Bato-Dalai Ochirov
A Buryat Activist at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

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Abstract: In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a native intelligentsia took shape among Siberia’s Buryat Mongols that, combining indigenous and Russian influences, pursued cultural survival alongside social, political, and economic modernization. One of its significant, yet relatively unsung, members was Bato-Dalai Ochirov (1874 or 1875–1913). He is best known as the only Buryat ever to serve in the Russian State Duma (in the short-lived Second Duma in 1907). Yet over the course of his short life, Ochirov also was an administrator, political activist, author, philanthropist, and supporter of culture and science. This article provides an overview of Ochirov’s life and seeks to elucidate his worldview, which stressed the defense of Buryat interests using the possibilities available within the existing autocratic order.

Keywords: Bato-Dalai Ochirov, Buriats, intelligentsia, nineteenth century, Second Duma, Russian Revolution of 1905

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a native intelligentsia arose among Siberia’s Buryat Mongols to struggle for cultural and political rights and social and economic improvement. Some of its members, such as the folklorist Tysben Zhamtsarano (1880 or 1881–1942), the Tibetologist Bazar Baradin (1878–1938), the Mongolist Gombozhab Tsybikov (1873–1930), and the journalist Mikhail Bogdanov (1878–1919 or 1920) are well known to researchers of the Native Siberian peoples. Far less familiar is Bato-Dalai Ochirov (1874 or 1875–1913), whose obscurity in the written record is surprising in light of his importance: Ochirov was the only Buryat ever to serve in the prerevolutionary Russian State Duma. Yet the longest published account of his life is a nine-page obituary written by his contemporary and acquaintance, the Buryat activist Elbek-Dorzhi Rinchino.
So an investigation of Ochirov’s life and works clearly is long overdue. By piecing together what the sources can tell us about Ochirov’s activities, this article will provide an overview of his diverse functions in Buryat life; along the way, it will seek to elucidate Ochirov’s worldview, which stressed the pursuit of progress and cultural survival using the possibilities available within the constraints and confines of the existing autocratic order.

Bato-Dalai Ochirov’s Childhood and Youth

Bato-Dalai Ochirovich Ochirov was born in the spring of 1875 (or perhaps 1874) in the remote buluk (settlement) of Kharganasha—now called Khoito-Tsangil—in Zabaikal’skaia Oblast’s Aga region to Ochir Tsyrempilov, a Buddhist herdsman of the Khori tribe’s Kharganat clan. Uncertainty about the date of Ochirov’s birth stems from three possible reasons. First, nomadism and the low literacy levels of the time prevented the registration of many Buryat births in Transbaikalia. Second, Buryat custom dated a child’s life to the presumed time of its conception, thereby granting it an age of one year at birth, and this may have caused confusion. Third and finally, Ochirov’s birth record, if it existed at all, may well have been lost: Ochirov’s daughter Butit-Khanda Batodalaeva (1913–1996) avers that—for reasons she does not explain—all of Ochirov’s books and papers were burned shortly after his death, either by Ochirov’s widow Chimid or by a lama named Choizhilodoi to whom Chimid had entrusted them.

Young Bato-Dalai Ochirov grew up in a typical Eastern Buryat nomadic setting, shepherding the family herds through the Aga steppe and sometimes across the border into Mongolia. Many other prominent Buryat intellectuals of Ochirov’s era (e.g., Zhamtsarano, Baradin, Tsybikov, and Bogdanov) were able to attend Russian or even foreign universities thanks to their birth into relatively prosperous families, but Ochirov in contrast had little formal schooling. He was largely self-taught because of the poverty into which he was born: his daughter Butit-Khanda says his family was “destitute” (ügytei), and the Buryat historian Zhigmit Tumunov quips that Ochirov “came from the lowest levels of the native Buryat [society] and experienced in everyday life all its difficulties and privations.”

Ochirov learned Classical Mongolian—the Eastern Buryats’ literary tongue—along with Russian from his uncle Tsyben. At the age of six, he entered the Aginskoe primary school (Aginskoe prikhodskoe
uchilische), where he studied under Buda Rabdanov (1853–1923) and became lifelong friends with his classmate Gombozhab Tsybikov. In later years, Ochirov would work with Rabdanov in the realm of journalism, and with Tsybikov in the realm of politics.

Next, Ochirov attended the Chita city school (Chitinskoe gorodskoe uchilishche) on a stipend from the Aga Steppe Duma. The latter body was one of the 12 “steppe dumas” that existed in different regions of Buryat territory. These were organs of local self-government that had been created for the Buryats by Tsar Alexander I’s advisor Mikhail Speranskii (1772–1839) as part of Speranskii’s 1822 reform of the Siberian administration. The steppe dumas were headed by tribal leaders, used the Buryat language, operated on the basis of Buryat customary law, mediated between Buryat communities and Siberian officialdom, and gave the Buryats a modicum of autonomy.

Upon graduating from the Chita city school, the teenaged Ochirov returned to his Aginskoe alma mater to teach at the invitation of its new senior teacher (starshii uchitel’) Pavel Murzin, a progressive, intelligent, well-educated Russian who founded the school’s first library and used his modern farmstead to teach useful agricultural skills to poor Buryat herdsmen with little farming experience (e.g., chicken-raising, beekeeping, fish-raising, and potato- and grain-growing techniques). Ochirov apparently handled his teaching duties well—Tumunov has called him a “young, energetic teacher” with a good command of Russian—but he only spent one to three years there. As Rinchino commented, “teaching, with its painstaking work and comparatively narrow sphere of activity did not suit his busy, expansive nature.” Nevertheless, Ochirov’s time in the classroom was significant in the long run, since it resulted in Ochirov’s acquaintance with the well-read and progressively minded Murzin, who expanded Ochirov’s cultural horizons; later, Ochirov and Murzin would work together to improve rural Buryat conditions.

In May 1892, the Aga Steppe Duma recommended Ochirov for a second stipend, this time to attend the Irkutsk Teachers’ Seminary (Irkutskaiia uchetel’skaia seminiariia), one of Eastern Siberia’s main teacher-training institutions. This stipend was specifically intended for Buddhist Buryats, who normally were barred from the school. Although the Irkutsk Teachers’ Seminary was a secular school and not a religious institution (as its name might suggest), it was almost unheard of for unbaptized Buryats to be admitted to it due to the religious prejudices of the institution’s Russian administrators.
The Aga Steppe Duma had established the stipend earlier in 1892 with the blessing of the tsesarevich Nicholas: the future Tsar Nicholas II. During his grand tour of Europe, Egypt, and Asia, tsesarevich Nicholas had passed through Siberia and on 16–17 June 1891 was received by a delegation of Buryat tribal leaders at the steppe locale of Turinopovorot-naia. The Buryat delegation included Zhalsarai Zorigtuev (1847–1892), the Aga Steppe Duma’s akhalagsha taishaa (head, or chief; Rus. glavnyi taisha), and Zorigtuev’s assistant Zhan Bodiiin (1839–1903); Bodiiin would replace Zorigtuev as akhalagsha taishaa the following year and would play a key role in Ochirov’s life. The Buryat notables feted young Nicholas with traditional Buryat entertainments—horse races, feats of bronco-busting, wrestling matches, and archery competitions—and arranged for Buddhist lamas (monks) to perform rituals and music for him. They also presented Nicholas with numerous gifts, including a large felt ger (yurt), a khadag (a long silk scarf traditionally given by Buryats to honored guests), a silver tray crafted by Buryat silversmiths bearing the customary Russian greeting of bread and salt, other gold and silver objects, items of Buryat clothing, and an elegant throne. Nicholas reciprocated by bestowing medals and cash gifts upon the Buryat aristocrats and donating five hundred rubles to help fund a festival for the common Buryats.

Nicholas wrote in his diary, “I shall always recall with great satisfaction . . . the day I spent among the Buryats!” And it was perhaps these warm sentiments that led Nicholas to approve the Aga Steppe Duma’s stipend for Buddhist Buryat students that was awarded to Ochirov. However, Ochirov ultimately did not accept the stipend, either because he had decided not to pursue a teaching career or because his straitened finances would not allow him to live in Irkutsk even with the stipend’s support. Eventually, the stipend went to Choizhil-Lkhamo Bazaron (1878–1937), who later became a teacher in Transbaikalia’s Buryat schools and worked with Ochirov on an important scientific investigation of the Aga steppe.

Service in the Aga Steppe Duma

In 1892—the same year in which he had received and rejected the stipend to study in Irkutsk—Ochirov was hired as the Aga Steppe Duma’s assistant clerk (pomoshchnik pis’movoditelia) by Zhan Bodiiin, who had just replaced Zhalsarai Zorigtuev as akhalagsha taishaa. Bodiiin was a
man of humble origins without formal education but had risen through the ranks of the steppe duma system on his own merit. Probably seeing something of himself in the poor but talented young Ochirov, he selected him for this “well-paid and important” position.23

Young Bato-Dalai’s clerical work involved serious responsibilities, for the Aga Steppe Duma governed more than fifty thousand Buryats through an hierarchy of subordinate local offices: eight native administrations (inorodnye upravy) that each oversaw a group of native settlements, and under them, 40 clan administrations (rodovye upravleniia) responsible for individual settlements.24 Like its counterparts in other Buryat regions, the Aga Steppe Duma carried out Siberian Russian officials’ instructions and sent them periodic reports on those instructions’ fulfillment, gathered demographic and economic data, collected taxes, and oversaw native courts, infrastructure, and public services. Ochirov had to handle documents on a wide range of local issues and interact with natives from all walks of life, so he gained an intimate knowledge of the Aga population and its needs. In the Aga Steppe Duma, Ochirov “entered into the very thick of steppe life” and “prepared himself for his future role as leader and tribune of the steppe masses.”25 This experience would stand Ochirov in good stead later when he would take up an important administrative position in the Aga region in the years after the Russian Revolution of 1905.

**Ochirov and Zhizn’ na Vostochnoi Okraine**

Ochirov served in the Aga Steppe Duma for four years26 before joining the staff of *Zhizn’ na vostochnoi okraine* (Life on the Eastern Frontier), a newspaper founded by the baptized Aga Buryat Petr Badmaev (1851–1920), who is well known as a practitioner of Tibetan medicine at the Romanov court, a businessman, a diplomatic strategist, and a sometime associate of the notorious court favorite Grigorii Rasputin (1869–1916). Badmaev was a highly complex, indeed contradictory figure: he enthusiastically championed Russian Orthodox Christianity’s spread among the Buryats, but at the same time he hoped to use their Buddhist ties to Mongolia and Tibet to extend Russia’s geopolitical grasp there. A loyal, indeed ardent monarchist, Badmaev nevertheless tried to defend the steppe dumas against the central authorities’ attacks on them when changes in Siberian administrative policy slated them for dissolution.27

*Zhizn’ na vostochnoi okraine* was published in parallel Russian and Classical Mongolian in Chita from November 1895 to June 1897, and
it usually came out five times a week in four-page issues. The newspaper’s goals were to spread knowledge of economic affairs and current events among the local population and to promote the Badmaev and Company Trading House (Torgovyi dom Badmaeva i ko.) in Chita. Aleksander Snitkin, a Chita school official, edited the Russian section, while Ochirov’s former teacher Buda Rabdanov edited the Mongolian text. As of 1896, the paper had three thousand readers, including newsstand sales, and at least six hundred Buryats were subscribing to it.\textsuperscript{28} Zhizn’ na vostochnoi okraine printed bilingual summaries of articles on national and world affairs gleaned from Russian and Western newspapers and the Russian Telegraph Agency news service; published original articles on local affairs, along with business and weather reports; and gave Badmaev a podium from which he promoted Orthodoxy and autocracy. Correspondents and translators who knew Chinese and Japanese wrote on East Asian affairs. Badmaev signed a few articles that he himself penned, but most were unattributed.\textsuperscript{29}

Badmaev hired Ochirov at some point in 1896 to help Rabdanov render the Russian texts into Classical Mongolian. Like the paper’s translators (and indeed most of its reporters), Ochirov received no acknowledgment for his work, even though he did most of the Mongolian translations: indeed, his daughter recalls from family lore that “he handled the whole Mongol-Buryat part of the newspaper” (gazetyngge bükhy mongol-buriaad khelenei khubiie khitelzhe baigaa).\textsuperscript{30} And he seems to have handled it well. Russian Mongolists such as Aleksei Pozdneev (1851–1920) praised his texts’ high literary quality: Pozdneev even used copies of the newspaper as pedagogical materials in his Mongolian-language classes at St. Petersburg University.\textsuperscript{31} But in any event, the paper was short-lived. High production costs and his trading firm’s bankruptcy forced Badmaev to close it on 29 June 1897.\textsuperscript{32} Nevertheless, Ochirov’s brief foray into journalism was of no little importance: for at least a short time, he had helped Buryat readers expand their knowledge of the world far beyond the steppe in their own tongue.

**Ochirov’s Return to the Steppe Duma: Petitions and Petersburg**

Thereupon, Ochirov returned to the Aga Steppe Duma,\textsuperscript{33} where his future must have seemed bright and promising. After all, his supervisor Bodiin had risen from clerk to akhalksha taishaa, and Ochirov might follow suit. But this was not to be: the Speranskii system contradicted
the autocracy’s Russification drive, so by 1890, Irkutsk Province’s seven steppe dumas had already been dissolved, one by one. A 1901 law ordered the five steppe dumas of Transbaikal’skaia Oblast’ to be closed by the end of 1903. The steppe dumas were replaced by Russian-language organs called volosti (townships) in Transbaikalia and inorodnye upravy (native administrations) in Irkutsk Province. These new bodies were subordinate to ethnic-Russian “peasant and native supervisors” (krest’ianskie i inorodnye nachal’niki; usually called simply krest’ianskie nachal’niki), who wielded extensive and intrusive administrative, financial, and judicial powers over them. Buryats could elect some subordinate officials such as elders (starshiny) to the new administrative organs, but the krest’ianskie nachal’niki could reject them or impose their own choices. At the same time, new laws slated all native landholdings above 15 desiatinas (around 40 acres) for transfer into a “colonization fund” for peasant migrants from European Russia. This policy threatened Russification by dividing Buryat lands with belts and pockets of Russian settlement. It also threatened the Buryats with destitution, especially the Transbaikal nomads who required large pastures for their herds.

The administrative and land “reforms” galvanized the Buryats into action. Some native elites sent petitions and delegations to Siberian officials to stop the laws, but to no avail. Others lobbied St. Petersburg officials—and even the tsar himself. Here, Ochirov played modest but important roles. When the Aga Steppe Duma’s head Bodin and his assistant Boronchu Borodin journeyed to Petersburg at some point between 1901 and 1904 to petition the tsar, Ochirov interpreted for Borodin, whose Russian was poor. Sometimes Ochirov passed on messages from the supplicants in St. Petersburg to local Buryats back home: for example, he distributed a December 1903 telegram from the Aga Steppe Duma officials Zhamasaran Vampilov and Aiurzan Tsyvenov reporting their mission’s failure to preserve their Duma. The Transbaikal police tried to hold up Ochirov’s telegram lest it “influence the natives’ agitated minds.”

And some natives’ minds were agitated indeed. While elite Buryats from the steppe dumas such as Ochirov’s superior Bodin relied on petitions and persuasion to press their point, Eastern Buryats of the commoner class signaled their disapproval of the administrative reform much more directly. Over 1903 and early 1904, they rioted raucously and rambunctiously, attacked local Russian officials, and beat natives who had agreed to serve as employees of the new volost’ organs. But by early 1904, the disorders had subsided after Siberian bureaucrats
sent in troops to keep the peace and had jailed or exiled some Buryat agitators.41

There is no evidence that Ochirov took part in these dramatic disorders in Transbaikalia. Instead, as the tide of delegations, demonstrations, and disturbances ebbed, at some point in 1903 or 1904 he apparently began to serve in the new Aginskaia volost' that now governed part of the former Aga Steppe Duma’s territory. The nature of his position there and the length of his service are contested by Buryat authors, due to the paucity of the surviving sources and their ambiguous and contradictory nature. Some authors aver that Ochirov served as an elder (starshina), while others say he was a judge (sud’ia). It also is unclear if the local Buryats selected him for his position based on his prior service in the Aga Steppe Duma or if he was assigned to the volost’ administration by Transbaikal Military Governor Ivan Nadarov (1851–1922).42 If the latter scenario is correct, Ochirov may have taken the job under duress: Buryats who refused to serve in the new volost’ organs when summoned to do so could be fined up to five hundred rubles and jailed for up to three months.43

Ochirov and the 1905 Revolution

Thus, the Tsarist administration had managed to suppress the initial stage of the Buryat national movement. But the outbreak of the Russian Revolution of 1905 rekindled the fires of Buryat resistance. Though their homeland Buriaad oron lay far from the main centers of revolutionary struggle such as St. Petersburg and the more populous and militant nationalities such as the Poles, the Buryats still witnessed local Russians’ strikes and demonstrations. At the same time, travelers brought back firsthand accounts of revolutionary developments elsewhere in the Russian Empire, and natives keenly followed events in the national press.44 All this invigorated a new wave of Buryat activism, and Ochirov would sail along on its current.

Encouraged by the wave of revolutionary upheaval that swept o’er Russia like a lava flow, some Buryats took daring measures. For example, in the fall of 1905 some of the Aga Buryats illegally took back lands from the colonization fund that had been set aside for new Russian settlers.45 December 1905 saw an attempt by Erdeni Vambotsyrenov, the former akhalagsha taishaa of the Khori Steppe Duma (served 1898–1903), to reopen that body (also illegally). Vambotsyrenov quickly gave up the following month, fearing the wrath of the state, but he suffered
lingering political fallout from this incident. Later, Ochirov would benefit politically from Vamobtsyrenov’s compromised situation.

Ochirov was not inclined to such bold feats as those of the Aga land liberators or the Khori Steppe Duma revivalists. Instead, he took advantage of the opportunities for peaceable free assembly that the Revolution had opened, which allowed the Buryats to meet openly and legally to discuss their needs and plans. On a local level, the Buryats held frequent suglaans (community meetings) that passed resolutions calling for some form of self-government and an end to the colonization policy. At the same time, 1905 saw the first Buryat national congresses. Since the Eastern and Western Buryats’ lands were split between Zabaikal’skaia Oblast’ and Irkutsk Province, each region held its own separate congress. The Eastern Buryats held their gathering in Chita on 26–30 April 1905, while the Western Buryats held theirs in Irkutsk on 21–24 August of the same year. The Eastern Buryats’ Chita Congress was chaired by the chief Buddhist cleric Khambo-lama Choinzon-Dorzhii-Irotuev (1843–1911), and Ochirov attended this gathering along with other native intellectuals such as Baradin, Tsybikov, Zhamtsarano, the Mongolian translator Radnazhab Bimbaev (1874–1921), and the military doctor Bazar-Sado Iampilov (1870–1918).

The Chita delegates all called for an end to colonization; the protection of traditional Buryat lands; grants of state land to poor Buryat communities; Buryat-language schools for both sexes (with Russian as a mandatory subject); and admission of unbaptized natives to teacher-training schools. Moreover, all the delegates called for Buryat self-government, but they differed sharply on what form it should take. Some demanded the return of the steppe dumas; these starodumtsy, as Zhamtsarano dubbed them, were—not surprisingly—headed by the former Khori akhalagsha taishaa Vambotsyrenov. Others, like Ochirov, initially supported the new volosti since they had the advantage of avoiding the steppe dumas’ earlier domination by noyons (native aristocrats); these delegates merely wished to curtail the overweening power of the krest’ianskie nachal’niki. Yet a third group—led by Irotuev and the prominent Buddhist cleric Agvan Dorzhiev (1853–1938)—offered a compromise that would preserve the autonomy that the old steppe dumas had provided but that would broaden popular participation in local administration. They convinced Ochirov and the other pro-volost’ delegates that the new system that had been imposed by the authorities was “absolutely unsuitable . . . since it in essence deprived the population of self-government.”
Influenced by Iroltuev’s and Dorzhiev’s arguments, the Chita Congress in which Ochirov took part devised a new system of self-government organized along territorial, not tribal lines. The lowest level of government would be the buluk, or group of households; the middle level—the inorodnaia uprava (“native office”)—would be composed of several buluks. The inorodnye upravy would be supervised by the highest level—the duma—which would liaison with Russian officiadom as the steppe dumas formerly had done. These planned new organs of self-government would be free of krest’ianskie nachal’niki, and their officials would be elected by all Buryat adults regardless of class, wealth, or sex. They would handle administrative, financial, and tax functions; provide education, public works, medical care, and veterinary and agricultural help (like the zemstva in European Russia); and operate in spoken Buryat and written Mongolian. Cognizant of the dangers of abuse of power by non-Buryat police and judicial officials, Ochirov insisted that the Buryats themselves must staff and control the police and courts, and this position was adopted in the Congress’ protocol.55

The Chita Congress also elected a delegation to lobby the central government to approve the administrative system outlined in its protocol and to halt the destructive land reform. Its members included Ochirov, several noyons and officials from the former steppe dumas, and some Buddhist clerics. By the time the delegation arrived in St. Petersburg in December 1905, it also had been tasked with securing a seat for the Transbaikal Buryats in the Russian State Duma promised by Nicholas II in his “October Manifesto.” The delegation failed in its original task: the (unnamed) officials who met Ochirov’s delegation in St. Petersburg rejected the Congress’s administrative and landholding desiderata. However, the officials promised that the Buryats would be given a Duma seat, which they would share with the Transbaikal Evenki.56

The Buryats apparently had little faith in this promise, for on 31 January 1906, a 10-man delegation of Ochirov, Zhamtsarano, three other laymen, Iroltuev, and four lamas received an audience with Nicholas II, whom they asked to confirm that the Transbaikal Buryats would indeed receive their own seat in the Duma. Nicholas vowed to have the matter investigated and then sent Ochirov and company on their way, praising the Buryats’ “age-old loyalty to me and to Russia” and exclaiming “I preserve the best memories of visiting Transbaikal Oblast’ during my journey through Siberia.”57 Despite this rather noncommittal reply, the Buryats did indeed gain a seat; later, Ochirov would fill it.58
Ochirov spent only a few months in revolutionary Petersburg, but they were crucial for his political development. There, he “[found] himself in the very maelstrom of Russia’s sociopolitical life; [he] tried to be everywhere in the numerous gatherings and sessions of the parties, groups, and societies of that time. He heard out rightists, liberals, and leftists with equal attention . . . Bato-Dalai’s political worldview decisively took shape . . . during his stay in Petersburg.” But none of the budding political parties he encountered in the capital fit this “political worldview”: as he complained at that time in a letter to an acquaintance, “All the parties speak for the people and in the name of the people, but none of them suits me. I still haven’t [found] like-minded friends.”

Ochirov and the Party of Progressive Buryats

But once back in Aga, Ochirov found “like-minded friends” in the Party of Progressive Buryats (Partiia progressivnykh buryat). The background to this party’s birth lay in a gathering of Buryat intellectuals and activists held in Aginskoe on 10–15 January 1906. Tsybikov had called this meeting to discuss the strategies that the Buryat national movement should pursue in the future. He stressed that the Buryats must use the new State Duma to promote Buryat interests; the other participants concurred and repeated the Chita Congress’ rejection of both the old steppe dumas and the new volost’ system with its oppressive krest’ianskie nachal’niki. Most likely, Ochirov did not attend this meeting since, as we have seen, he was part of a delegation of petitioners that was in St. Petersburg until the end of January 1906. But later that spring, Ochirov joined with Tsybikov, Iroltuev, Iampilov, the contractor (domovladelets-podriadchik) Dugar-Zhap Dobdanov, and two Aga volost’nye starshiny, Namdak Dylykov and Nanzat Irdyneev, in founding the Party of Progressive Buryats, which was guided by the ideas voiced at the January meeting called by Tsybikov.

The program of the Party of Progressive Buryats combined the left-liberalism characteristic of the Russian Kadet (Constitutional Democrat) Party with the Chita Conference’s emphasis on the Buryats’ specific needs and began with the stirring words, “Humanity is moving irrepressibly forward along the path of progress, and we, the native peoples, must strive to go alongside others . . . not remaining stagnant.” The program called for freedom of speech, press, assembly, and religion; elective native self-government; equal rights for Buryats and Russians; the end of noyon privilege; labor laws to protect workers; uni-
universal, free, and compulsory schooling in the native tongue (although Russian would be taught, too); progressive property and income taxes; an end to colonization; communal use of herding lands; and state land grants to poor Buryat communities.\(^6^4\)

Zhamtsarano—who held a lingering attachment to the old steppe duma system on nationalistic grounds—observed rather dismissively:

This party is not especially numerous and is not very popular among the people since it negates the 1822 law, which had given the natives the right to live and be governed by their own steppe laws and customs. Among the Progressives are more people with education, they have more connections with the local authorities; they write in the local newspaper, [and] they try to convince the reading public that the starodumtsy are reactionaries.\(^6^5\)

Indeed, despite its grand-sounding name, the Party of Progressive Buryats was less a modern political party than a small group of like-minded native intellectuals. As the Buryat historian Nikifov Egunov notes, it “did not have its own organizations, or a charter defining its organizational principles and membership. So one cannot call [it] a party in the strict sense of the word.”\(^6^6\) To be sure, Ochirov tried to popularize the group by passing copies of its program hand-to-hand—illegally—to “progressively inclined clan members (rodovichi)” but local Buryats’ fear of Russian officialdom and their reluctance to antagonize starodumtsy among the noyons and lamas hampered the program’s distribution.\(^6^7\) Eventually, Russian officials forced the group to disband at some point in 1908.\(^6^8\)

**Ochirov and the Second State Duma**

But before that happened, one member of the Party of Progressive Buryats—Ochirov—had won the State Duma seat for the Transbaikal natives that had been promised to the delegations in which he had taken part in late 1905 and early 1906. During the election campaign for the Second Duma that began on 4 January 1907, Ochirov faced fierce opposition from starodumtsy nobles and lamas led by Erdeni Vambotsyrenov.\(^6^9\) The Russian ethnographer Lev Shternberg (1861–1927) tells us the starodumtsy promoted an elderly, conservative Buryat as their candidate (Shternberg does not name him, but he almost certainly was Vambotsyrenov himself), and many Buryats were ready to support him less for his views than from respect for his age.\(^7^0\)
Yet Ochirov had four advantages in the Second Duma campaign. First, the main spokesman of the *starodumtsy* Vambotsyrenov was hampered by fraught relations with the Siberian administration, and this prevented him from campaigning openly and effectively. Egunov tells us that by that time, Vambotsyrenov had “fallen into disgrace.” 71 Another observer, Ts. Ochirzhapov, remarks that Vambotsyrenov had to direct the duma campaign “from underground.” 72 Vambotsyrenov’s earlier, illegal gambit to reopen the Khori Steppe Duma was certainly to blame for this situation. Over the spring of 1907, Siberian officials still were investigating this stunt, and Vambotsyrenov was busy sending them frantic and pitiful pleas for clemency, so he was little inclined to raise his voice too loudly in the political arena. (These pleas ultimately proved to be in vain: in July 1907, Vambotsyrenov was sentenced to five years’ exile in Siberia’s Enisei Province as punishment for his earlier deeds of Duma derring-do.73)

A second advantage that Ochirov enjoyed in the Second Duma elections was the support of many of the lamas; after all, his fellow Party of Progressive Buryats member Iroltuev just happened to head the Buddhist clergy. Iroltuev officially declared himself neutral in the election; in fact, he championed Ochirov behind the scenes to the lamas, who in turn convinced many laymen to support him. Third, Ochirov’s personal qualities were also an asset: as Egunov puts it, “he firmly hewed to his people’s customs and traditions and defended their interests.” 74 Egunov does not elaborate, but these traits clearly enhanced his popularity among the Buryats. A fourth and final advantage, according to Shternberg, was support from “decisive Evenki” figures who helped tip the balance in Ochirov’s favor. 75 Although Shternberg does not explain who these Evenki were or why they preferred Ochirov, it is most likely that in their eyes the *starodumtsy* represented narrow class and national self-interest. Since Ochirov was not a member of the Buryat noyon elite, he probably seemed more likely to address Evenki needs.

Thus, when elections to the Second Duma were held in Chita on 7 April 1907, 76 Ochirov seized the victory, despite *starodumtsy* electors’ attempts to disrupt the proceedings and—later—to persuade Siberian authorities to revoke Ochirov’s election on the grounds of his alleged politically unreliability. 77

As we know from a letter that Ochirov sent to Tsybikov at that time from the village of Kutulik in Irkutsk Province, Ochirov consulted with Evenki and Buryat constituents in Verkhneudinsk (now Ulan-Ude) and attended a Western Buryat gathering in Irkutsk later in April 1907 before setting off for the capital. 78 His concern for the Evenki—not just
the Buryats—was entirely in character with his worldview, since “as a national leader (deiatel’), Bato-Dalai had a strong aversion to cheap national patriotism and chauvinism.” By 30 April, he had arrived in Petersburg and taken his seat in the Second Duma. Here, Ochirov favored the Kadets, whose left liberalism was close to that of Ochirov’s Party of Progressive Buryats; forsooth, he even translated the Kadet platform into Classical Mongolian for the edification of the Eastern Buryats.

As Rinchino recalls, Ochirov “took the duties of a State Duma member very seriously and tried not to miss a single meeting. He energetically took up self-education to rise to the occasion as the people’s representative and tribune.” To be sure, during his 33 days in the Second Duma (30 April–2 June 1907), Ochirov made no speeches, as the body’s stenographic records show. But this certainly was not unusual. Many—perhaps most—delegates did not give speeches, and even had they wished to do so there simply would not have been enough time. After all, the Duma sat for only 103 days, had 520 delegates, and met in only 53 sessions, which often were dominated by the ponderous or provocative pontifications of particularly prolix parliamentarians such as the Kadet Pavel Miliukov (1859–1943) and the rightist Vladimir Purishkevich (1870–1920).

So Ochirov’s Duma activity took place behind the scenes. Upon his arrival, he—like all other new members—was placed in one of the 11 sections (otdely) tasked with verifying the legitimacy of Duma election procedures in specific regions and cities. Ochirov found himself in the Fourth Section, whose 47 members were responsible for reviewing the Second Duma elections in Astrakhan’, Khar’kov, Kovno, Mogilev, Poltava, and Viatka Provinces; Turgai Oblast’ (now in Kazakhstan); and the cities of Astrakhan’, Khar’kov, and Tashkent.

In addition to his more general tasks in the Fourth Section, Ochirov attempted to use his Duma post to address specific Buryat needs. At some point in May 1907, at Iroltuev’s urging, he requested a meeting with Prime Minister Petr Stolypin (1862–1911) to present a petition from the Buddhist clergy demanding greater religious freedom for the Buryats. Drafted on 19 April 1907 and signed by Iroltuev and more than 70 other lamas, the petition called for ending state interference in the monasteries’ circulation of texts, their acceptance of new lamas, their practice of Tibetan medicine, and their proselytizing work among the Buryats. However, it is not clear if Ochirov’s planned meeting with Stolypin ever took place, since the Duma was shuttered early the following month.
Ochirov also participated in the informal group of the Siberian deputies to the Second Duma that met frequently to discuss Siberian issues. The Siberian group’s protocols were published in the St. Petersburg journal *Sibirskie voprosy* (Siberian questions), and they show that Ochirov attended every one of its meetings after his arrival in St. Petersburg. He even attended one meeting that the deputies defiantly held two days after Nicholas II had ordered that the Duma be dissolved. The protocols do not single out Ochirov as a speaker at any of the meetings and do not mention the Buryats by name, although they do list matters directly relevant to the Buryats (e.g., the overbearing authority of the *krest’ianskie nachal’niki* who dominated the Siberian natives and the Russian colonization of indigenous lands), so he probably made his voice heard at some point.86

But Ochirov’s parliamentary career ended abruptly on 2 June 1907, for on the following day Nicholas II decreed its dispersal. By that time, Ochirov seems to have despaired of the Duma system’s potential as a tool for promoting Buryat interests. He wrote to Tsybikov in late spring or early summer that “I’m disappointed in the endless and fruitless disputes that go on in the Duma meetings. I haven’t joined a single fraction and remain among the independents. There’ll be new elections. One must prepare for new battles. Abandon narrow science, prepare yourself, join the struggle.”87

Yet Ochirov didn’t “join the struggle” for the next Duma elections. The new 3 June 1907 electoral law88—which was aimed at securing a wealthy, ethnic-Russian, loyal, and conservative Duma more to the tsar’s liking—curtailed non-Russian participation, and the Transbaikal natives lost their seat. The Buryats still could take part in elections, but their votes would be vastly outnumbered by Russian votes, virtually guaranteeing that they could not elect one of their own to advance native interests. In any event, given his disillusionment with the Duma, it’s not surprising that Ochirov did not choose to participate in the elections to the Third or Fourth Dumas.89

After the Second Duma: Ochirov as Volost’ Elder

Ochirov’s Duma experience had helped convince him that the surest way forward for the Buryats lay not in national politics but in practical local tasks: he now decided that “a rational school and the reformation of all aspects of the people’s life on cooperative foundations are the best and [most] basic means” to improve the Buryats’ lot.90 And he soon put
these “means” into action as the *starshina* of the Aginskaia *volost’,* replacing the previous elder Banzaraksha Soktoev who had served since 29 March 1905. Ochirov began to serve as *starshina* on 1 January 1908; he would occupy this post for the rest of his life.91

To be sure, some of Ochirov’s duties as *starshina* dealt with mundane matters like docking subordinates’ pay for skipping work and arresting Buryats who visited an *oboo* (Shamanist holy place) in a drunken state.92 Yet, weightier matters were afoot, for he used his post to significantly expand the Aga Buryats’ school network. So far, they had had only one school—the Aginskoe primary school that Ochirov himself had attended—but in September 1911, Ochirov persuaded the Ministry of Education to expand it into a four-year institution (now dubbed the Aginskoe City School; *gorodskoe uchilishe*) that taught Russian, natural science, mathematics, history, the tenets of Orthodoxy (*Zakon Bozhii*), and—probably at Ochirov’s insistence—Classical Mongolian. The school was quite popular: Alfred Termen (1855–ca. 1914), a Russian official who visited the school shortly after its expansion, observed that when a Buryat from a distant settlement found that there was no seat left for his son, he wheedled the staff until they allowed the son to attend classes standing.93 Altogether, as *starshina* Ochirov opened 15 new schools; he had planned to institute mandatory universal schooling for the Aga Buryats, but he lacked the staff to do so.94

Ochirov also supported Buryat education through philanthropy. He tirelessly solicited scholarship funds from the Aga Buryats to allow young natives to continue their schooling in Chita, Irkutsk, Omsk, Tartu (Iur’ev), and Moscow.95 As early as July 190796—even before becoming *starshina*—he had founded a Society for Buryat Enlightenment (*Obshchestvo prosveshcheniia buriat*) to provide an infrastructure for educational philanthropy, and he continued its work into his term as *starshina.* The ambitious goals of the Society for Buryat Enlightenment included funding stipends for poor but talented pupils; founding native-language vocational schools to promote modern herding, business, and trades; and publishing newspapers, journals, and broadsides (*listki*) in Classical Mongolian to spread knowledge of the outside world and modern technologies and techniques among the indigenous population.97 However, these aims proved too nationalistic for Russian bureaucrats: in 1909 the Society’s application for official status was denied on a technicality, and it was forced to disband.98
Ochirov and the Buryat Cooperative Movement

Meanwhile, during his tenure as elder of the Aginskaia volost’, Ochirov launched the Buryat cooperative movement. He was well aware that local moneylenders and merchants long had held the indigenous masses in a stranglehold, so in 1908 Ochirov and his former fellow teacher Murzin pooled their own money with funds borrowed from sympathetic Buryats to found a credit cooperative based in Aginskoe (with a branch in Tsugol near the Onon River). Each of its members could borrow small sums determined by creditworthiness. Termen remarked that the cooperative “immediately undermined the influence of the rich men (bogachi)” of the Aga region and loosened the “bondage in which the people had been [held].”99 so Buryat moneylenders and monopolists naturally opposed it and slandered it (rather illogically) as a tool of Russification. Besides battling these accusations, Ochirov also had to overcome the reticence of rural Buryats who were suspicious of anything new. Despite these obstacles, the credit cooperative was a great success: just in its first eight months, it saw a profit of 1,800 rubles, even though it capped interest rates at only 10 or 12 percent, compared to the usurers’ 30 or even 40 percent. Within two years, the credit cooperative’s capital fund had risen to 100,000 rubles, and by 1914 (the year after Ochirov’s death), it had 2,500 members.100

Along with lending money to its members, the credit cooperative occasionally had sold its members tools and agricultural equipment, but the increasing demand for such items among the Buryats eventually necessitated a separate organization to handle them. So next, in 1910, Ochirov and Murzin founded a consumers’ cooperative in Aginskoe (with a branch at Unenker on the Ingoda River). This enterprise bought the Aga herdsmen’s hides, horsehair, and wool at higher prices than those offered by local markets, and then resold them elsewhere. The profits from the sale of the Buryats’ animal products went to purchase breeding stock, agricultural implements, tools and other manufactured goods, and daily necessities like flour and tea from European Russia, Western Siberia, and China. The cooperative sold these goods to its members at half the price charged by local Chinese and Russian monopolists, who for years had overcharged the Buryats for inferior goods, underpaid them for their animal products, and demanded exorbitant interest for advances. Thus, the consumers’ cooperative did much to defend the Aga Buryats from such exploitation. At Ochirov’s death, it had at least 53 stockholders (paishchiki) and almost 25,000 rubles in circulation (v oborot).101
Ochirov and Murzin also founded a model farm at Khoito-Aga (around 20 versts, or 13 miles, from Aginskoe) to demonstrate modern herding and farming technology and techniques such as planting fodder crops to the Buryat masses. The model farm brought pedigree cattle, pigs, and horses from European Russia to raise as breeding stock to improve Aga herds. Ochirov and Murzin were joined in this enterprise by Naidan Damdinov, an Aga volost’ clerk. Damdinov had spent several years in Moscow working with the owner of a modern dairy named Vereshchagin, and he brought the knowledge he had gained from this experience to bear on the farm’s operations.

Ochirov as Translator and Author

After visiting his friend Tsybikov in St. Petersburg in 1895 or 1896, Ochirov wrote him, “I have decided to dedicate all my strength and ability to the enlightenment of the Buryat people. In the first instance I’ve started to think about taking up the translation [into Classical Mongolian] of necessary books and textbooks.” Ochirov’s desire to spread enlightenment among the Buryats through the written word primarily manifested itself in translation and journalism during his post-Duma years, as we know from multiple sources on early twentieth-century Buryatia. The Aga historian Darma-Bazar Zhigmitov writes that Ochirov “translated into Buryat [i.e., into Classical Mongolian] over one hundred fables by Ivan Krylov [and] a collection of Lev Tolstoy’s stories and tales, compiled a mathematics textbook, and published several ethnographic articles and brochures.” An obituary by a certain A-v suggests that Ochirov penned articles for the Chita Russian-language newspaper Zabaikal’skaia nov’ (Transbaikal virgin soil). The historian Ksenia Gerasimova notes that Ochirov translated several works into Classical Mongolian for Dorzhiev’s Petersburg publishing house Naran (Sun): these included a few books from the Tolstoyan publisher Posrednik (Intermediary), such as a biography of the Buddha, and a 91-page collection of excerpts in Classical Mongolian from the great Indian Buddhist work The Dhammapada titled “The Teaching of the Buddha Called the Dhammapada, or the Path of Wisdom” (Dhama-pada buyu Ünen-ü mőr kemegdekü burqan-un nomlal orosiba). The Dhammapada texts were printed using the Mongolian typesetting machinery of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg.

The Russian Mongolist Aleksei Sazykin writes that in 1906, Ochirov wrote an 18-page pamphlet in Classical Mongolian about the changes
introduced into the Russian political order by the October Manifesto titled “A Report about the Opinion of Society That, Although Freedom Is Indispensable for the Subjects of the Russian State, There Should Be a Real Tsar at the Head” (Oros gürüm dotor-a albatu-dur cilüge-tei erke kereg-tei bolbacu oroı-dağan ʊğ-un qağan-tai-a ba(yıq)uğ geßen sanal-tai bülgüm ulus-un ʊğulekũ inu ʊrid-iyar ʊğül ekũ inu). This work was based on Ochirov’s translations from current Russian publications and most likely was aimed at Eastern Buryats who henceforth would be taking part in elections to the new State Duma. It too was published by Naran using the Russian Academy of Sciences’ Mongolian typographical equipment.107

Sazykin further informs us that Naran also published (between 1905 and 1913, judging from the context) Ochirov’s two-part, 166-page collection of translations of Russian legislation relevant to Buryat land-holding and the colonization drive in a work titled “Decrees and Laws Published in Connection with the Distribution of Community Lands in Zabaikal’skaia Oblast’” (Bayiġalu̱n cinaduki muji-yin jon-tu ɡajar-un eskemji ʊğkü tuqai-du ġaru̱ɡsan toğtağal qauli-nar jakirulda-nud bolai).108

But much remains uncertain about Ochirov’s written legacy. It is not at all clear how many of the works mentioned in the sources were printed or how many remained in manuscript form: Gerasimova, for example, does not list any of Ochirov’s Mongolian translations in the bibliography of the work in which she mentions them. And Zhigmitov and “A-v” provide no references at all for the any of the Krylov translations and newspaper articles they attribute to him. As noted above, Ochirov’s daughter Batodalaeva says Ochirov’s books and papers were burned after his death; it is possible that his manuscripts and rare copies of his printed texts perished in the flames.

But we do know that Ochirov helped bring Buryat culture to the Russian-speaking scholarly world through his contributions to ethnography. In 1908, he coauthored (with S.-D. Shagdaron) a 17-page study of the local Buryats’ traditional forms of merrymaking titled “Games and Entertainments of the Aga Buryats” (Igré i uveseleniia aginskikh buriat). Here, Ochirov and Shagdaron described in detail various pastimes of Buryat children and adults such as hiding, chasing, and singing games; socializing and feasting; archery and wrestling contests; horse races; a variant of blind man’s bluff; and dice-like games using shagai (sheep’s ankle bones). Ochirov and Shagdaron’s ethnographic materials appeared in an article in the 1909 volume of the prominent Notes of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society.109
Ochirov and the Aga Expedition

Along with working to spread knowledge *among* the Buryats, Ochirov played a key role in a major scholarly undertaking meant to spread knowledge *about* the Buryats and their land: the Aga Expedition carried out by the Chita Branch (*otdelenie*) of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society’s Amur Division (*otdel*). Ochirov was a member of the Chita Branch and was quite aware that it performed geographical and ethnographic surveys in Siberia. He deemed such work vital to the Aga Buryats’ interests, for if they wished to halt the accursed colonization policy, they had to demonstrate to Tsarist authorities “through impartial and comprehensive study”¹¹⁰ that it left the Aga herdsmen with too little land to support them, and that moreover the soil on the steppe was far less suitable for farming by the Russian colonists slated for arrival there than for the nomadic herding traditionally practiced by the Buryats. Thus, at a meeting of the Chita Branch on 7 October 1907, Ochirov and Namdak Dylykov—a fellow member of the Party of Progressive Buryats—proposed that the Chita Branch carry out a systematic survey of the Aga steppe’s land, people, climate, flora, and fauna, and promised that the local Buryats would provide logistical help for the survey. The other members of the Chita Branch agreed in principle but were concerned about the high cost of such an enterprise, so Ochirov donated 567 rubles to the project out of his own pocket and solicited additional funds from other Aga Buryats; altogether, he provided almost five thousand rubles to the expedition. Although Russian geographers, statisticians, soil scientists, botanists, zoologists, and others came to collect data in their specialties, Buryat intellectuals like Ochirov, Dylykov, and Bazaron also took part in the Aga Expedition’s field work. So too did Ochirov’s cooperative partner, the Russian Murzin. Ochirov, for his part, gathered detailed statistics about the Buryat population during the expedition, which lasted from May to September 1908. The following year, Ochirov supplied an additional two thousand rubles to aid the publication of the researchers’ findings. The data gathered by the expedition filled eight volumes, although only five were printed. The Aga Expeditions’ findings demonstrated that colonization indeed had harmed the Buryats’ livelihoods: there had been a sharp drop in herd size after their land had been given to the peasant newcomers. To be sure, the undertaking failed to convince the authorities to end the land “reform,” but it did provide valuable economic, demographic, geographical, hydrological, soil-science, and botanical data about the Aga steppe and its Buryat inhabitants.¹¹¹
The Death of Bato-Dalai Ochirov

But five years after the Aga Expedition, Ochirov set off on his final expedition . . . to the realm of the dead. On the night of 15 June 1913, whilst returning home to Kharganasha through the steppe on horseback from a meeting in Aginskoe where the Aga Buryats had discussed land and colonization issues, he became separated from his riding companions. They later found him pinned under his horse—which apparently had been startled by something in the dark—with a fractured skull. The same night, Bato-Dalai Ochirov breathed his last.\footnote{Tumunov notes that immediately after Ochirov’s death, rumors began to circulate in Aga claiming that kulaks and lamas had had a hand in his untimely demise. Another Buryat researcher, Vladimir Andreev, mentions “unfounded suppositions” that Chinese merchants in Siberia who were angry at having been undercut by his cooperatives had slain him. And Ochirov probably did have enemies: in a letter written to Tsybikov in 1910 (or later) about the cooperatives, he asked Tsybikov to help him obtain a pistol and complained vaguely of opposition from unnamed rich men (bogachi) and lamas; this might suggest Ochirov knew he was facing danger. And Batodalaeva writes confusedly that someone in a Buryat settlement had struck Ochirov with a horsewhip not long before his death. But such rumors of foul play are simply unverifiable: the authorities did not deem Ochirov’s death suspicious, so they refused to carry out an investigation whose records might have helped us to learn more.}

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Conclusion

Ochirov left few writings behind, and most secondary sources treat him rather vaguely, but perhaps we can use his deeds to adduce something of his worldview, which may have been shaped by his early poverty and showed a preference for working moderately and modestly within the existing order, rather than boldly challenging it. Fate had granted other members of the young Buryat intelligentsia the wherewithal to broaden their horizons through extensive formal education and foreign travel. For example, at the turn of the twentieth century, Baradin visited Western Europe, spent much time investigating the practice of Buddhism in Tibet and Mongolia, and attended prestigious St. Petersburg University; Zhamtsarano and Tsybikov also undertook scholarly travels in Mongolia (and in Tsybikov’s case, Tibet as well) and studied
at the same institution; while Bogdanov leisurely attended courses that struck his fancy at Tomsk, St. Petersburg, Berlin, and Zurich universities (without bothering to complete a degree at any of them) and immersed himself in Western European culture during sojourns in Germany and Switzerland.\textsuperscript{118}

In contrast, the straitened circumstances into which Ochirov had been born deprived him of such opportunities: he had been unable even to attend a Siberian teacher’s college despite the offer of a stipend, and the most distant travels of his youth had been a visit or two to the capital to visit his friend Tsybikov. So—keeping his gaze focused close to home—he grasped the few options locally available for self-education and self-improvement, for example, the translation work on the staff of \textit{Zhizn' na vostochnoi okraine} that exposed him to national and international current events and the clerical duties in the Aga Steppe Duma that trained him in administrative work and deepened his knowledge of the Buryats’ practical needs.

All this may have informed Ochirov’s tendency to focus on using practical, concrete means (rather than indulging in the romantic idealism of other activists such as Zhamtsarano) in order to help his Aga Buryats within the Tsarist system’s constraints and despite its imperfect institutions. Thus, when the Buryats’ land and administrative autonomy came under threat, he employed peaceful petitions, rather than rambunctious rioting, to try to defend them. When this failed—making the best of a bad situation—he participated in the new \textit{volost’} system (willingly or not) to serve Buryat interests and—eventually gaining a high position in that system—used the clout that it offered to promote education and philanthropy among his people.\textsuperscript{119} During his quite limited time in the State Duma, Ochirov also tried to use it to serve Buryat needs, despite the limitations the tsar had placed on it from the very inception of the Duma system. The cooperatives and model farm that Ochirov established after his Duma service had come to an end allowed him to aid the local poor Buryats directly, immediately, and in concrete ways rather than waiting for benevolence from the imperial state or liberation through revolution. His Classical Mongolian translations aimed to raise the Aga Buryats’ cultural level and to spread useful knowledge among them while promoting the preservation of their literary language in the face of late Tsarist policies of Russification. Ochirov’s organizational work for, and participation in, the Aga Expedition attempted to further Buryat interests by using objective scholarship to defend Buryat lands from colonization, rather than by denouncing colonization with impassioned nationalist rhetoric. We
also see this practical and even-tempered approach in the platform of Ochirov’s Party of Progressive Buryats, which eschewed the extremes of Red revolution and Romanov reaction personified at the time by, respectively, the Buryat Bolshevik Tsyrempil Ranzhurov (1884–1918) and the ardent monarchist Badmaev.

And although Ochirov’s activities and activism focused intensely on the Aga Buryats, the concern with the Evenki that he evinced after his election to the Second Duma (as well as the Western Buryats, although they lay outside his Duma seat’s jurisdiction) showed his worldview was sufficiently broad that he understood well the interconnection of the Aga Buryats’ struggles with those of other Native Siberians at the turn of the century. This attention to nationalities other than one’s own seems to have been fairly uncommon among the pre-1917 Native Siberian intelligentsia, who understandably tended to champion their own peoples’ interests due to the practical necessity of addressing the needs of the group among which they lived and whose circumstances they knew best. Exemplars of this narrower approach to the national question in Siberia include the aforementioned Buryats Zhamtsarano and Tsybikov and the Sakha (Yakut) Vasiliy Nikiforov-Kulumnur (1866–1928), whose Union of the Sakhas (aka Yakut Union) founded in 1906 championed Sakha self-government and an end to Russian colonization. The group of young Khakas intellectuals who formed a Union of Siberian Natives (Soiuz sibirskikh inorodtsev) in 1905 pursued aims for their people similar to those of the Union of the Sakhas. To be sure, the charter of this Union of Siberian Natives also advocated “establishing ties between the separate native tribes and spiritual and material mutual aid and support [among them],” suggesting a broader vision extending beyond Khakasiia’s steppes and forests, but in any event these grand pan-Siberian plans bore no fruit since the group soon was shut down by the authorities.

Indeed, the rather few exceptions to this tendency for prerevolutionary native intellectuals to focus exclusively on their own groups included the Buryat journalist Bogdanov, who worked as a land surveyor among the Khakas in 1909–1913 to ameliorate the effects of native land loss to Russian settlers and penned articles on Khakas economic and cultural matters; the Khakas Turkologist Nikolai Katanov (1862–1922), who wrote extensively on the language and folklore of the Tuvans and Tofalar as well as his own people; and of course Ochirov himself. Thus, the highly localized focus of most of Ochirov’s activities belied a much broader vision whose implementation was prevented by its bearer’s untimely demise.
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Notes


However, Batodalaeva, who exited the womb a few months after her father entered the tomb, confidently dates his birth to 20 March 1874. Re-
calling childhood memories, she states “‘He was exactly 10 months younger (sic) than Gombozhab Tsybikov,’ Tsybikov’s wife abgai (aunt) Beshi used to say.” Batodalaeva, “Esegymni khuriaangy namtar,” 3. Tsybikov was born in April 1873, so this actually would make Ochirov 11 months younger than Tsybikov, not 10. For Tsybikov’s date of birth, see Ts. B. Tsydendambaev, “Zhiznennyi put’ G. Ts. Tsybikova,” in K stoletiiu so dniia rozhdeniia professora G. Ts. Tsybikova: Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii i i stat’i, ed. A. P. Okladnikov (Ulan-Ude: Buriatskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1976), 6–44, here 6; Tsybikov, Buriatskie ucheye natsional-demokraty, 151; “Palomnik osobogo naznacheniia,” Russkoe geograficheskoie obshchestvo: Istoriiia. 20 April 2018, https://www.rgo.ru/ru/article/palomnik-osobogo-naznacheniya. This last source dates Tsybikov’s birth on 20 April 1873, suggesting Ochirov was born in 1874 if he were about a year younger than Tsybikov.

A birth date of 1874 for Ochirov also is suggested by a 1913 newspaper obituary that says he entered school in 1880 “as a six-year-old boy.” A-v, “Slavnyi buriat: Bato-Dalai Ochirov (nekrelog),” Sibirskaaia zhizn’ 148 (7 July 1913): 2. Another obituary says he died in June 1913 at the age of 39, which similarly would place his birth in 1874. Rinchino, “Bato-Dalai Ochirov,” 349. (This contradicts the 1875 birth year that Rinchino gives on p. 342 of the same source.)

On the other hand, a brief 1907 biographical sketch of Ochirov and the other Siberian deputies in the Second Duma gives his birth year as 1873. I. Rodionov, “Kratkie biografii sibirskikh deputatov,” Sibirskie voprosy 13 (10 June 1907): 26–27, here 27. So too does the index to the Second Duma’s stenographic records, which ages him at 34 as of April 1907. Gosudarstvennaia Duma: Vtoroi sozyv—Stenograficheskie otchety, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennaia tipografia, 1907), index, 9 (“Spisok chlenov G. Dumy”). But this is very much a minority opinion, since no other sources date Ochirov’s birth to 1873.


6. Batodalaeva, “Esegymni khuriaangy namtar.” 3. No available source gives the precise years of Ochirov’s school attendance, either in the Aginskoe prikhodskoe uchilishche or subsequently in the Chitinskoe gorodskoe uchilishche. Vladimir Andreev, Istoriiia buriatskoi shkoly (1804–1962) (Ulan-Ude: Buriatskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1964) treats the Aginskoe prikhodskoe uchilishche (founded in 1842) in chapters 2 and 3 but is rather vague on the length of its program at the time. So too are other sources on Buryat education, which describe it as, variously, an odnoklassnaia (one-class) or dvukhklassnaia shkola (two-class school). Tumunov says the Aga school was an odnoklassnaia shkola until 1904, when it became a dvukhklassnaia shkola. Zh. Tumunov, Ocherki iz istorii aginskikh buriat (Ulan-Ude: Buriatskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1988), 140. On the other hand, Ochirov’s daughter calls it a “three-year Russian school” (gurban klassstai orod hurguuli). Batodalaeva, “Esegymni khuriaangy namtar,” 3. While we should not trust uncritically the 81-year-old Butit-Khanda’s memory (she occasionally jumbles events), other evidence supports her version: we read elsewhere that Ochirov’s classmate Tsybikov entered the school at seven in


9. GAU DPO Aginskii institut povysheniia kvalifikatsii rabotnikov sotsial’noi sfery Zabaikal’skogo kraia, “Muzei obrazovaniia ABO,” https://gaudpo.wixsite.com/aipk/muzej-obrazovaniya-abo; Tumunov, Istoriia Agi, 197; Batodalaeva, “Esegymni khuriaangy namtar,” 3. (The first source dates Murzin’s arrival at the Aga school to 1895, but this is clearly erroneous: as we shall see, by that time Ochirov had left the school and was employed in the Aga Steppe Duma.) Incidentally, Zhamtsarano replaced Murzin as starshii uchitel’ in fall 1901. “M. N. P. direktor narodnykh uchilishch Zabaikal’skoi oblasti. Okon-chivshemu kurs v Irkutskoi uchitel’skoi seminarii Zhamtsaranovu: Avgusta 4 dnia 1901 g. G. Chita. no. 1496,” in Ts. P. Vanchikova and M. V. Aiusheeva, Opisanie lichnogo arkhива Ts. Zh. Zhamtsarano (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’stvo Buriatskogo nauchnogo tsentra SO RAN, 2010), 77.


17. Interestingly enough, the Buryat author Tsyden-Zhap Zhimbiev says in his introduction to Ukhtomskii, Puteshestvie po Zabaikal’iu, 3, that Ochirov also took part in the delegation, but Ukhtomskii does not mention Ochirov in his account, nor does any other source I have encountered: it appears Zhimbiev has confused Bato-Dalai Ochirov with an (apparently unrelated) Aga aristocrat in the group named Dorzhi Ochirov. As a teenager of modest birth, Bato-Dalai would hardly have been included in the delegation, the more so as he was not yet employed by the Steppe Duma. In any event, his name appears nowhere in Bazarygab Batomunkin’s exhaustive investigation of the Buryat delegation’s participants. Bazarygab Batomunkin, “Mudrost’ naroda v vozvelichivani dostoinykh,” in Aginskie buryaty: Istoriia, traditsii i ku’turnoe nasledie (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’stvo Buriatskoi gosudarstvennoi sel’skokhoziaistvennoi akademii, 2016), 86–96.

18. Ukhtomskii, Puteshestvie po Zabaikal’iu, 10–11.


21. After all, even Buryat youths who lived much closer to Irkutsk than Ochirov often could not afford to study there. This problem was serious enough that Western Buryat activists founded a Society for Aid to the Buryat Pupils of Irkutsk Province (Obshchestvo vspomoschestvovaniia uchashchimsia buriatam Irkutskoi gubernii) in August 1908 specifically to help Buryat pupils pay for room, board, and other quotidian expenditures in the provincial capital. “Sredi buriat,” Sibir’, 15 August 1908, 2. Ochirov’s obituary in the Tomsk newspaper Sibirskaiia zhizn’ specifically blames poverty for his failure to continue his education after “brilliantly” completing the Chita city school. A-v, “Slavnii buriat.” Batodalaeva confirms that poverty kept Ochirov from studying in Irkutsk: at that time, Ochirov was tutoring the children of a wealthy rural Aga Buryat—a certain “Sandan noyon”—and performing housekeeping duties for
him. (A noyon was a prerevolutionary Buryat hereditary aristocrat.) Sandan noyon wanted Ochirov to continue working for him, so he selfishly refused to help fund Ochirov’s studies in Irkutsk, knowing full well he could not afford to go on his own. The plan backfired: refusing to be Sandan’s “slave” (barlag), Ochirov simply quit. Batodalaeva, “Esegymni khuriaangy namtar,” 3. (Here, Batodalaeva writes erroneously that Ochirov was slated to study in St. Petersburg like his fellow Aga Buryats Zhamtsarano, Baradin, and Tsybikov. She apparently has confused the Irkutsk Teachers’ Seminary with Petr Badmaev’s St. Petersburg gymnasium for Buryat youth, which those three briefly attended at the turn of the century.)


23. “Predislovie: Iz istorii Aginskoi Stepnoi dumy,” in Bazaron et al., Istoriia Aginskoi Stepnoi dumy: Chast’ I—Formuliarnye i posluzhnye spiski dolzhnostnykh lits Aginskoi Stepnoi dumy, 6–17, here 12. Like Ochirov, Bodiiin had learned Classical Mongolian and Russian from private tutors in his youth but, unlike Ochirov, had no formal education. For more on Bodiiin, see the biographical sketch in Bazaron et al., Istoriia Aginskoi Stepnoi dumy: Chast’ I, 317 (as well as the sundry documents in Chast’ I and Chast’ II treating his work in the Steppe Duma); Dameshek et al., Istoriia organov samoupravlenia, 26–27, 300, 330.

According to the Aga teacher and local historian (kraeved) Lodon Linkhovoin (1901–1979), a steppe duma clerk earned much more than a school-teacher; this consideration may have helped persuade Ochirov to choose the clerk’s office over the classroom. Linkhovoin, Lodon bagshyn dehterhe, 335.

24. The Aga Steppe Duma’s eight inorodnye upravy were Barun-Khatsaikia, Byrke-Tsugol’skaia, Kialinskaia, Mogoituevskaia, Sholotuevskaia, Tsugol’skaia, Turginskaia, and Tutkhaltuevskaia. Dameshek et al., Istoriia organov samoupravlenia, 233.


26. “Kratkii posluzhnoi spisok o sluzhbe Bato-Dalia Ochirova, pomoshchnika pis’movoditel’ia Aginskoi Stepnoi dumy. 30 noiabria 1900 g.,” in Bazaron et al., Istoriia Aginskoi Stepnoi dumy: Chast’ I, 286. The document reads: “S kakogo vremeni sostoit na obshchestvennoi sluzhbe [?] Na gosudarstvennoi sluzhbe sostoial s 1892 po 1896 god. Skol’ko v ysluzhili na nastoiashei dolzhnosti [?] Dva goda i odinasdat’ mesiatsev.” This passage shows that Ochirov’s service in the Steppe Duma was interrupted over 1896–1897 by his work for Badmaev’s newspaper.

27. For biographical information on the enigmatic Badmaev, see R. E. Pubaev, “Petr Badmaev (1842–1920 [sic]),” in Ulymzhiev, Vydaushchiesia buriatskie deiateli, 1:66–71; Iu. V. Kuz’min, Doktor P. A. Badmaev: Uchenyi, diplomat, predprinimatel’ (Moscow: Tovarishchestvo nauchnykh izdanii KMK, 2014); David McDonald, “Petr Badmaev (1851–1920),” in Russia’s People of
Badmaev’s audacious ambitions for Russia in Asia are typified by a 13 February 1893 note to Finance Minister Sergei Witte (1849–1915) brashly advocating the “Mongolo-Tibeto-Chinese East’s unification to Russia.” Quoted in V. P. Semennikov, Zaxisamis for us: Arkhiv tibetskogo izdatelstva (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo, 1925), 75.

28. N. V. Kim and S. S. Baldanov, “O pervoi gazete na buriatskom iazyke,” in Natsional’naia intelligentsiia i duxhovenstvo: Istoriia i sovremennost’—Tezisy i materialy respublikanskoii nauchno-prakticheskoi konfekentseii, ed. Iu. B. Randolov (Ulan-Ude: Buriatskii nauchnyi tsentr SO RAN, 1994), 87–90; T. S. Averiachkina, Periodicheskaia pechat’ Zabaikal’skoi oblasti (vtoraia polovina XIX veka-fevral’ 1917 g.) (Chita: Zabaikal’skiy institut predprinimatel’stva Sibirskogo universiteta potrebitel’skoi kooperatsii, 2015), 18–22; I. G. Striuchenko, Pechat’ Dal’nego Vostoka nakanune i v gody Pervoi russkoi revoliutsii (Vladivostok: Dal’nevostochnoe knizhnnoe izdatel’stvo, 1982), 67, 233; V. N. Volkova, Kniga i chtenie na peresechenii epokh i kul’tur: iz veka XIX v vek XXI (sibirskie nabliudeniia) (Novosibirsk: Gosudarstvennaia publichnaia nauchno-tekhnicheskaia biblioteka Sibirskogo otdeleniia RAN, 2009), 76. Kim and Baldanov, “O pervoi gazete,” 88—an examination of documents in the State Archive of the Republic of Buryatia and the State Archive of Zabaikal’skaia Oblast’ (formerly Chitinskaia Oblast’)—reveals that out of the 600 Buryat subscribers whom they have identified, 35 belonged to the Khori tribe’s Galzut clan; 50 lived under the “Barun-Khuntsiiskaia” native administration (inorodnaia uprava); 120 belonged to the Tsugol’skaia native administration; 10 were lamas of the Tsugol’skii datsan (Buddhist monastery); and 156 dwelled in other jurisdictions (vedomstva). The authors provide no information about the remaining Buryat subscribers.

29. Iu. V. Kuz’min, M. P. Rachkov, and A. P. Sukhodolov, “Zhizn’ na vostochnoi okraine: Pervaia gazeta v Rossii na mongolskom iazyke,” Voprosy teorii i istorii zhurnalistiki 3 (2014): 5–12, here 7; Striuchenko, Pechat’ Dal’nego Vostoka, 65–66; Kuz’min, Doktor P. A. Badmaev, 131–134; Sukhodolov and Kuz’min, Mongoliya i russko-mongolskie otnosheniia, 224–229; Kim and Baldanov, “O pervoi gazete,” passim. Badmaev’s strong monarchist views and close ties to the court made him politically reliable. After all, the godfather at his 11 April 1872 baptism was none other than the tsaresvich Alexander—the future Alexander III—and both Alexander III’s and Nicholas II’s families numbered among his patients. Thus, Zhizn’ na vostochnoi okraine was spared official interference: on 2 September 1895, Interior Minister Ivan Durnovo (1834–1903) officially granted Badmaev in advance the right to bypass the censorship. Kuz’min, Doktor P. A. Badmaev, 45; Striuchenko, Pechat’ Dal’nego Vostoka, 65.

30. Batodalaeva, “Esegymni khuriaangy namtar,” 3. In general, Badmaev seems to have treated his correspondents and translators as hired laborers whose toil did not merit acknowledgment: only the names of his Russian and Mongolian editors Sniitkin and Rabdanov were printed on the issues. Ironically,
although Badmaev failed to acknowledge Ochirov’s professional contributions to the paper, he did identify him—along with Rabdanov—as a contributor to Badmaev’s campaign to build an Orthodox church in Aginskoe. As Buddhists, Ochirov and Rabdanov probably donated unwillingly. “K svedeniiu blagochestivykh liudei,” Zhizn’ na vostochnoi okraine, 1 June 1896, 1; “Na soderezhanie khrama v selennii Aginskom: Po sbornoi knige, s 29-go maia po pervoe iiunia, postupilo . . . .” Zhizn’ na vostochnoi okraine, 4 June 1896, 4. But Ochirov got off relatively lightly: he had to donate only 5 rubles, as opposed to Rabdanov’s 20.


32. Rabdanov left the foundering newspaper a week before it closed. His departure left Badmaev with too few Mongolian translators, so Badmaev announced all issues would appear only in Russian until 1 July 1897, by which time he hoped to find a new Mongolian editor. Zhizn’ na vostochnoi okrainy, 22 June 1897, 1. And indeed, the last week’s issues were printed in two-page, Russian-only editions. One wonders why Badmaev didn’t have Ochirov or any other remaining translators render at least some material into Mongolian: perhaps they too had jumped ship by then? Despite Badmaev’s assurances, no 1 July issue was forthcoming: the last issue came out on 29 June.


34. Irkutsk Province’s steppe dumas were dissolved as follows: Alar (1890), Balagansk (1890), Idinsk (1886), Kuda (1890), Ol’khon (1887), Tunka (1889), and Verkholensk (1889). Dameshek et al., Istoriia organov samoupravleniia, 274–284. Zabaikal’ia’s steppe dumas were abolished thusly: Aga (1903), Barguzin (1902), Khori (1904), Kudara (1903), and Selenga (1903). Ibid., 230, 238–239, 296–305. The legislation for the Transbaikal dumas is contained in “Vremennoe polozhenie ob ustroistve obshchestvennogo upravleniia i sude kochevykh inorodtsev Zabaikal’skoi oblasti” (no. 19984, 23 April 1901), in Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii: Sobranie tret’e (henceforth PSZ), vol. 21, 1901 (St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennaia tipografiia, 1903).

35. As Zhamtsarano discovered in 1903, one Irkutsk Province krest’ianskii nachal’nik rejected the Alar Buryats’ choice of starshina since the man was a Buddhist, even though no law required elders to be baptized. The Buryats had to bribe the krest’ianskii nachal’nik into confirming him. Zhamtsarano, Put’eyet dnevnik, 26. Zhamtsarano provides ample evidence of the numerous political and social problems suffered by the Western Buryats after the steppe dumas’ closure. Montgomery, “Zhamtsarano,” passim.

36. The relevant laws were “O glavnykh osnovaniakh pozemel’nogo ustroistva krest’ian i inorodtsev, vodvorivshikhsia na kazennykh zemliakh gubernii Tobol’skoii, Tomskoi, Eniseiskoi i Irkutskoi” (no. 12998, 23 May 1896), in PSZ, vol. 16, 1896 (St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennaia tipografiia, 1899); “Pravila o poriadke opredeleniia zemel’nykh nadelov i proizvodstva pozemel’noustroitel’nykh rabot i ob otvode lesnykh nadelov, opredelenii lesnogo naloga i
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37. For example, Bodiiin, together with the Khori and Selenga akhalagsha taishaas Erdeni Vambotsyrenov (served 1898–1903) and Vandan Zhambaltarov (served 1896–1903) wrote to Transbaikal Military Governor Ivan Nadarov on 28 February 1902 warning the land reform would harm the Buryats economically and that replacing the Speranskii organs with a larger number of Russian-style administrative bodies and their sizeable staffs would be a financial burden. Khaptaev, *Natsional’noe dvizhenie v Buriatii*, 66–67. The Irkutsk Buryats’ experiences showed the validity of such concerns: in July 1903, Zhamtsarano learned the new organs had indeed increased the Western Buryats’ taxes. Zhamtsarano, *Put’evye dnevniki*, 14, 19–20, 35; Montgomery, “Zhamtsarano,” 280.

38. In September 1902, Vambotsyrenov even led a group of Khori and Aga noble petitioners to Nicholas II at the royal resort in Livadia. Nicholas didn’t favor them with an audience, so they had to transmit their petition through the palace commandant. After a considerable delay, Nicholas declined the petition in November 1902 pompously replying, “I thank you who have come from a distant frontier for the sentiments expressed to me in the name of the Buryat population of the Aga Steppe Duma. The Buryats’ age-old devotion toward the Russian rulers is well-known to me. Transmit to them that I have attentively listened to your words about the anxious mood experienced by the Buryats as a result of the implementation of the new law on the arrangement of their way of life.” He admitted the Buryats “must reconcile [themselves] to the temporary inconveniences [caused by the reforms]” but reminded them “the well-being of all my Buryat subjects is dear to me”; he assured them “my commands [on the reforms] are being implemented by people who are invested with my trust, and the [Buryats] therefore should turn to them for explanations of the new laws.” He then dismissed the delegation with the grand words “Farewell, I shan’t forget you.” Quoted in Khaptaev, *Natsional’noe dvizhenie v Buriatii*, 71–72. (Incidentally, Irkutsk Province’s Buryats also had petitioned—fruitlessly—to stop the administrative and land reforms. Bazarov, *Istoriia Buriatii*, 3:10–11.)

appears in “Formuliarnyi spisok Boronchu Borodina, vtorogo taisha Aginskoi Stepnoi dumy, 27 maia 1872 g.” and “Formuliarnyi spisok Boronchu Borodina, vtorogo taisha Aginskoi Stepnoi dumy, 21 iuniiia 1881 g.,” in Bazarov et al., Istorii Aginskoi Stepnoi dumy: Chast’ I, 102–104, 151–154.

40. “Telegramma doverennykh ot buriat svoim doveriteliam v Mogotui (sic), 4 dekabria 1904 g. (sic), Peterburg,” in Natsional’nye dvizheniia v period Pervoi revoliutsii v Rossii: Sbornik dokumentov iz arkhiva byv. Departamenta politii, ed. I. L. Kuznetsov (Cheboksary: Chuvashskoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo, 1935), 79–80. Ochirov is specifically listed among the telegraph’s addressees charged with publicizing it in their respective communities within the Aga and Khori Steppe Duma areas. The telegram’s context, and references to it in the following documents in the collection, firmly and logically date it to 1903, not 1904; the Transbaikal telegraph station’s name is “Mogoitui” (as in the collection’s other documents), not “Mogotui.” For the telegram’s correct date, see “Raport nachal’nika Tsugol’skogo otdeleniia Zabaikal’skogo zhandarmskogo politsei-skogo upravleniia nachl’niku Zabaikal’skogo zhandarmskogo politseiskogo upravleniia Sibirskoi zheleznoi dorogi, 13 dekabria 1903 g., no. 2305, st. Adrian-kovka,” and “Donesenie nachal’nika otdeleniia po okhraneniuiu poriadka i obshchestvennoi bezopasnosti v osobyi otdel departamenta politii, 18 fevralia 1904 g., no. 2911, Peterburg,” in Kuznetsov, Natsional’nye dvizheniia, 81, 81–82.

Later, on 8 January 1904, the persistent Aga Buryats Vampilov and Tsyvenov even telegraphed a petition to Empress Alexandra, naively assuming she would convince her husband to spare the Buryats’ steppe dumas and primordial lands; Nicholas replied a week later with a written refusal. On 29 January 1904, Transbaikal Military Governor Nadarov sentenced Vampilov and Tsyvenov to five years’ exile in rural Irkutsk Province for “inciting the inorodtsy.” “Khrоника,” Pravo: Ezhenedel’naia iuridicheskaia gazeta, 29 February 1904, cols. 584–585. But if Nadarov’s sentence was ever carried out, it wasn’t carried out immediately, for Tsyvenov, at least, was still in St. Petersburg a month later, having obtained permission to stay there to recover from an unspecified illness. On 20 February 1904, Tsyvenov boldly approached Nicholas’s carriage on Nevskii Prospekt near Anchikov Bridge bearing yet another petition, but Okhrana agents kept him from reaching the tsar. Two days later, a doctor pronounced Tsyvenov cured, and he was sent packing to Chita. “Donesenie nachal’nika otdeleniia po okhraneniuiu poriadka i obshchestv. bezopasnosti v osobyi otdel departamenta politii, 23 fevralia 1904 g., no. 3312, Peterburg,” in Kuznetsov, Natsional’nye dvizheniia, 82.

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42. Tumunov opines that Ochirov was appointed as the Aginskaia volost’s first starshina by Military Governor Nadarov (“Nazarov” in Tumunov’s text). Tumunov, Ocherki iz istorii, 54. On the other hand, Andreev, who fixes Ochirov’s term as starshina at one year, avers that the Buryats themselves elected him. Vladimir Andreev, “Ochirov Bato-Dalai” Soël [Culture], http://soyol.ru/personas/figures/708.

However, Batomunkin argues the Aga volost’s archival sources show that Ochirov did not become starshina at this time (although he did so later, as we shall discover); rather, Buda-Chimit Batkhain took up the post on 10 February 1903, holding it until his replacement by Banzraksha Soktoev on 29 March 1905. Bazarzhab Batomunkin, “O posluzhnykh spiskakh rukovoditelei Aginskoi inorodcheskoi volosti,” in Aginskie buriaty, 124–129, here 125, 127. (Batomunkin rightly opines, “There is much confusion with the chronology of the appointment of the Aginskaia volost’s officials.” Ibid., 125.) To further muddy the waters, Batodalaeva claims Ochirov served in the volost’ as a judge, not an elder. “Esegymni khuriaangy namtar,” 3.

43. Egunov, Kolonial’naia politika tsarizma, 277.

44. For instance, Zhamsarano marveled that an attendee of a June 1905 suglaan (community meeting) in Irkutsk Province’s Ol’zon village expounded at length on a speech given by the liberal Prince Sergei Trubetskoi (1862–1905) in far-off Peterhof only nine days earlier. Zhamsarano, Put’evye dnevnik, 164. In general, as the Buryat historian Nikifor Egunov astutely comments, the Buryats weren’t “sealed off behind a Chinese wall from the other groups of [Russia’s] population” during the 1905 Revolution. Egunov, Kolonial’naia politika tsarizma, 254.

45. Khatapaev, Natsional’noe dvizhenie v Buriatii, 64–65; N. P. Egunov, Pervaya russkaia revoliutsiia i vtoroi etap natsional’nogo dvizhenia v Buriatii (Ulan-Ude: Buriatskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1970), 116. The Aga natives’ (undated) protocol defended their action by intoning, “His Majesty’s Cabinet has seized our lands and forests,” which had occasioned them “material want” and concluding “It is resolved: to take from the Cabinet’s use all the locales [formerly] occupied by us along the Olenuia, Ara, Ile, Ures, etc. Rivers.” “Iz postanovleniia skhoda aginskikh buriat (osen’ 1905 g.),” in Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Buriat-Mongolii v period Revoliutsii 1905 goda: sbornik dokumentov, ed. P. T. Khaptaev (Ulan-Ude: Buriat-mongol’skoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1955), 121.

46. On 19 December 1905, Vambotsyrenov and around two hundred other Buryats broke into the defunct Khorii Steppe Duma’s sealed building in Oninskoe and led a spirited meeting whose resolutions thundered that “since the introduction of the new [administrative] law, the natives’ way of life has been constrained, and life has become unbearable” and that “therefore the Buryats are taking back their old rights.” Quoted in “Iz prigovora buriatskogo narodnogo soveshchaniia v s. Aninskoi (sic) ot 19 i 20 dekabria 1905 goda o vvedenii buriatskogo samoupravleniia,” in Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Zabaikal’e 1905–1907 gg.: Sbornik dokumentov i materialov k piatidesiatletiiu Pervoi russkoi
They reconvened on 13 January 1906 to elect a new Steppe Duma staff that would be headed—not unsurprisingly—by Vambotsyrenov himself. But by that time, the autocracy had regained its balance and had begun to repress the revolution: having crushed the Moscow insurrection and dispersed the St. Petersburg Soviet in December 1905, early the following month it unleashed Generals Alexander Meller-Zakomel’skii (1844–1928) and Pavel Rennenkampf (1854–1918), who set out in troop trains from Moscow and Harbin, respectively, to restore order along the Trans-Siberian Railway. Although the punitive expeditions were aimed at Russian insurgents, not Buryats, this show of force struck fear into the hearts of the would-be Duma revivalists, and two days later (15 January 1906), they suspended operations . . . forever. R. Montgomeri, “K voprosu o stepnoi dume v gody Pervoi russkoi revoliutsii,” in Buriatskie natsional’nye demokraty i obshchestvenno-politicheskaia mysli mongol’skikh narodov v XX v.: sbornik nauchnykh trudov, ed. B. V. Bazarov (Ulan-Ude: Vostochno-Sibirskaya gosudarstvennaya akademiiia kul’tury i iskusstv, 2008), 238–251, here 245–250; Robert W. Montgomery, “Buriat Political and Social Activism in the 1905 Revolution,” Siberica 10, no. 3 (2011): 1–28, here 9–11, https:/doi.org/10.3167/sib.2011.100301; Khaptaev, Natsional’noe dvizhenie v Buriatiy, 75–78; Tsyben Zhamtsarano, “Buriati i osvoboditel’noe dvizhenie,” Sibirskie voprosy 7 (22 April 1907): 3–10, here 3–4; Kudriavtsev, 1905 god v Buriat-Mongolii, 51–52. For biographical information on Vambotsyrenov, particularly his activities before 1905, see the biographical sketch in B. Ts. Zhalsanova and L. V. Kuras, Istoriiia Khorinskoi Stepnoi dumy v dokumentakh Gosudarstvennogo arkhiva Respubliki Buriatiia (1825–1904) (Ulan-Ude: IMBT SO RAN, 2016), 437–438, as well as the documents in the same book relating to his activities in the Khori Steppe Duma.

47. Suglaans west of Baikal frequently promoted conversion to Buddhism and the construction of datsans (Buddhist monasteries), since particularly harsh Russification policies earlier in Irkutsk Province had hampered the spread of Buddhism there, cutting the Shamanist or baptized Western Buryats off religiously from their Buddhist kin across Baikal. Zhamtsarano, Put’evye dnevnik, 230, 234–245; Montgomery, “Zhamtsarano,” 297.

48. Although the Eastern and Western Buryats held their congresses separately and at different times, they understood their shared national interests. Zhamtsarano remarked that the young Western Buryats he encountered in Alar on 6 June 1905 “displayed the liveliest interest” in the Chita congress held several months earlier. Zhamtsarano, Put’evye dnevnik, 160. The Irkutsk Congress called for unifying the Western and Eastern Buryats but did not specify how this would come about. Egunov, Pervata russkaia revoliutsiia, 144.

49. On the Chita and Irkutsk Congresses, see “Protokol zasedaniia buriat Zabaikal’skoi oblasti v g. Chite s 26 po 30 aprelia 1905 goda,” Sibirskie voprosy 22 (25 August 1907): 27–32 (pt. 1); 24 (8 September 1907): 27–29 (pt. 2); Protokol zasedanii Obshchego s’ezda buriat Irkutskoi gubernii dla obsuzhdeniia voprosov, sviazannykh s zemskoi reformoi (Irkutsk: Raspioriaditel’nyi komitet Vostochno-
50. For biographical information on Iroltuev, see B. V. Bazarzhapov and G. Ts. Mitypova, “Khambo-lama Choinzon-Dorzh Iroltuev,” in Ulymzhiev, Vydaiushchiesia buriatskie deiateli, vol. 1: G. N. Zaiatuev and S. A. Maksanov, “Bazar Baradin,” 105–110; Sh. B. Chimitdorzhiev, “Gombozhab Tsybikov,” 90–97; Chimitdorzhiev, “Tsybikov Zhamtsarano,” 125–134; Chimitdorzhiev, “Radnazhab Bimbaev,” 97–100; Chimitdorzhiev, “Vrachi s vyshish evropeiskim obrazovaniem,” 152–156 (esp. “Bazar-Sada [sic] Iampilov,” 155–156). The available records do not specify all 137 delegates’ class affiliations. Egunov assumes most were “noyons (aristocrats) and kulaks” and stresses that 32 were Buddhist abbots (shereete), although some were common Buryats, and—as we see—others were intellectuals. Egunov, Pervaia russkaia revoliutsiia, 126–127. In fact, Leonid Kuras has astutely remarked, both the Chita and Irkutsk Congresses “stood out for their breadth in geography and representation [of different social groups]. They became discussion tribunes of a sort, where the similarity and difference of their participants’ views were determined and [where] programs and resolutions were worked out on the most important questions of Buryat life.” Kuras, “Natsional’noe dvizhenie buriat,” 69.


53. Zhamtsarano, who attended the Chita Congress, verifies Dorzhiev’s participation. Zhamtsarano, Put’evye dnevники, 136. Dorzhiev was one of the
most remarkable Buryat figures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for he was notable as not only a religious leader but also a diplomat, a traveler, a publisher, the creator of a new Buryat alphabet, and a victim of the Stalinist purges. For a brief, serviceable introduction to his life and works, see R. E. Pabaev, “Agvan Dorzhiev,” in Ulymzhiev, Vydauiushchiesia buriatskie deiateli, 1:76–82.

54. Zhamtsarano, Put’evye dnevники, 137. At the same time, Irltuev and Dorzhiev reminded the starodumtsy that Siberian authorities had forbidden the Congress to advocate a return to the steppe duma system, so their obstinacy in doing so threatened the Congress’ continued operation.


56. At Irltuev’s suggestion, the Iangazhinskii Datsan’s shereete (abbot) Dashi-Dorzho Itegelov (1852–1927) headed this delegation. For more on Itegelov, see Ts.-D. Tsydenov and B. Bal’zhiev, “Dashi-Dorzhii Itygilov (sic),” in Vydauiushchiesia buriatskie deiateli, ed. B. Sh. Dorzhiev (Ulan-Ude: IMBT SO RAN, 2004), 5:79–81. Secular delegates included Ochirov, Vambotsyrenov (who soon hurried home to stage his attempt to reopen the Khori Steppe Duma), the Selenga Steppe Duma’s former akhalagsha taishaa Vandan Zhambaltarov, and the head (golova) of the Khori tribe’s Khudai clan Zhigzhit Galsanov. Besides Itegelov, clerical members included the Iroiskii Datsan’s shereete Shagzha Rinchinov and Danzha Erdeneev, an official from the Iangazhinskii Datsan. Rinchino, “Bato-Dalai Ochirov,” 343, places the delegation’s (hence Ochirov’s) journey in December 1905. So does Ganzhurtsyren Radnaev, who concurs with the list of delegation members above. Ganzhurtsyren Dashinimaevich Radnaev (Ganzhur Lama), “Obshchestvenno-politicheskaia deiatel’nost’ Khambo-lamy Itegelova,” Institut Pandito Khambo-lamy Itegelova [sic], etegelov.ru/conf-3/doclad-conf-3/119-conf-14. Oddly enough, Ganzhur Lama also includes the former Aga Duma head Bodin among the petitioners, although Bodin had died in December 1903, as we know from Bazarov et al., Istoriia Aginskoi Stepnoi dumy: Chast’ I, 317.

Elsewhere we read that a Buryat delegation (of unnamed composition) had been promised a Duma seat by late November 1905 by unidentified officials in St. Petersburg. “Soobshchenie gazety ‘Verkhneudinskii listok’ o rezul’tatakh poedzki deputatsii buriat v Peterburg,” Verkhneudinskii listok 135 (25 November 1905), reproduced in Khrestomatiia po istorii Buriatii: Dokumenty i materialy s drevneishikh vremen do 1917 goda, ed. G. L. Sanzhiev (Ulan-Ude: Buriatskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1986), 173–174; also cited in Kuras, “Pod’em natsional’nogo dvizheniia buriat,” 151; Bazarov, Istoriia Buriatii, 3:16. It is possible that different groups of Buryat petitioners were assured of a Duma seat by different officials on several occasions, since—relying on remarks by Zhamtsarano—the ethnographer Lev Shternberg (1861–1927) wrote later that “from fall 1905 to spring 1906, up to 20 deputies were in Petersburg at various times with the same petitions about the cancellation of the odious laws on self-government and landholding, free-

57. Quoted in Tsentr vostochnykh rukopisei i ksilografov Institututa mongolovedeniaia, buddologii i tibetologii Buriatskogo nauchnogo tsentra Sibirskogo otdeleniia Rossiiskoi Akademii nauk (TsVR IMBT SO RAN), Ulan-Ude, Obshchii fond, Inv. no. 309 (Ts. Ochirzhapov, “Kratkoe opisanie o pravakh Zabaikal’skich (horinskikh i aginskikh) buriat pri sushchestvovanii ustava 1822 g. i vremennogo polozheniia 1901 g. i vospominanie o sobytiakh imevshikh mesto v period ikh deistviia. I. Period sushchestvovaniiia stepnykh ustanovlenii. II. Period sushchestvovaniiia volostnykh i buluchnykh ustanovlenii”), l. 68. Ochirzhapov identifies the laymen in the 31 January 1906 audience with the tsar as Ochirov, Zhamtsarano, a certain Iu. Gomboev (a Khori Buryat), R. Bazarov (a Barguzin Buryat), and B. Tuduidorzhiev (a Selenga Buryat), but does not name the lamas other than their leader Iroltuev.

58. Unlike their Transbaikalian kin, Irkutsk Province’s Buryats were never granted a Duma seat of their own, despite their petitions requesting one. This guaranteed the dilution of their votes in a sea of Russian electors from the very beginning of the Duma System. Many Western Buryats—about half, in some locales—boycotted the elections in protest. Zhamtsarano, “Buriaty i osvoboditel’noe dvizhenie,” 7.

59. It’s worth noting that although Ochirov’s modest means had limited his travels outside Transbaikalia before 1905, this was not his first visit to the capital. In fact, he had visited his friend Tsybikov there in late 1895 or early 1896, and this sojourn in the metropolis had left a profound impression on the provincial youth. As one Buryat historian puts it, “Ochirov, having viewed with his own eyes the works of art, the high culture, and the scientific establishments and schools, compared what he had seen with the backwardness of his native people and his native region,” and this experience engendered in him a desire to spread enlightenment and progress among the Buryats. Zhigmitov, “Novye dannye,” 154. As we shall discover, Ochirov would pursue these goals later through his political, administrative, economic, and cultural activities.


62. Egunov, Pervaia russkaia revoliutsiia, 162; Tsybikov, Buriatskie uchenye natsional-demokraty, 157–158; Ochirzhapov, “Kratkoe opisanie,” 1. 68. These sources do not precisely identify the meeting’s location or its participants (other than Tsybikov), but it presumably included some of the later founders of the Party of Progressive Buryats (except for Ochirov). Bazarov et al., Istoriia Aginskoi Stepnioi dumy: Chast’ I, 329, locate the 10–15 January meeting in Aginskoe. Like Ochirov, Dylykov and Nanzatov had served in the old Speranskii organs before


64. Ibid., passim. A version of the platform with slightly different wording can be found in TsVR IMBT SO RAN, f. 6 (Lichnyi fond Ts. Zhamtsarano), op.1, d. 38 (“Programma Partii progressivnykh buriat”), ll. 1–2. The party program is treated in Egunov, Pervaiia russkaia revoliutsiia, 162–166; Bazarov et al., Istoriia Aginskoi Stepnoi dumy: Chast’ I, 329–330; Pubaev, “G. Ts. Tsybikov.,” 20; Ochirzhapov, “Kratkoe opisanie,” ll. 68–71. Oddly enough, Ochirzhapov lists Zhamtsarano as a member of the Party of Progressive Buryats, although as I will indicate, he viewed the party somewhat skeptically. Ibid., 69.

65. Zhamtsarano, “Buriaty i osvoboditel’noe dvizhenie,” 6, 7. On the party’s journalistic attacks on the starodumtsy mentioned by Zhamtsarano, see P. T. Khaptaev, “O dvukh publisticheskikh stat’iah G. T. Tsybikova,” in Okladnikov, K stoletiiu so dnia rozhdeniia, 123–125: here, Khaptaev discusses Tsybikov’s 1906 articles in the Chita newspaper Dal’ criticizing the starodumtsy for defending an outmoded, undemocratic system that primarily had served noyon interests.

Zhamtsarano’s thoughts on the Party of Progressive Buryats and the starodumtsy reveal his complex worldview. On one hand, Zhamtsarano leaned toward the neo-Populist socialism of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, not the Kadet-style bourgeois liberalism on which the Party of Progressive Buryats was pinning its hopes, so he naturally was skeptical of Ochirov’s rather moderate group. On the other hand, nationalism led Zhamtsarano to take the seemingly conservative position of defending the Speranskii system favored by the starodumtsy since it had been a truly “national” institution (one is reminded of the Russian Populists’ idealization of the peasant commune). Moreover, the steppe dumas had offered the Buryats at least some degree of autonomy, even though Zhamtsarano admitted they had been marred by their domination by wealthy noyons. In fact, during the 1905 Chita Congress, he initially had leaned toward Vambotsyrenov and the starodumtsy, although he eventually supported the more participatory model of self-government promoted by Iroltuev and Dorzhiev and ultimately embraced by Ochirov and the other Congress members. Zhamtsarano, Put’eveye dnevnik, 137. Yet Zhamtsarano was by no means an unthinking supporter of the Speranskii system and its champions: he remarked, “there is great variety among the leaders of the starodumtsy: One will find those who clearly are swindlers who play on the [national] feelings of the masses and mercilessly exploit them, but for the most part [one will find] selfless extreme narodniki as well.” Zhamtsarano, “Buriaty i osvoboditel’noe...

Predictably, works by Soviet-era historians—who tend to denigrate all non-Bolshevik political movements of the early twentieth century—view the Party of Progressive Buryats with a jaundiced eye. For instance, a 1955 work on the 1905 Revolution in Eastern Siberia castigates its leaders as “representatives of the *ulus* bourgeoisie and kulaks” and opines that “hiding behind the flag of ‘general national interests,’ the *ulus* bourgeoisie attempted to play the leading role in ‘national self-government,’ based not on high birth but on direct economic influence (the commercial and moneylending [torgovo-rostovshchicheko] enslavement of the Buryat peasants and the exploitation of the *batraks*’ hired labor).” V. I. Dulov and F. A. Kudriavtsev, *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Vostochnoi Sibiri v 1905–1907 gg.* (Irkutsk: Irkutskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1955), 118. Even Egunov’s far more nuanced and thoughtful work carps that the party was riddled with “kulaks and noyons.” Egunov, *Pervaia russkaia revoliutsiia*, 162.


67. The party program “was not spread widely among the population due to the [people’s] fear of the consequences of distributing it and [due to] the conservative and tribal [rodoveye] convictions of several influential clan members and lamas who strove to restore the steppe dumas.” Ochirzhapov, “Kratkoe opisanie,” l. 71.


69. Incidentally, Vambotsyrenov’s support of the Speranskii system was shared by Ochirov’s former employer Petr Badmaev. Ochirzhapov, “Kratkoe opisanie,” l. 78. Despite Badmaev’s fervent monarchism and support of Buryat religious assimilation, he long had favored the steppe dumas and had defended them in his correspondence with Russian authorities. Kuz’min, *Doktor P.A. Badmaev*, 121–122. Badmaev’s position on the steppe dumas probably reflected both his political traditionalism and a hope that appeasing the Buryat tribal elites who headed the steppe dumas would make them better agents of Russian influence in the East.


72. Ochirzhapov, “Kratkoe opisanie,” l. 78.

73. Montgomery, “K voprosu o stepnoi dume,” 250.


76. The East Siberian elections to the Second Duma were held later than those in the rest of Russia: the Duma actually had been convened on 20 February 1907. David Longley, *The Longman Companion to Imperial Russia* (New York: Longman, 2001), 27.
77. Ochirzhapov, “Kratkoe opisanie,” l. 79. Ochirov’s victory is even more striking when one considers some of Ochirov’s starodumtsy enemies were themselves the electors charged with choosing the Buryats’ Duma delegate. (The Duma elections in the Transbaikal were indirect, just as they were elsewhere in Russia: members of Buryat communities voted for electors who in turn met in Chita to vote for the candidate of their choice.) For an excellent introduction to the Duma system in which Ochirov participated, see Geoffrey A. Hosking, The Russian Constitutional Experiment: Government and Duma, 1907–1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

78. D. Zhigmitov, “Perepiska G. Ts. Tsybikova,” Novosti aginskikh kraevedov 1 (1971): 63–72, here 64. Zhigmitov does not provide the date of this letter or specify the topics discussed at the Verkhneudinsk and Irkutsk meetings, but the context clearly places it at some time between the 7 April 1907 election and Ochirov’s arrival in the capital by 30 April.


84. The Second Duma’s president Fedor Golovin (1867–1937) chose the members of each section on a random basis, by drawing lots (po zhrebiiu) to prevent the delegates from choosing the regions they investigated (which obviously could have presented a conflict of interest). The Duma closed before Ochirov’s section could check the Mogilev elections. Gosudarstvennaia Duma, vol. 1, cols. 2293–2294 (“Sessiia II. Zasedanie tridtsatoe. Ponedel’nik, 30 aprelia 1907 g.”); email communication from Geoffrey Hosking, 18 September 2019; Gosudarstvennaia Duma: Vtoroi sozyv—Obvor deiatel’nosti kommissii i otdelov (St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennaia tipografia, 1907), 197–198.

85. K. M. Gerasimova, Lamaizm i natsional’no-kolonial’naia politika tsarizma v Zabaikal’e v XIX i nachale XX vekov (Ulan-Ude: Buriat-mongol’skii nauchno-
Iroltuev’s petition additionally demanded consultation between the Duma and State Council and the clergy of all the Empire’s religions (including Buddhism) in setting religious policy; the state’s equal treatment of Orthodoxy and Buddhism in the Buryat lands; and an end to the Interior Ministry’s supervision of Buddhist institutions. The petition is published in “Nakaz buddiiskogo dukhovenstva Zabaikal’skoi oblasti deputatu 2-i Gosud. Dumy Bato-Dalai-Ochirovu” (sic), Sibirskie voprosy 16 (1 July 1907): 28–29. (This issue of Sibirskie voprosy was published after the Duma had been prorogued the previous month.)

86. “Protokol sobraniia sibirskoi gruppy,” Sibirskie voprosy 10 (13 May 1907): 34–39 (verifies Ochirov’s attendance at the 2 May meeting); “Protokol sobraniia sibirskoi gruppy,” Sibirskie voprosy 11 (27 May 1907): 33–40 (verifies Ochirov’s attendance at the 9 May meeting); “Protokol sobraniia sibirskoi gruppy,” Sibirskie voprosy 14 (21 June 1907): 33–40 (verifies Ochirov’s attendance at the 16 May meeting); “Protokol sobraniia sibirskoi gruppy,” Sibirskie voprosy 13 (10 June 1907): 27–28 (verifies Ochirov’s attendance at the 23 May meeting); “Poslednie protokoly gruppy sibirskikh deputatov Gosud. Dumy,” Sibirskie voprosy 16 (1 July 1907): 31–35 (verifies Ochirov’s attendance at the 30 May and 4 June meetings). Sibirskie voprosy, 12 (3 June 1907) lists an additional (undated) “Protokol sobraniia sibirskoi gruppy” in its table of contents but oddly does not include it in the issue’s text, whose pagination show the “Protokol” was intentionally omitted between the two articles listed before and after it: perhaps this was due to censorship or self-censorship? Otherwise, we see the journal continued to publish the Siberian group’s accumulated protocols after the Duma’s closure. An article that sums up the group’s activities over the entire period of its existence verifies that colonization and the krest’ianskie nachal’niki were discussed at its meetings. “Otchet o deiatel’nosti gruppy sibirskikh deputatov vtorogo sozyva Gosudarstvennoi Dumy,” Sibirskie voprosy 15 (30 June 1907): 29–35.

87. Zhigmitov, “Perepiska G. Ts. Tsybikova,” 64. Zhigmitov does not provide the letter’s date; he opines that it was penned “during the Duma sessions,” but the remark about “new elections” would seem to suggest it was written sometime after the Duma’s prorogation.

88. “Vysochaisme utverzhdennoe polozhenie o vyborakh v Gosudarstvennuiu dumu” (no. 29242, 3 June 1907) PSZ, vol. 27, 1907 (St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennaia tipografiia, 1910).

89. Fear of political persecution also may help explain Ochirov’s reticence to reenter parliamentary politics. As Iia Mosina points out, after the Second Duma was closed, its liberal and leftist Siberian deputies feared holding meetings or engaging in other public activities, and the Siberian branches of the Kadet party (which Ochirov had favored) were virtually inactive into 1908. Journalistic evidence from the time show the deputies’ caution was quite understandable: former Duma deputies, members of the intelligentsia, and politically “unreliable” elements now were placed under surveillance, and Siberian newspaper editors now faced fines and arrest for having printed material several
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years earlier that had been legal at the time but now was deemed seditious. I. G. Mosina, *Formirovanie burzhuazii v politicheskuiu silu v Sibiri* (Tomsk: Izdatel’stvo tomskogo universiteta, 1978), 96–99; L. B-v, “Sibirskaiia pechat’ v period mezhdudum’ia,” *Sibirskie voprosy* 33 (16 November 1907): 13–16.


93. A. I. Termen, *Sredi buriat Irkutskoi gubernii i Zabaikal’skoi oblasti: Ocherki i vpechatleniia* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Ministerstva vnutrennikh del, 1912), 114–115. On 1 January 1914, six months after Ochirov’s death, the Aginskoe City School became an “upper elementary school” (vysshee nachal’noe uchilishche) with a more extensive curriculum. Andreev, *Istoriiia buriatskoi shkoly*, 302–303. Andreev frets “the Aginskoe upper elementary school [i.e., the former Aga gorodske uchilishche] was the only educational institution among the Buryats with a program more extensive than that of a primary school (nachal’noe uchilishche).” But in the six years of its existence under tsarism, that is, up to the February 1917 Revolution, it did not exert, and could not exert, a noticeable influence upon the cultural life of the Buryats.” He asserts that subsequently, “the school’s activity became livelier from the time of the socialist revolution of October 1917.” Ibid., 305. And to be sure, Andreev demonstrates that during the prerevolutionary years, the pedagogical preparation of many of the Russian teachers had left much to be desired and that the school had lain inconveniently distant from the most isolated Buryat settlements. Still, his criticism seems to be based less on solid evidence than on the demands of Soviet ideology, which required emphasizing the Communist regime’s achievements relative to those of the autocracy: it would be unreasonable to expect any school to spark a
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Buryat cultural explosion in only six years, and in any event, one wonders how much “livelier” the school really became after the October Revolution, when Russia already had endured three years of world war and political upheaval and soon would face the terrible trials and traumas of the Civil War.


96. Pavel Nataev, “Shkola i deiateli prosveshcheniia,” Buriatia (20 December 2009), 4, 24, here 4, gives a date of 1906 for the founding of the Obschestvo prosveshcheniia buriat; Nataev, “Pervyi buriatskii parlamentarii,” provides a date of 1909 for this event. For a more reasonable founding date of 1907 and closing date of 1909 based on archival materials, see the Schorkowitz references cited in n98.


99. Termen, Sredi buriat, 141, 120.

100. I. B. Lomakina and B. S. Starin, Kooperatsiia v Zabaikal’e: istoricheskii opyt (60-gody XIX veka—vekhal’ 1917 g.) (Ulan-Ude: Vostochno-Sibirskii gosudarstvennyi tekhnologicheskii universitet, 2000), 87; Termen, Sredi buriat, 120; I. A. Koriakov and L. Kh. Koriakova, Ocherki istorii potrebitel’skoi kooperatsii Zabaikal’ia, 2 vols. (Chita: Chitinskii oblastnoi sobrание, 1992), 1:75; P. V. Pleshakov, ed., Ocherki istorii potrebitel’skoi kooperatsii Buriati (Ulan-Ude: Burjatskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1974), 17–18. The brief journalistic account Nataev, “Pervyi buriatskii parlamentarii,” says the interest rate charged by the credit cooperative was as low as 5 percent, but the more heavily researched Pleshakov, Ocherki istorii, 18, quotes an interest rate of 10 to 12 percent, a figure confirmed by the recent investigation of the history of the Russian cooperative movement K. I. Vakhitov, Kooperatory Rossii: Istorii kooperatsii v litsakh (Moscow: Izdatel’skii sobranie, 2016), 83.

101. Pleshakov, Ocherki istorii, 18–19; Termen, Sredi buriat, 120; Tumunov et al., 108—Gordost’ drevenoi Agi, 282; Tumunov, Ocherki iz istorii, 93; Lomakina and Starin, Kooperatsiia v Zabaikal’e, 77 (renders “Unenker” as “Uniker,” but this is clearly a typographical error); Koriakov and Koriakova, Ocherki istorii, 1:74–75. In 1911, Rinchino established a consumers’ cooperative at Karalik in his native
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Barguzin region of Transbaikalia; perhaps he was influenced by Ochirov’s example? Lomakina and Starin, *Kooperatsiia v Zabaikal’e*, 77.


105. A-v, “Slavnyi buriat”.


108. Ibid., 186–187.

109. S.-D. Shagdaron and B.-D. Ochirov, “Igry i uveseleniia aginskikh buriat,” *Zapiski Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obschestva po Otdele-

110. “Nauchnaia deiatel’nost,” *Otchet Chitinskogo otdeleniia Priamurskogo otde-

Eastern Buryats: as Shirab-Nimbu Dashidondokov, President of the Aga Branch of the Transbaikal Division of the Russian Geographic Society, has written, the Aga Expedition initiated by Ochirov gathered “an enormous, rich material describing the Aga steppe’s nature and its population’s way of life.” Sh.-N. Dashidondokov, “Raritetnyi istochnik po istorii Agi,” Tolon [Light] (15 June 2008), 6 (pt. 2).


113. Tumunov, Ocherki iz istorii, 93–94. Tumunov unfortunately does not elaborate on the question of exactly whom the murderers were alleged to have been, but Ts. Zh. Zhamsarano (the Aga local historian, not the folklorist) adds more detail to the tale, citing rumors that point the blame at Uta-Rikchin Shagdarov, a lama from the Aga Datsan who failed to provide medical care when the wounded Ochirov was found, and B. Soktoev, a starodumets and volost’ judge who refused to carry out an inquest into the cause of death: “There was no investigation, and the matter was hushed up.” Ts. Zh. Zhamsarano, “B. D. Ochirov,” 82.


115. Cited in Zhigmitov, “Perepiska G. Ts. Tsybikova,” 64. Zhigmitov does not provide the date of Ochirov’s letter to Tsybikov, but it clearly was written between the founding of the consumers’ cooperative in 1910 and Ochirov’s demise in 1913: before asking for the pistol, Ochirov discussed purchasing agricultural equipment, sewing machines, and purebred breeding stock for the cooperative.


117. Tumunov et al., 108—Gordost’ dreveni Agi, 284.


119. In any event, as we see from Ochirov’s stance at the 1905 Chita Congress, he did not idealize the old steppe duma system (although he personally had raised his social status through it): as a man of non-elite birth, he was quite sensitive to its shortcomings, such as its favoring of the hereditary native aristocracy.


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