## THE ORAL HISTORY OF TWENTIETH CENTURY MONGOLIA



### Osor

# **Basic information** Interviewee ID: 990296

Name: Osor Parent's name: Dondov Ovog: Hongor Sex: m Year of Birth: 1955 Ethnicity: Halh

### **Additional Information**

Education: elementary Notes on education: Work: herder, race-horse trainer Belief: none

Born in: Saihan sum, Bulgan aimag

Lives in: Saihan sum (or part of UB), Bulgan aimag Mother's profession: herder

Father's profession: herder

### Themes for this interview are:

(Please click on a theme to see more interviews on that topic) herding / livestock; collectivization; cultural campaigns; new technologies; belief;

Alternative keywords suggested by readers for this interview are: (Please click on a keyword to see more interviews, if any, on that topic)

horse races; wedding; gender equality;

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### **Translation:**

Khishigsüren - All right, Osor ah and I are now beginning the interview. Let's sit outside to continue the interview! In the previous interview, you generally gave rather brief answers to the questions. I was wondering whether this time you could give some examples. Were there any events that had a deep impact on your life? Which events of your life do you consider important? It could be both good or bad events.

Well, I generally think about what happened in this way. I am a great supporter of democracy.

Khishigsüren -

I am really happy that we have democracy now that we are sitting here together. The most important thing...

Khishiasüren

The fruits of democracy in your life really...

I regard them very highly.

Khishigsüren - Ah. Is there is anything in your life that you could call unique?

Osor

No, there is no such thing.

Ah. You train race horses, right?

Osor

Yes, I do.

As I understand it, after the 1990s race horses really have...how do you say...I guess in the socialist period they existed, too, but it is one of the things that really developed and spread later. Could you please talk about those aspects of Mongolian culture, history, tradition and economy that have do to with horses?

Well, before the advent of democracy, I didn't manage to train not even one horse alongside my work. I wasn't able to leave in order to watch really fast and fierce horses.

Khishigsüren -

Ah.

I had just a few horses. In 1990, the year when democracy was introduced, I bought a stallion from Bürentsogt, Bayan-Uul in Sühbaatar Province. This how I started with the races..

Khishigsüren -

Ah. What year was that?

Osor -1990.

Khishigsüren -



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I bought a piebald stallion in 1990 and I still train him for races. He wasn't bad, he was reasonably fast. I train horses with one of my elder brothers. He is Dornod's son-in-law, and thanks to him I was able to make that stallion run in the race. I am also having fun with his offspring.

Ah. Tell us about the race horses. Could you talk about why the horse is so important in Mongolian culture for those who one day will read this interview? How do you recognize a fast horse? How do you train a horse? How do you categorize race horses? Could you please talk about this in some detail?

I can't really talk about it in a very detailed way...

### Khishigsüren

Just the way you generally understand it...

Osor -Shall I talk?

### Khishiasüren -

For instance, why are horses important for you? You have a bigger passion for them than others.

Well, in general there is no reason for Mongolians to dislike horses. There is no Mongolian who does not like horses.

# Khishigsüren -That's right.

Maybe it's because I tended horses for my entire life? Horses are animals which generally bring good fortune.

### Khishigsüren -

It's thanks to horses that we meet people and go everywhere.

## Khishigsüren -

Ah.

Well, I think that it is especially with regards to meeting people and to traveling that horses are so significant.

### Khishigsüren -

Ah.

However, I am interested in them not because of their importance. I train race horses because I have always liked them, ever since I was a small child.

### Khishigsüren -

I thought about training them and then I started doing it.

Khishigsüren -Ah. Did you ride race horses in your childhood?

## Osor

No, I didn't

## Khishigsüren -

You didn't?

I was the youngest in the family. I was spoiled. And actually I wasn't allowed to ride race horses. At the time of the cooperatives there weren't as many people training race horses as today. People were submerged with work for the cooperative and there were very few race horses.

## Khishigsüren -

Ah.

## Osor -

Only a few people trained race horses, unlike today when almost everybody is doing it.

## Khishiasüren

Ah. How was the naadam celebrated when you were a child? Was the sum naadam the most wonderful of all?

It was the main thing to watch. At that time, people had very little spare time. And only very few horses used to race during the naadam.

## Khishigsüren

Ah.

## Osor -

It was sometime in the 1960s. I trained a two year old and participated in the race. It was the only one in the entire sum.

## Khishigsüren

How interesting!

## Osor -

It was the only colt. People generally didn't own any young horses that they could have trained for the race. And they didn't have enough spare time to do it. And talking about colts, there was hardly anybody who owned a mare. That year our State Elephant Janchiv, also known as Red-Shoed-Janchiv, was sentenced to two years in prison for hiding two oxen.

## Khishigsüren -

Ah.

He was sent to prison. He had a son and they had a race horse. The son had trained the horse and it won the race during the sum naadam. He won a dapple-grey two-year old as a prize. And then the father went to prison.

## Khishigsüren -

## Osor -

There was a guy named Chöönd. He was a wrestler. His son Erdenbileg was my age. He won the sum race and won a chestnut two-year old. The day before he had won the race of his age group. In the race, there had been only him riding my bay and the dapple-grey.

## Khishigsüren -

## Osor -

There were only two horses in the race, isn't that interesting? Ah. That's how it was during your childhood, but later the number of people who trained two-year olds and raced increased, right? Yes, beginning from the 1990s. Khishiqsüren How was it in the 1980s?

Well, the number had already increased.

Khishiqsüren -

Ah.

Osor -

In the 1960s, it was more or less like that.

Ah. When I was a child, two-year olds were the most numerous at the horse races. Here it was very different, right?

It was very different at that time. In the 1960s, there was only one two-year-old trained for races in the whole sum. That's really interesting.

Khishigsüren

Ah. Have you heard any interesting stories about the guy who was sent to prison for hiding two oxen?

Well, there is nothing more to it. He had hidden two oxen from the state registers.

Khishigsüren -Ah. He didn't have them counted

He didn't hide them from the cooperative, but from the statistics.

Khishigsüren -

Ah.

Osor -

However, not to have them counted meant to hide them from cooperative.

Khishigsüren -

Osor -

Maybe those oxen exceeded the number of animals that he was supposed to have at that time. Maybe he was supposed to have twelves cows, but he had fourteen. Two oxen..

Khishigsüren -

He wanted to keep them.

Osor -

Yes, because he had many children.

Khishigsüren -

Ah.

Osor -

He hid them, but somebody denounced him. He was arrested and sentenced to several years because of those two oxen. Poor Red-Shoed-Janchiv went to prison. His children are known to people here.

Ah. Has anybody in your family been repressed? The repression was a terrible period, did you parents talk about it...?

That's what people say, but I don't know much about it. When I was little my father told me that it is hard to see a child dying in front of you.

Khishigsüren -

Osor - But that the one who is going to be killed is the most pitiful. 'I had an older brother who became a monk when I was little. I went with him to the sum centre, where he took off his robe and left. I was so sorry for him. He was led away and I thought he would come back. He was dying in front of my eyes', that's what I heard my father say.

Khishiqsüren -

Then they confiscated his belongings.

Khishigsüren -

Then I am not sure whether he dispensed medicines or whether his ger was close to ours. We have a small colorful table with four legs on which he used to wrap the medicines.

Khishiqsüren -Ah.

Osor They wanted to confiscate his belongings, and asked whether it belonged to a gavj. One man from our area recognized the table as a table belonging to a lama, so they confiscated it and carried it away. That's what my mother used to tell. It was that strict then.

Khishigsüren -

This is what I heard. If you ask Namhai ah, he might know, I only know what my father used to tell.

Khishiqsüren

The so-called cultural campaigns were terrible everywhere in Mongolia...

They were dangerous..

Khishiqsüren -

What do you know about them? It was really a grand thing at that time. For those, who were submerged with work having to tend a large number of livestock, the cultural campaigns and cleaning their homes were incredibly difficult. Ah Osor -Oh, it really was grand. I witnessed some of it.

Would you please talk about what you have seen? What was required?

Osor - At least, well, today we all use these items in the countryside. Hygiene products, a sink to wash the hands and the face, an iron bucket, things like that.

Khishigsüren -

Ah.

Osor -

We had to have them. A toothbrush and toothpaste, bed sheets and a few changes, maybe two. It was tough. People fainted just hearing the word 'cultural campaigns'. I have forgotten a lot by now.

Khishigsüren -

Osor -

There was a cultural campaign at my time.

Khishigsüren -

Osor -

It was really hard work.

Khishigsüren -Ah. Everybody talks about the bed sheets.

Osor -

There's a movie, you know.

Khishigsüren -

Ah

Osor -

What was the name of that movie again? 'People, the darga have come..'

Khishigsüren -

'Rare People'?

Osor -

Probably that's the one. The staff at the hospital had covered a table with white cloth, but they said it was wrong and took it away. I think it is a really great movie. It really was like that. When I watched it I remembered how during the cultural campaigns some were doing the inspections and the others were cheating.

Khishiasüren

laughs

It makes me laugh when I watch it. I think it's a great movie. I think it was really like that.

Khishigsüren -

What happened to the families who didn't meet the requirements?

Osor -

They were fined, you know.

Khishigsüren -Did they have to pay money?

Yes. But I think there were various measures.

Khishigsüren - Ah. How has religious life in Mongolia changed in the course of your life?

Osor -

It changed a lot.

Khishigsüren -

Ah.

Osor -It has changed a lot. People are becoming religious, at our time they had basically forgotten about it.

That's right, people are now religious.

Osor -

I grew up without religion, so I am rather removed from it. Maybe I can't really believe, you know?

Khishiqsüren -

Ah. You are not able to worship, right?

Osor -Yes, I can't. I always wonder whether there might not be something wrong with it.

Khishiasüren -

But besides that I don't think that religion is wrong in general.

Khishigsüren -

But since I didn't learn about it from when I was a child, I am not very familiar with it.

Ah. I gather that you understood everything related to democracy very quickly and that you actively participated in it. I would thus like to ask you how Mongolian women's position has changed in the course of your life. Gender issues are very

important, you know. People are talking about the relation between men and women, about women's social position and about people's attitudes to men and to women. What relationship did your parents have? How was the situation of women when you were a child? How is it today? And how was it before?
Osor - I think that today women really have equal rights.
Khishigsüren - Ah.
Osor - Well, in the olden days women did everything the men said.
Khishigsüren - Ah.
Osor - That was the custom in those days.
Khishigsüren - Ah.
Osor - Is that right? That's what I think.
Khishigsüren - Ah.
Osor - I don't know very well, but I think that women have a high degree of equality.
Khishigsüren - Is it enough?
Osor - I think it is.
Khishigsüren - Ah. Looking at you parents' relationship, would you say that your father had more rights and your mother was subordinate?
Osor - Generally when trade agents came to our home my mother would never buy much, but only food and items of everyday use. She would say, for example, that she had to see what her husband thought.
Khishigsüren - Ah.
Osor - Today if a trader comes with his van, my wife buys stuff worth a horse or a cow.
Khishigsüren - laughs
Osor - It's different, right?
Khishigsüren - She does as she likes?
Osor - She says that she has money on her own and that she buys stuff with her own money. It has become like that.
Khishigsüren - Ah.
Osor - So I think today we have equal rights. I don't say a word to her. Generally, they buy what they want.
Khishigsüren - Ah.
Osor - There's no need to ask.
Khishigsüren - How were relations between young men and women at your time? Marrying someone
Osor - It was very unsophisticated then.
Khishigsüren - Ah.
Osor - When we got married.
Khishigsüren - What does that mean?
Osor - Today people say 'Our children are getting married' and offer a hadag. Right? And then they start planning the wedding and so on.
Khishigsüren - Ah.
Osor - I am almost the last one who married in a really simple way.
Khishigsüren - Ah.
Osor - I went to her place with a friend and a spare horse in the middle of the night and kidnapped her.
Khishigsüren - laughs
Osor - The next morning my eldest brother-in-law came and he left with a bottle of arhi and a hadag.
Khishigsüren - laughs

I think I was the last one to do such an unsophisticated job. Khishigsüren -Did the girl know about it? Osor -Ah? Khishigsüren -Had she agreed? Ves, she had agreed. When I kidnapped her at night, we rode back both sitting on one horse. Today they come with two, three jeeps. Then they talk 'It has become clear that our daughter is going to get married with this person', and the parents and relatives on both sides negotiate. At my time, it was much more unsophisticated. But I guess I was the last one to marry in that way, in 1978. Khishiasüren -Ah. Was it popular to get married in the way you did? Osor -I think it was. Khishigsüren -Osor -Khishiqsüren -Who knows? That's what I did. That's what I decided to do. Why I did it. Khishigsüren laughs

Why did you not formally tell her parents and take her in a different way? Why did you decide to do it that way?

Osor

At that time we didn't talk openly with each other and the parents didn't either.

Khishigsüren -

Ah.

Osor - Was it a strange modesty? Were we hiding things from each other? Right?

Khishigsüren -

Αh

Osor -

Maybe I had kept it secret? But I did say that I was getting a spouse.

Khishiqsüren -

Osor

Now it has become very open. I think it's very right to be open.

Khishiasüren -

Many young people today drink and I have three daughters. Two of them are married, I think with decent guys. There is still one daughter. I wish to give her to somebody who doesn't drink. Everything else doesn't really matter. Now that things have become very open, it seems easier to say 'My daughter, this guy won't be a good husband for you.'

Khishigsüren -

I think that it is very nice.

Khishigsüren -

Ah.

At that time, daughters talked with their mothers, but not with their fathers. Fathers didn't communicate with their daughters

Khishiqsüren -

I think that it was somehow like that.

Khishiasüren -

Ah. When you brought your wife home, had you prepared everything for her arrival? You brought her home, right?

Well, it didn't matter.

Khishigsüren

The parents knew, right? I mean your parents.

There was my father. And there was my nother.

Khishigsüren -

Ah.

Osor -

I set up our home in an old four-walled ger.

Khishigsüren -

Αh

Today young people's gers, well, what can I say. They are given a TV set and carpets and a car.

Khishigsüren -

Osor -

We, instead, covered our floor mat with drill and edged it with red cloth. So we had a new drill floor mat and drill wall Khishiqsüren -But it was a beautiful ger. Today people have carpets everywhere, on the floor and on the walls. Was it in the 1970s? No, in the 1980s I bought a 2x3 or 4x2 yellow carpet. We were herding horses and we treated that carpet with the greatest care. Every five days we would clean it from the dust and wrap it back up. Today people put such old torn carpets right at Khishigsüren -Ah. Osor -They wipe their feet on it. At that time we had a carpet but we never spread it out. Khishiasüren -We bought it with our wages and protected and treated it with the greatest care, you know. Khishigsüren -That's how we lived. I think life was really tough. Khishigsüren -Ah. What about other consumer goods? Goods were scarce. I had never worn anything made of üiten huar, until 1990 when I wore it for the first time. Khishigsüren -Ah. Üiten huar, well. When you looked at old people's deels, you wouldn't see any üiten huar. Ah. Osor -Consumer goods were very scarce, you know Ah. Which goods were the scarcest in the countryside? How did people get them? At that time even thermos flasks were rare, you know. Khishigsüren It was impossible to find them, right? Osor Thermos flasks were talked about even on Chinese or Inner Mongolian programs. Our thermos flasks is the Mongolian, what was it again? There was a joke. The best herders and milkmaids were rewarded with thermos flasks. At that time we thought it was a wonderful reward. Khishigsüren -That's how it was. Even thermos flasks were hard to find, what shall I say. Today thermos flasks are everywhere. Khishiqsüren -When did people begin to use thermos flasks? Do you know? Osor -I don't know. Khishigsüren -Ah. The radio, I saw it first in the 1960s, when I went to visit a family with my father. Was it a 'Motherland-53'? It was a big yellow radio. Khishiqsüren -It had three big batteries. Two square ones like dice and one long battery. It almost looked like a camel. I am exaggerating. Khishigsüren -Αh Osor I saw the radio at another family's place and I wanted to have one, too. I was ten then. Khishiqsüren -We were really simple at that time, weren't we? Khishiasüren -Yes, you didn't even have a radio. Beginning from the 1970s, herders were obliged to buy radios, black square ones whose cost was deducted from their wages. This is how we got radios. Ah. If they hadn't been forced, people wouldn't have bought them? Osor -

Khishigsüren -It was very expensive, right? Osor -

Yes. Was it 100 something? No, more than 300 tögrögs.

Khishigsüren

For a herder it was...

Osor -

Well, what to say, it was the wage of one month, you know.

Khishiqsüren -

Ah.

Osor -

It was the wage for a month of hard work with 500 horses.

Khishigsüren -

Ah. Was your salary sufficient? Were you able to save some money?

No, I couldn't. Later I was able to put about 10 000 tögrög in the bank. Ten thousand was a lot of money....

Khishiasüren

That's a lot of money.

At that time it seemed like a lot of money. In the end, however, I wasted those ten thousand tögrögs...

Ah. Those who had savings, how did they deposit them into a bank?

Osor -

At that time?

Khishigsüren -Ah.

Osor

From the wages. There was the so-called 'output'. Every month people gave a small amount of their wages to the cooperative, that is disciplined people did. To say the truth I never did, I just squandered my money.

Khishiasüren

Well, you didn't squander it, but spent it to satisfy your needs.

We didn't drink like young people today. We were people who didn't drink. But we squandered our money, too, on gambling.

When did you go to the cinema or the theater for the first time? Do you remember?

I think I watched movies at the time when I started school. I remember watching something like that. For children it was 50 möngö.

Khishigsüren -

Ah.

The movie was screened on a big white cloth. That's when I first began to watch movies. When we were in school, the only game we played was called matak.

Khishiasüren -

How many years did you go to school?

I went to school until fifth grade.

Khishigsüren -

One winter we went sledding and we ran over a bone. The sled hurled it up and it hit my teeth. My front teeth were broken and I went to the city to get treatment. The dentist pulled out the roots and made a dental bridge, it took a month to heal.

Khishigsüren -Ah.

Osor -

Thanks to that incident I felt the desire to leave school.

Khishigsüren -

laughs

I went back to school after two months, but I had always been bad and I was lagging behind, so I wanted to leave. Fortunately they let me go. I left school in the 1960s and I was so happy.

Khishiasüren

Did you ever have regrets?

Osor -

No, never.

Khishigsüren -

Did your elder brothers and sisters not insist that you go to school?

Maybe they told me to go school, but I never wanted to get an education. The only thing I thought about were horses. I had only horses in my mind.

Khishigsüren -

Maybe it was destiny. I really loved horses. And I have worked with them for my whole life.

Khishiqsüren

Now you are training race horses for the naadam. How fast are your horses?

Well, just now on the 20th and the 21st we had the competition of the Western Regions.

Khishigsüren -

Ah.

About eighty stallions ran in the race. My red and black stallion came 11th.

Khishigsüren -

On the 14th of August, there will be champion Tüvshinbayar's naadam.

Khishigsüren -

Osor

I'm thinking of going there with a two-year old.

Ah. What does it mean to have such a passion for horses? Could you imagine not to participate in horse races? That's really interesting for the readers. What would you tell them? Why did you start horse racing?

I have always been thinking about doing it. I always wanted to, it has been my dream from when I was little.

Khishigsüren -

From 1990 until today, I have never separated from them. I trained horses also before 1990. I started with that two-year old bay when I was 8, 9 or 10.

Ah. You mean the one that ran in a race with just one other horse?

Osor - Right. I have been racing since then.

Khishiqsüren -

Ah.

Horses are my hobby...

Khishigsüren -

I really love them.

Khishiasüren -

Ah. When your child was born, a lama gave you an amulet, right?

Osor -

Right.

Khishigsüren -That lama has witnessed the socialist regime, right?

Yes, he has. He was a tractor driver.

What else was he doing besides working as a tractor driver?

Osor -

I don't know

Where did a tractor driver get such an ancient amulet from?

I suppose his father had been a lama. Who knows? When I visited him after I had lost my eldest son, he said 'You will have a son and I will give happiness to the two of you.'

Khishigsüren -

Ah.

My son was born in 2000. He had told me to come back to see him after my son's birth. The next day I ran over to him and I got a name for my son from there. There was a the hamba lama of Karakorum, a man called Pülee.

Khishiqsüren -

He is his eldest brother-in-law. He had come to visit and gave my son the name Otgonbileg. What a suitable name! There are suitable and unsuitable names, you know.

Khishigsüren -Δh

Osor -That's what I think.

Khishigsüren

Ah. Did that tractor driver have visions when he was a child?

Osor - I don't know. Maybe he had. A incarnated lama from Hairhan discovered him. He is from Hairhan, you know. It was an incarnated lama who revealed that he was an incarnated lama, too.

Khishigsüren -

When?

Osor -

I think in the 1990s. He had been not only a tractor driver, but also a firefighter. And then it was revealed that he was an incarnated lama.

Khishigsüren -

Where did he go thereafter?

I heard he went to India. Sometimes he is around at the naadams. They say he is an incarnated lama, you know.

Khishiqsüren -

What is his name?

Osor -I don't know. Was is Luvsanjambaapüldenjigmed? He had many names.

Khishigsüren -

Is that the name he had when he was a tractor driver?

No, that's his name as a saint.

Khishigsüren -And what was his name when he was a tractor driver?

Before he was called Osor lam.

Khishigsüren -Ah.

Osor -

Then he adopted the name of the incarnation. But I don't know his original name.

 $\begin{tabular}{ll} \it{Khishigs\"{u}ren} - \\ \it{All right}, let's finish our interview. Thank you very much, it was very interesting. \\ \end{tabular}$ 

Osor - Thank you for coming and interviewing me.

Khishigsüren -

You're welcome.

Osor - Congratulations and good luck for your work.

Khishigsüren -Thank you.

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