This article examines the background and causes of political repressions in Tuva and tries to answer the question, whether it was possible to avoid political repressions. The precondition for the repressions appeared in 1921, in the early days of Tuvan People's Republic (TPR), which received the active support of Soviet Russia. In 1925 students from Tuva were sent to Moscow to study in Communist University of the Toilers of the East (CUTE, also KUTV). Salchak Toka, future leader of Tuva, was one of those students. In 1929 he returned to Tuva and in 1932 he became a general secretary of the Central Committee of the Tuvan People's Revolutionary Party (TPRP). His policy was directed against the former aristocracy and clergy. As a result one of the founders of the TPR Mongush Buyan-Badyrgy was executed. Moreover, Toka tried to make collectivization in Tuva but failed it. His attempts to copy the Soviet experience and his quickly raising in political arena with his fellows from CUTE led to the emergence of the opposition in TPRP. Opposition members wanted to relieve Toka from general secretary post. In 1936 Toka gave full freedom of action to the Interior Ministry to combat against “public enemies” (“the enemies of the people”). In 1938 all opposition members were arrested and executed. But the political repression against the TPR population started just after victory over opposition. Over 8% from 90,000 TPR citizens became victims of repression. Consequently Salchak Toka’s actions led to the emergence of the cult of personality in Tuva. We cannot answer “No” to question “Was it possible to avoid political repressions in Tuva?” because repressions against political opposition were inevitable. But if we ask question “Was it possible to avoid massive repressions in Tuva?” answer “No” becomes possible, because Toka could finish repressions after defeating his political enemies.

Keywords: Tuva People’s Republic, opposition, counterrevolution, repressions, Tuva People’s Revolutionary Party, cult of personality, rehabilitation.

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Research area: national history.
expressed loyalty, being rather an ally to the
USSR than its “marionette”. This period of Tuvan
history has many “blind spots”, among which a
special place is occupied by political repression.
At the moment, one of the most urgent scientific
and social problems of the modern history of
Tuva is the study of the mass repression policy in
the 1930-40s, as these repressions affected many
residents of the republic, although the number of
victims of political persecution is unknown so
far. When we looked into archival documents, it
turned out that the number of politically repressed
is 1,034 people (Dostak-oool, 2003: 5). According
to the Prosecutor’s Office of the Republic of
Tuva, there are data for 1,286 people who were
arrested and punished for their political views
and convictions. If we take into account numerous
applications of citizens to learn more about their
repressed relatives who were not included in this
list, the number of victims of political repressions
will become much larger. In the opinion of M.B.
Dostak-oool, the Memorial Society a member,
the population of the TPR in that period did
not exceed 90 thousand people, and about 8 % of
the Tuva total population was subjected to mass
political repression (Dostak-oool, 2003: 6).

However, to this day political repressions
in Tuva have not become the subject of a special
scientific study yet. This is due to the fact that
most archival materials concerning repression
have not yet been published and remain closed
for use. In addition, for many people affected by
repression and their descendants this problem is
still too “acute” and painful, which also hinders
the objective analysis of these events. These or
other aspects of this problem were reflected in a
number of newspaper publications, in collections
of papers, or were mentioned in passing as being
a part of scientific research on another subjects
of the Tuva People’s Republic period. These
are M.B. Kenin-Lopsan’s novel-essay “Buyan-
Badyrgy” (2000), dedicated to the life and
activities of the last ruler of Tuva, shot during
the repression, M.B. Dostak-oool’s book “The cult
of personality and political repression in Tuva”
(2003) and “Salchak Toka” (2016), published by
the team of authors – N. Mollerov, A. Kanzai,
G. Shirshin. Nevertheless, this topic is far from
exhausted. Recently, the terrible mysteries of
the time have come up, thereby increasing the
importance of this problem.

The purpose of this article is to study the
history of the political development of TPR, the
causes and conditions of mass repressions in the
1930s and 1940s, and try to answer the question,
whether it was possible to avoid repression.

Political repressions in Tuva are
primarily connected with the influence of the
Soviet Union on its political and ideological
development. Therefore, despite the decade of
struggle against the feudal system legacy and
the persecution of former representatives of the
nobility and the clergy, the repressive policy in
TPR was particularly strong in the years of the
Great Terror, specifically in 1936-1938, when
inner-party purges of “right” with opposing views
and pro-Soviet “left”. The trial of 1938, known
as the “case of nine”, marked the beginning of
a large-scale repressive policy throughout the
territory of TPR, involving all classes of the
population. Repressions stroke a blow not only
at the representatives of the former nobility,
clergy, and oppositionists, but also at ordinary
arats. Denunciations or intimidation of innocent
people led to their persecution, stigmatization as
“enemies of the people”, deprivation of liberty;
some were sent to execution, being accused of
“espionage” and counter-revolutionary activities.

One of the first works on the political and
legal underpinnings of repressive politics is the
cycle of articles by the leading researcher of the
Tuvan recent history Iu.L. Aranchyn “Long way
to the truth (on the history of the Tuva trial in
1938)”. The articles were published in Russian
Zoia Iu. Dorzhu, Ottuk Iu. Irgit. Political Repressions in the Tuva People’s Republic: Was It Possible to Avoid Them?

in the newspaper “Tuvinskaia Pravda” in 1990 (Aranchyn, 1990), then in 1991 they were translated into Tuvan for the newspaper Shyn (Aranchyn, 1991: 2). The author of the articles considered the factors and causes of the 1938 repression on a broad historical background, beginning with the first years of the TPR creation and ending with the inner-party struggle for power between two “left” and “right” factions.

In many respects the historiography of TPR political repressions is based on the Aranchyn’s research. Despite the articles’ relative politicization, since they were written back in the Soviet years and remained loyal to socialist ideology, they examined in detail the influence of the personality cult of S. Toka on the party and TPR state administration system, the fight against political opposition and the consequences of mass repression in Tuva. As in the case of Aranchyn’s work, we reckon it necessary to consider the history of TPR political repression in the context of its entire history.

The Uryanghai Territory, as Tuva was called until 1921, had been under the yoke of major powers for seven centuries, until the second half of the 18th century. It was a part of the Mongolian state, and in the period from 1758 to 1912, it was a part of the Qing Empire. After the Xinhai Revolution and the fall of the Manchu dynasty, Tuva freed itself from Chinese oppression. Then it had to choose either to become a part of independent Mongolia, or to seek the support of the Russian Empire, taking into consideration that Tuvan arats had already developed friendly relations with the population at the Russian border. In 1914, Emperor Nicholas II gave the go-ahead to the letter of Mongush Buyan-Badyrgy and the Russian philanthropist I.G. Saf’ianov the settlement of Sug-Bazhy (now Kochetovo) saw all-Tuva constituent Khural. It was attended by 62 representatives from 7 kozhuuns of the Uryanghai Territory and a Soviet delegation of 17 people, which included I.G. Saf’ianov and S.K. Kochetov, who commanded a detachment of red partisans during the Civil War. The result of the Khural was the creation of a sovereign state – the Tuva People’s Republic and the adoption of Constitution drawn up under the leadership of Buyan-Badyrgy. At the same time, the Khural participants recognized the important role of Soviet Russia in the creation of an independent state.2

Soviet Russia, in turn, sought to strengthen its influence in the young republic, so one of the first tasks was the creation of a revolutionary party in Tuva. As early as 1921, the commissioner of the Comintern in Tuva B.Z. Shumiatskii recommended Saf’ianov to help the TPR government in creating the party. The work on the party creation was led by Oiun Kursedi and the arats of the Oiunnar kozuun. The first congress of the Tuvan People’s Revolutionary Party (TPRP) was held from February 28 to March 1, 1922, attended by 40 delegates, mainly from western and central kozhuuns. At the second congress, which took place in the summer of 1923, the number of delegates was 568 people out of five kozhuuns, and in 1925 there were 7,000 delegates from all 6 kozhuuns. From the very beginning of its existence, the TPRP yearned to play a leading role in the country and was gathering the arats, gradually developing among them the idea of a struggle against the “exploiters”, against the former nobles and clergy, who constituted the first officials of the young state (Aranchyn, 1982: 21-24).

An important role in the young state formation was played by the Russian self-governing labor colony (RSLC), which actively engaged in TPR's
cultural and educational activities, facilitated
the opening of schools, the development of
science, medicine, art, etc. The most critical part
in the TPR political development was the July
1924 issue of the newspaper “Krasnyi Pakhar”,
which was positioned as a paper for workers and
peasants, a spokesman and an expresser of the
will of proletarian public opinion (Chadamba,
2014: 2).

In 1925, the first group of Tuvan students
was sent to Moscow to study at the Communist
University of the Toilers of the East named after
I.V. Stalin (CUTE), among whom was the TPR
future leader, one of the main organizers of the
mass political repressions S. Toka. The CUTE
was organized under the People’s Commissariat
for Nationalities with the purpose to train the
leading cadres of the national republics from the
representatives of the nationalities themselves
and to spread the communistic ideas to the East.
This university played a dramatic role in the
training of the Tuvan intelligentsia and the party
elite (Kharunov, 2014: 2).

After graduating from the CUTE in 1929,
S.K. Toka returned to Tuva and, thanks to the
support of the RSLC, immediately took an
important place on the political Olympus of
the young state. He began agitating the class
struggle against former representatives of the
nobility and the clergy, purging the party ranks
and state officials from the “exploiters”. As
early as in October 1929, 16 former party and
government leaders were arrested, among them
was Mongush Buyan-Badyrgy, the founder of the
Tuvan statehood, the Chairman of the first Tuva
Government. In the same year, all representatives
of the nobility and the clergy were deprived of
their suffrage. On March 22, 1932 at a meeting
of the TPRP Central Committee it was decided to
apply the highest penalty (death through execution
by a firing squad) to the “exploiters”. Suspects of
counter-revolutionary activities Buyan-Badyrgy,
Donduk, Shagdyr and Bondu were sentenced to
death penalty without trial and investigation, and
on March 23 the verdict was carried out. This
was the first round of political repressions in
Tuva, held under the slogan of dekulakization of
the nobility and the clergy, so they did not have a
mass character, as in subsequent years.

Mongush Buyan-Badyrgy and other
victims of the 1929 repressions – Mongush
Shagdyr, Boidu, Sanchai-Dorzhu, Narmandagy,
Shagdyr, Danzyryn, Sagdy, Baazan, Chamyian,
Dala-Surun, Samdan, Sonam, Kileiti, Sundui,
Dungulak, Nima-chap, Dembirel were
rehabilitated only 75 years after their death. The
decree on this “On the political rehabilitation
of statesmen of the Tuvan People’s Republic
and citizens subjected to political repression in
the Tuva People’s Republic in the 1920s-1930s”
was signed by the Republic Head in 2007.
It was decided to erect in the Republic’s capital
a monument to Buyan-Badyrgy, the founder of the
Tuvan statehood and one of the main
initiators of the Uryanghai Territory’s accession
under the auspices of Russia. The monument
was opened in 2014, celebrating the centenary
since the unification of Russia and Tuva, thereby
commemorating the memory of this amazing
man (Philatenko, 2014: 3).

One of the main reasons for the class
struggle against the “right” was not only the
Tuva Sovietization, but also the aggravation
of relations between the arats and the more
prosperous classes of the population in the
course of the unsuccessful collectivization
concerning the TPR economy and several
uprisings, among which there was Khemchik
one in 1924, organized by the pro-Mongolian
nobility. In 1930s and 1932 two more uprisings
against collectivization and dekulakization took
place in Dzun-Khemchik and Kungurtug, which
the TPRP authorities actively used in their
struggle against the “right”.

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In the summer of 1932, the General Secretary of the TPRP Central Committee Irgit Shagdyrzhap got seriously ill, and the second secretary, S.K. Toka soon assumed his post. This event, according to M.B. Dostak-oool, became the starting point of the undivided dictatorship of Salchak Toka in Tuva, which lasted until his death in 1973 (Dostak-oool, 2003: 118). The same opinion is shared by journalists M.S. Bayir-oool and A.A. Dugerzhaa in their articles on Tuva repressions.

Having become the General Secretary of the TPRP Central Committee, Toka began to gather around him like-minded people, primarily the CUTE graduates, who fully supported the development of the young state by the Soviet model. Among them were Khertek Anchimaa, Sedip-oool Tanov, Oiun Polat, Tatiana Kamova, Khovalyg Bazyr-Sat and others. Rapid progress to the tops by S.K. Toka and his associates, who were called “kutvans” (from CUTE – KUTV in Russian) and who followed the Soviet policy of collectivization blindly and unsuccessfully, aroused dissatisfaction among other TPRP members. The latter supported the independent TPR development, taking into account the mentality, culture and lifestyle of the Tuvinians. So by 1936 the opposition was formed, headed by prominent politicians Sat Churmit-Dazhy, Adyg-Tiuliush Khemchik-oool and Kara-Sal Pirinlei. They wanted to lower Toka from the post of TPRP General Secretary to the Minister of Culture and appoint General Secretary either Oiun Danchai, Chairman of the State Bank, or Sat Lopsan, the Minister of Trade and Industry of the TPR.

In response to the plot against him, Toka appointed his closest follower Oiun Polat as the Minister of Internal Affairs of the TPR (1936), instructing him to control the oppositionists and, at the right time, get rid of them. According to the memoirs of Oiun Polat himself, Toka significantly expanded the functions and powers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, thereby launching a powerful repressive machine that later struck the entire population of Tuva (Polat 1991: 3). Polat communicated effectively with M.P. Frinovskii, the First Deputy Minister of the Ministry of the Internal Affairs of the USSR, in order to learn the experience of fighting counter-revolution in Soviet Russia and create a system of identifying “enemies of the people” in Tuva.

The first to be arrested was the TPR prosecutor Kara-Sal Pirinlei in December 1937; the head of the “counter-revolutionary Trotskyist espionage organization” was arrested in February 1938. Chairman of the TPR State Bank Oiun Danchay was one of those whom the opposition planned to elect the TPRP General Secretary instead of Toka. Until the end of August 1938, other “counter-revolutionaries” were also arrested: excluded from TPRP Kuzhuget Seren, the Minister of Trade and Industry Sat Lopsan, the Director of State Printing House Khovalyg Totkan, the TPR Prosecutor’s Deputy Oiun Sengijik, the Secretary of the Small Khural Presidium Kuular Sungar-oool. On 30 August, there were arrested the rest of the opposition organizers – the TPR Minister of Foreign Affairs Sat Churmit-Dazhy and the Chairman of the Small Khural Presidium Adyg-Tiuliush Khemchik-oool.

At the Third Plenary Meeting of the TPR Central Committee on August 30-31, 1938, Salchak Toka made a special report, in which S. Churmit-Dazhy, A.-T. Khemchik-oool, O. Danchai and their followers were accused of counter-revolutionary activities with the aim of overthrowing the arats’ power, restoring the feudal system and annexing Tuva to imperialist Japan. The resolution of the Plenum indicated the need to apply to the “enemies of the people” the highest penalty, i.e. the death penalty. Thus began the trial, which entered the Tuva history of as “the case of nine”. 

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The next step against this group of conspirators was calling the Extraordinary Open Court of the Small Khural Presidium on October 10-13, 1938. The work of the court was fully covered in the periodical press, journalists did not hesitate to demand the execution of the defendants, as a consequence the defendants’ families were publicly persecuted. The court passed a verdict – the death penalty to all nine people with the full confiscation of their property (Dostak-ool, 2003: 134). Shortly before the execution of the verdict, for Kuzhuget Seren and Khovalyg Totkan, who after lengthy interrogations and tortures confessed their guilt and gave false testimony against other convicts, the capital punishment was replaced by imprisonment for 8 years. The verdict over the other convicts was carried out on October 16, 1938. According to Mongush Baiyr-ool, the 1938 trial was nothing more than a farce; under the guise of fighting the “enemies of the people” it was an ordinary struggle for power and the establishment of the dictatorship and personality cult of Salchak Toka (Baiyr-ool, 2008: 3). This case was reviewed by the Prosecutor General’s Office of the RSFSR twenty-six years later, on September 3, 1964. The case revealed the grossest violations of the law: the use of torture during the investigation, the falsification of investigation materials. There was no objective evidence of guilt in counter-revolutionary activity and in separatism; all the allegations were based on verbal confirmation of the accused, who after lengthy torture agreed with the charges brought against them. The witness of the cruel torture was Kuzhuget Seren, a survivor of the “case of nine”, who was forced to give false testimony against the other defendants. The Judicial Collegium for Criminal Cases of the Supreme Court of the RSFSR, by its decision of December 3, 1964, annulled the verdict, thereby rehabilitating all the accused in the “case of nine” (Dostak-ool, 2003: 88-90).

As one can see, the rehabilitation of innocent convicts did not happen immediately. The repressive machine launched in 1936 and after a successful fight against the “enemies of the people” it received complete freedom of action and many residents of the republic became victims of repression in the next two decades, until 1953.

The question arises here whether political repression could have been avoided. It is difficult to give an unambiguous answer to this question. The TPR political development through the Soviet system, the struggle against the opposition and the ideological influence of the party, the pursued policy of the class struggle by all means would have led to persecution of representatives of the nobility, the clergy and the opposition. But if the question is asked differently, whether it was possible to avoid mass repression, then the probability of an unequivocal answer becomes larger. The “successful” struggle against political enemies, with pro-Soviet leaders led to the freedom of action for the repressive apparatus of the TPR Ministry of Internal Affairs and to violations of the law and human rights. The repressions spread to the broadest strata of the population and acquired a mass character. If at that time there had been at least some restrictions on violations of the rule of law and human rights, on the influence of the party apparatus as regards the organization and implementation of repression, the number of victims could have been significantly less.

Until now, there has been no authoritative general statistics on the number of convicts and the repressed political and other leaders in the 1930s and 1940s, on the repressed from the people’s revolutionary army and “unreliable” cadres from other spheres of Tuvan society. The rehabilitation policy of the repression victims requires thorough scientific analysis, taking into account that moral and physical suffering affected not only the repressed, but also their
relatives and friends. The “enemies of the people” name stigmatized innocent people and entire families. Many people died as a result of terror and false accusations. Painful lessons and experience of the national drama, an attempt to look into its nature – these problems strongly need the research and objective assessment based on an analysis of negative and positive facts.

1 FSS Archive. Case 199. Vol. 8, p. 35.
2 Scientific archive. Case. 37, p. 344.
4 Central archive. F. 1, list 1, case 2035, p. 1.
5 Central archive. F. 1, list 1, case 2035, p. 59.

Words explanation

Kozhuun – a Tuvan administrative and territorial unit.
Noion – a representative of the Tuvan aristocratic nobility.

List of abbreviations

Central archive – Center of archival documents of parties and public organizations of the Central State Archive of the Tyva Republic.

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politicheskie repressii
v Tuvinskoi Narodnoi Respublike:
mozhno li bylo их izbeshataya?

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