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Skill, social change, and survival in postsocialist Northern Mongolia

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Skill, Social Change and Survival in Postsocialist Northern Mongolia

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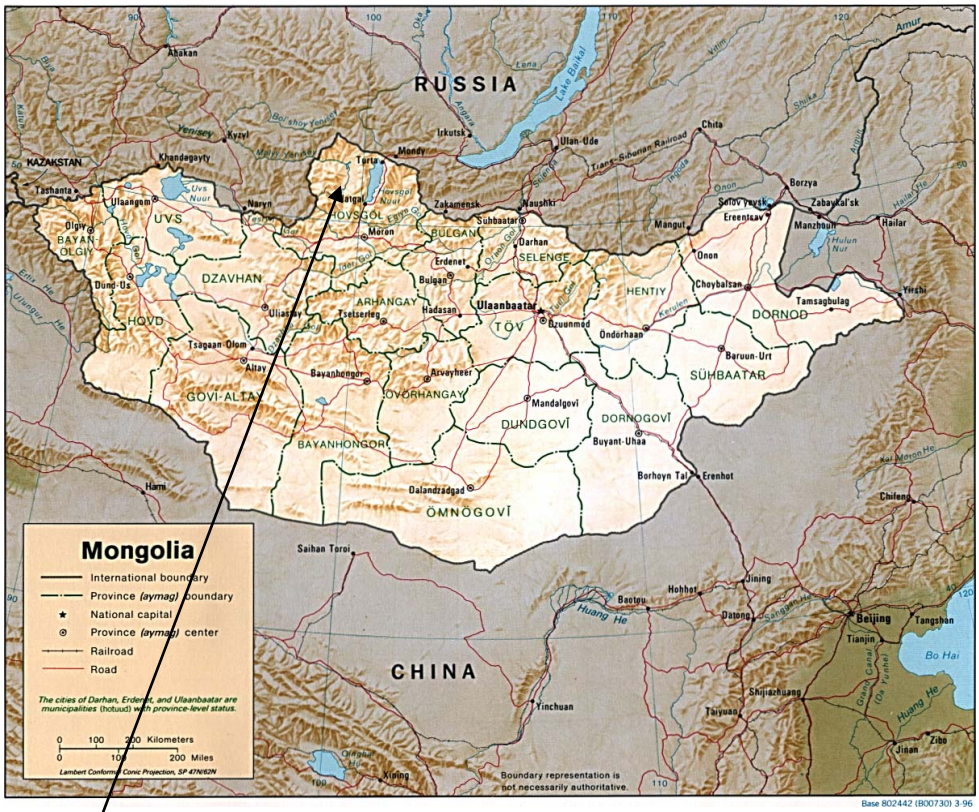
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Map 1: Inner Asia
(Source: Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit, University of Cambridge)



Map 2: Mongolia, incl. Shishged Depression
(Source: University of Texas at Austin, CIA)

Shishged Depression



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(Source: Google Earth)

Introduction:
Towards an Anthropology of Skill and Social Change

Introduction

It was a cool afternoon in the spring of 2012 and Bayarmaa was busy preparing the evening meal in the *ger*[1] (yurt) she shares with her husband, Batukhan, their sixteen-year-old son, Hurelbaatar, their twelve-year-old daughter, Oyun, and their three-month-old son, Sukh. The ger was situated, as it usually was at this time of year, on an area of grassland along the steppe-forest borderland at the foot of *Ulaan Uul* ('Red Mountain'), one thousand kilometres from Mongolia's national capital, Ulaanbaatar, and some two hundred kilometres from the provincial capital, Mörön[2]. To the east lay vast stretches of undulating steppe; to the north the beginnings of the Shishged Depression - one of the most remote parts of Northern Mongolia - and to the west the regional centre (*sum*) of Ulaan Uul itself[3]. As Bayarmaa prepared the meal Batukhan and Hurelbaatar travelled on horseback to herd the household's sheep and goats back towards the ger, a task they performed multiple times a day by rotating the family's one hundred and fifty herd animals - which includes horses, cattle, yak, sheep, and goats - between

[1] The *ger* or yurt is a round, transportable, and seasonally adaptable single room tent, used by mobile herders in Central and Inner Asia for centuries (Humphrey 1978; Sanders 2003).

[2] Mongolia is divided into twenty-one provinces or *aimags*, each of which is subdivided into a number of *sums* and *bags*. Each sum (district) is subdivided into a number of *bags*, which exist largely to organise herding households within each sum. Each aimag has an administrative centre and each sum has a district centre (*sumin tov*). Mörön is the administrative capital of Khövsgöl aimag, the largest province in Northern Mongolia. See Map 1.

[3] Ulaan Uul is a sum of Khövsgöl province. It includes a district centre ('Ulaan Uul') and a surrounding area of mixed forest-steppe. In 2012, the total population of Khövsgöl was 124,000, while the district centre (Ulaan Uul) had approximately 1000 residents (Khövsgöl Statistical Yearbook 2012; NSOM 2001; Coulombe & Altankhuyag 2012).

different areas of pasture. Upon their return Batukhan entered the dwelling and, helping himself to a cup of milk tea, announced that some of the sheep appeared to be showing signs of illness. Having lost a number of animals during the particularly harsh winter and, concerned for the well-being of the rest of the herd, he suggested the family seek to acquire some veterinary medicine and also delay their upcoming move to the summer encampment.
Since the collapse of state socialism in 1990 herders in Mongolia have been pushed into an uncertain subsistence economy, with the need to maintain large and healthy herds becoming a requisite for survival. While state subsidies and support were commonplace during the socialist period – providing veterinary care, insurance schemes, a pension system, and even motorised transport when moving between seasonal pastures – decollectivisation and the transition to a market economy left people without the one familiar state support. As a result, they have become increasingly vulnerable to the size and composition of animal herds, environmental fluctuations, the impact of climate change, and the availability and quality of forage, as well as proximity to roads, regional markets, and access to essential services and commodities (Humphrey & Sneath 1999; Fernandez-Gimenez 2001; Mearns 2004a; Brenner 2003; Fernandez-Gimenez 2012; Brunn & Narangoa 2004; Janes & Chuluundorj 2004; Addison & Brown 2014).

Upon hearing Batukhan's announcement Bayarmaa stood up in the kitchen area of the ger and poured some milk into a pail, then unhooked the *tsatsal* – or wooden stick used for sprinkling milk on ceremonial occasions - from its place on the side of the wall. Gesturing for Oyun to follow she exited the ger and made her way towards the sheep now grazing beside the encampment, instructing her daughter to help locate the *seter* - or sacred animal – within the herd. In Mongolia families select one animal from each species to be dedicated to *Tengger*[4] - the primary spirit-being of the sky thought to have the potential to administer both fortune and misfortune and retain balance in the world (Humphrey & Onon 1996). Typically conducted alongside a Buddhist lama, households attach a blue *khadag* - or ceremonial silk scarf – to the neck or horn of the designated animal, agreeing not to slaughter, exchange, or give that animal away for the remainder of its natural life (Fijn 2011:56). In return, the seter comes to represent all of the animals within the herd and is given offerings during ceremonies and rituals, serving as protector against negative energy and harmful forces such as illness and adverse weather conditions.

Scanning the herd Oyun spotted the seter with the khadag scarf tied around its neck, the blue silk standing out against the animals' muddy wool. Taking it her arms Bayarmaa instructed her daughter to dip the tsatsal into the pail and sprinkle some milk over its back as an offering, then uttered a short prayer petitioning Tengger for the health of the herd. Within a few seconds Bayarmaa told Oyun that she was sprinkling the milk "too high" on the seter's body, instructing her to "only cover the lower part of its back" and, at one point, taking the tsatsal in her own hands to demonstrate the correct technique. It was important, Bayarmaa explained, to sprinkle the milk "properly" (*zöv*), specifically to show respect to the sacred animal which, in turn, would help to ensure the well-being of the herd. Heeding her mother's advice Oyun adjusted her technique and started sprinkling the milk lower down on the seter's body, then imitated her mother in offering another short prayer to Tengger.

[4] In Mongolia, *Tengger* is generally characterised as 'Eternal Heaven' or 'Sky'. The worship of *Tengger* (or Tengri) is sometimes referred to as Tenggrism, where *Tengger* is the Sky-Father and *Eej* is Mother-Earth. According to Humphrey and Onon (1996), the concept of Tengger is not the same as the Western concept of 'sky' because Tengger includes the sky, the weather, and is seen as having a degree of agency and the will to act. In this regard, Tengger should be seen as part of a broader Mongolian ontology of the environment in which various aspects of the landscape are afforded degrees of personhood (also see Pedersen 2007).



(Figure 1. Batukhan and Bayarmaa's ger, summer 2012 – photo by the author)

Watching Bayarmaa and Oyun I reflected on the milk sprinkling ritual and the transmission of skills between the generations. I knew from my reading of Inner Asian ethnography that to sprinkle milk over the back of herd animals was a practice firmly rooted in the presocialist past, tied to a number of long standing cultural presuppositions such as the recognition of nonhuman agency in the form of Tengger, notions of fortune and auspiciousness associated with the symbolism of milk, and the intimacy of human-animal relations epitomised by the seter. To sprinkle milk marked a ritualised offering to the nonhuman agencies thought to inhabit the Mongolian environment, petitioning for the health of the herd and, by extension, the survival of the household itself. Here I was reminded of Tim Ingold's (2000, 2001) conceptualisation of skill as the locus of cultural transmission. For Ingold, what anthropologists typically call 'cultural continuity' or the 'reproduction of tradition' actually consist, in the first place, of a process of *enskilment*, whereby everyday skills are neither innate or simply acquired but cumulatively 'grown', "incorporated into the human body through practice and training in a context of social relations and in articulation with a broader environment" (2000:37).

Importantly, enskilment does not depend on the transfer of static rules and representations 'in the mind' but on what Ingold calls systems of apprenticeship – human relationships, such as that between Bayarmaa and Oyun - where more and less experienced practitioners are engaged in contexts of hands-on activity, and "it is through the reproduction of these relationships…that continuity of tradition depends" (ibid). So it is that by instructing her daughter how to dip the tsatsal and sprinkle the milk "properly", Bayarmaa not only taught Oyun an important survival strategy, but also a series of relevant cultural meanings such as the symbolism of milk and auspiciousness of sacred animals, nonhuman agency, and the intimacy of human-animal relations. By taking the tsatsal in her own hands and adjusting the position of the sprinkled milk, Oyun came to learn the milk sprinkling ritual for herself, reproducing it anew for the next generation and internalising its cultural meanings, the cultural to some extent embedded within the embodiment of the practical.

Making our way back to the ger we found Hurelbaatar preparing himself to leave the household's encampment. On Batukhan's advice he would ride the family motorcycle to the nearest mountaintop to use their mobile phone, specifically to contact Bayarmaa's brother and ask him to bring some medicine for the animals from the regional centre. In recent years, new technologies such as motorcycles and mobile phones have become ubiquitous features of herding life, used by households in even the most remote parts of the country. This is a result of the recent transformations to have occurred over the last ten to fifteen years since the

collapse of state socialism, including the liberalisation of trade, the burgeoning of an informal economy, and Mongolia's shifting relationship to the international commodity markets of China and other parts of the world. Having purchased a motorcycle in 2010 Batukhan's family acquired their first mobile phone in 2012 and, during the time of my fieldwork, a small solar panel, the latter installed on the outside of their ger providing energy to charge their phone while moving across the steppe, as well as overhead light bulbs and other basic appliances. Given the remote conditions in rural Mongolia, however, limitations exist concerning the use of such technologies: mobile phone coverage, for example, is highly sporadic away from regional centres and often unavailable in the vicinity of herders' encampments. As a result, people have to complement their knowledge of the landscape – including migration routes, use-rights to pastures, and interaction with non-human agencies – by learning new locations specific for mobile phones. These are informally called 'post offices' (*shuudan*), that is specific mountaintops, hills, or other vantage points where mobile reception is known to pass and to where people travel to make phone calls.

After preparing the motorcycle Hurelbaatar and I rode for thirty minutes across the steppe until reaching the base of a small mountain, then manoeuvred our way up the steep and rocky slope. Upon reaching the top he removed the phone from inside his *deel*[5] and, holding it high above his head, attempted to locate the mobile signal. After fifteen minutes and numerous failed attempts he gave up as it appeared the reception was no longer available at this particular site, something that was commonplace given the changeable coverage away from regional centres. Scanning the landscape Hurelbaatar tried to identify another suitable location, with myself gesturing toward a nearby hill and suggesting perhaps that we try that location. Immediately Hurelbaatar rejected my proposal and explained that the hill belonged to a prominent spirit-owner (*ezen*)[6], one who had saved his fathers' life by sheltering him while lost and alone in a severe blizzard. As a result, whenever the household crossed the hill they always made a substantial offering at the ritual cairn – or *ovoo*[7] – erected at the top but, since we did not have a ceremonial scarf, bottle of vodka, or other suitable offering he felt it inappropriate to utilise the site. Glancing past a number of other peaks Hurelbaatar eventually pointed out another location where we might find suitable reception. Descending the mountain and riding for a further twenty minutes we arrived at the next post office and again attempted to use the phone. This time, with just a weak signal appearing Hurelbaatar typed a text message and threw the phone into the air, specifically to catch the mobile signal immediately after pushing 'send'. As the phone landed back in his hand we saw that the message had successfully been sent and, a few moments later, we received a reply from his uncle who agreed to deliver the medicine a few days later.

As we prepared to return home Hurelbaatar struggled to get the motorcycle started again as it had incurred damage travelling up the mountain. For the next forty minutes, he dismantled nearly every component of the engine, handing me dozens of mechanical parts as I watched on

[5] The *deel* is a three-quarter length gown worn by both men and women, the winter version lined with sheepskin and the summer version made of silk and cotton. The *deel* remains the preferred clothing for Mongolian herders as it is a practical working garment that can withstand considerable wear and tear. A *deel* has a multi purpose function, acting as clothing while out herding or milking and as a blanket at night or when sleeping outdoors.

[6] In Mongolia 'spirits' are typically characterised as 'masters' (*ezen*, pl. *ezed).* The *ezen* of a locality is to provide generalised well being, good weather, and fertility or, if 'angered', drought and pestilence (Humphrey in Hirsch & O'Hanlon 1995:145).

[7] An ovoo is a ritual cairn typically consisting of a pile of stones and branches indicating a pass between two valleys, or erected at the summit of an important or sacred mountain. Many important mountains have ovoos on their summits and the term ovoo is polyfunctional in that it refers simultaneously to the cairn, the spirit master, and to the mountain (Humphrey in Hirsch & O'Hanlon 1995:146).

with anticipation. Like herders throughout Mongolia Hurelbaatar has learnt a range of mechanical repair skills out of necessity while travelling across the steppe, and spent many hours pulling apart motorcycles with his friends while attending boarding school in the regional centre. After first dismantling the engine he instructed me to hand him various items such as a leather strap from my bag and a knife from inside my boot, using these to construct a quick albeit tentative fix but eventually getting us underway. Only ten minutes into the return journey, however, the motorcycle once again broke down, with Hurelbaatar commenting that the problem clearly required 'specialist' (*mergejiltei*) skills and perhaps even an entirely new spare part. Faced with no other alternative we continued making the remainder of the journey on foot, pushing the motorcycle beside us for over an hour as the evening sky grew dark above our heads.

Walking with Hurelbaatar I reflected on the two different ways the household had sought to ensure the health and survival of the herd. At first glance, they appeared as somewhat opposite strategies, for while the milk sprinkling ritual was a more 'traditional' practice firmly rooted in the presocialist past, the use of motorcycles and mobile phones were fundamentally tied to the recent changes to have occurred since the postsocialist transition, such as the advent of 'marketisation', the 'globalisation' of telecommunications, and Mongolia's entry into the international neoliberal economy. Here I found myself falling back upon a familiar metanarrative of change which we are all no doubt familiar with, one presupposed by the key teleological '*isations*' used to characterise contemporary change such as 'modernisation', 'globalisation', 'sedentarisation', and others (Ferguson 1999; 2006; Tsing 1999; Cooper and Packard 1997; Escobar 2011; Sachs 1997; Abrahms 1988; Arce & Long 2000; Inda & Rosaldo 2001; Trouillot 2003). But was this how Batukhan and his family actually experienced the two strategies themselves? In fact, for them there was a fundamental gap between the familiar metanarratives of change and its everyday lived-experience. Here the distinctions between the traditional and the modern, the socialist and the postsocialist had little saliency, and both strategies were seen as viable skills for survival in the contemporary postsocialist context.

As I came to learn during the course of my fieldwork for households such as Batukhan's their experiences of postsocialist change could not be reduced to any single teleological process, but were rather characterised by a series of non-linear, co-existing, and often reversible processes which problematised taken-for-granted assumptions. After all the unmaking of state socialism (Humphrey 2002) was still clearly an ongoing process, and the newer changes such as having a motorcycle or mobile phone remained entwined with the lingering effects of postsocialist collapse and what people described as the 'reversal' of (socialist) modernisation. The availability of motorised transport, for example, was problematised by the rising cost of fuel and the need to purchase spare parts, which were often unaffordable or unavailable for extended periods of time, forcing people to switch regularly between motorised and animal-drawn transportation. While mobile phones too had become ubiquitous features of herding life their use remained constrained by the remote conditions in rural Mongolia, something epitomised by the existence of the 'post offices'. As many in the Shishged described it life after socialism was supposed to be all about 'change' (i.e. improvement, modernisation, and global interconnection), and yet in only some senses was this felt to be true. For most people life had to some extent gone 'backwards', constrained by the limitations of living in a rural society, the lack of stable employment, as well as the new contradictions associated with neoliberal capitalism as Mongolia's economy faltered as a result of mismanagement and corruption, most notably within the resource sector, and particularly following the 2008 global financial crisis. Much as in other parts of the postsocialist world

(Humphrey and Sneath 1996, 1999; Sneath 1999, 2002; Humphrey 2002; Bruun and Li 2006; Empson 2007; Højer 2009; Empson 2011), for people in the Shishged the familiar metanarratives of change only encapsulated a part of their everyday lived-experience, which were actually characterised by a range of *polydirectional* experiences which cut across the divisions between the traditional and the modern, the socialist and the postsocialist, the local and the global, the capitalist and the socialist, the nomadic and the sedentary, and the rural and the urban.

Here I saw that in order to understand how people really experienced life in the postsocialist period I needed a way of thinking and writing outside the familiar metanarratives. This included not only 'modernisation' and its teleological incarnations but also the corollary teleologies of 'postsocialist collapse' and 'loss of tradition'. After all, having visited Mongolia myself in the mid-1990s I could see that fundamental changes had occurred since the postsocialist transition, including genuine improvements in everyday life such as a reduction in poverty and new opportunities and livelihood strategies. Here I saw that in order to take the non-linear, non-teleological experiences of people seriously I required a different set of theoretical and methodological tools. I required a hermeneutic lens which remained open to the full spectrum of co-existing variations in the late postsocialist context, including both positive and negative transformations, advances and reversals, changes and continuities. Reflecting on this further I returned to Ingold's conceptualisation of skill and wondered: was it not possible to extend his notion of enskilment to capture this polydirectional experience of postsocialist change? After all if, as Ingold suggests, skills are not transmitted via the 'passing on' of a corpus of rules and representations ('in the mind'), but rather, regrown by people anew in the process of their own enskilment, then would it not suggest that people inevitably regrow their skills in articulation with the changing contexts in which they are situated? Approached from this perspective, is what we call 'change' not actually experienced by people as fundamentally caught up with the maintenance – and transformation – of their everyday skills? Looking at Oyun, for example, she had learnt the ('traditional', 'presocialist') skills of the milk sprinkling ritual by identifying the sacred animal and learning to sprinkle the milk properly, while Hurelbaatar had learnt entirely new ('modern', 'postsocialist') skills such as motorcycle riding, mechanical repairs, and using a mobile phone. These newer skills were simultaneously learnt alongside other ('presocialist', 'traditional') skills such as knowledge of sacred geography and properly relating to nonhuman agencies such as the mountain ovoo.

Here I realised that what brought the two strategies together – and gave them equal meaning for Batukhan and his household – was condensed inside people's embodiment of skills, which collapsed for them the distinctions between the traditional and the modern, the socialist and postsocialist, the old and the new. Approached from this perspective, was it not possible to extend Ingold's notion of enskilment to include not only those skills reproduced between the generations, but also newer skills learnt in articulation with postsocialist change, those which may be lost, forgotten, or rendered obsolete, and even those skills which might be debated, contested, or transposed from one context to another? Thus, while some skills will be reproduced - such as the milk sprinkling ritual and knowledge of sacred sites and agencies - new skills will be learnt - such as motorcycle riding, mechanical repairs and how to use a mobile phone, while others may be lost, forgotten, or limited such as having to rely on a specialist in order to repair the damaged motorcycle. Similarly, other skills might be debated, contested, or transposed from one context to another, such as Hurelbaatar having better mechanical skills than his father from living in the regional centre, and which to some extent disrupted the normative hierarchy of generational expertise such as between fathers and sons?

Here I saw that by extending the notion of enskilment and observing transformations in skilled practice I was afforded insight into the polydirectional experience of life characteristic of late postsocialist Mongolia. I saw that by widening the approach to skilled practice I found a useful lens for elucidating the polydirectional experiences of the people with whom I lived and worked, capturing simultaneously both their positive and negative transformations, advances and reversals, as well as their changes and continuities, illuminating a fuller range of co-existing variations outside the familiar teleological metanarratives.

At the most general level, then, this dissertation is about postsocialist change. Or, more specifically, it is about how people living in a remote part of Northern Mongolia have experienced the recent changes to have occurred over the last ten to fifteen years since the postsocialist transition. My main argument is that while Mongolia's postsocialist transition occurred over twenty years ago it is not at all clear what has come after socialism, or how we as anthropologists might conceptualise the contradictory, fuzzy, and often reversible experiences of people during the so-called postsocialist period. To this end I develop in this dissertation a new hermeneutic framework for elucidating the polydirectional experience of postsocialist change, taking the form of an extension of Tim Ingold's (2000, 2001) concept of enskilment – and inspired by a broader anthropology of skill and practice[8], as well as the comparative literature on postsocialism[9] and de-modernisation in Africa (Ferguson 1999; Geschiere, et al. 2008) – combined with a critique of the teleological metanarratives which underpin normative conceptualisations of change (Ferguson 1999; Mosse 2005; Tsing 2005; Arce & Long 2000; Garden & Lewis 1996; Inda & Rosaldo 2001). I argue that these metanarratives fail to capture the full spectrum of co-existing variations as they are experienced by people in the late postsocialist context - including the differentiation within individual communities and between the generations, non-linear changes, transformations and transpositions, as well as non-teleological reversals - specifically because of their implicit allusion to the teleological metanarrative of 'modernisation', the hidden trajectories inherent within related concepts such as 'globalisation', 'marketisation', 'sedentarisation', and 'urbanisation', as well as the broader teleological doxa of change which remains embedded within much academic discourse. In opposition to this I develop a processual and polydirectional perspective grounded in skilled practice, which envisions the transmission of skills as not only being re/produced between the generations (Ingold 2000), but also new skills learnt in articulation with change, as well as skills that are lost, forgotten, transformed, adapted, and transposed in relation to transforming social, economic, and political contexts. By extending skill in this way and observing transformations in skilled practice I argue that we are afforded better insight into the polydirectional experiences characteristic of the late postsocialist context, and which can better reveal a more diverse range of processes as they are experienced by people in their everyday lives.

Here I use this hermeneutic framework to investigate different aspects of social life as I encountered them during my fieldwork in Mongolia between 2012-2013, including herding strategies, hunting and ontological presuppositions, uses of new technologies, trans-frontier trading, and the migration of people from rural areas to the capital city. In each case I describe

[8] See e.g. Marchand (2008); Portisch (2009); Gieser (2008, 2014); Chaiklin & Lave (1996); Coy (1989); Harris (2005, 2007); Willerslev (2007); Grasseni (2009); Downey (2005); Froerer & Portisch (2012); Van Ede (2009).
[9] See e.g. Berdahl (1999); Borneman (1997); Hann (1994); Verdery (1996, 2003); Berdahl et al. (2000); De Soto & Anderson (1993); Kideckel (1993); Humphrey (2002)

the transformations in skilled practice and problematise what I see to be four major narratives which influence normative conceptualisations of change: namely, the relationship between 'tradition' and 'modernity' and the teleology of temporality; 'globalisation' and the teleology of technological innovation; the advent of 'marketisation' and the transition from socialism to capitalism; and the rural-urban dichotomy as epitomised in the concepts of 'sedentarisation' and 'urbanisation'. In the process, I demonstrate how a consideration of people's skills allows one to prioritise the lived-experience of change and reveal the non-linear experiences brought about by the postsocialist transition, as well as the mutual co-existence between continuity and change in the re/production of social life. In this regard, the dissertation should also be seen as a critical reflection on how we as anthropologists think about change in both explicit and implicit ways, where I use the ethnographic particularities of life in Mongolia to problematise normative assumptions and critique the enduring legacies of modernist teleological metanarratives.

With this approach, I aim to contribute both to an anthropological understanding of social and cultural change and to the wider sub-fields of postsocialist studies and Inner Asian societies. Furthermore, I contribute to the recent theoretical debates concerning the anthropology of skill, practice, and embodied learning, and develop a processual conceptualisation which I believe has broad ethnographic value. In particular, I develop this approach as a counter to the widespread assumption that so-called phenomenological perspectives fail to capture the political and economic contexts in which human beings experience the world and the changing dynamics in which skills are taught and learnt. Thus, by extending the concept of enskilment and combining it with a critique of the teleological metanarratives of change I develop a political-economy of skill that moves beyond theoretical considerations and is applied to a real-world ethnographic context.

Changing Mongolia

The recent history of Mongolia is characterised by profound change, including two revolutions in the space of just seventy years. In 1921 the country became the second communist state in world history. Until 1991, it was rule by a one-party state, the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR). As a virtual satellite of the Soviet Union the MPR closely imitated the USSR, implementing policies such as industrialisation, urbanisation, and the collectivisation of the country's' herd animals, which comprised 23 million at the time (Baabar and Kaplonski 1999; Rossabi 2005; Bawden 1991). As a predominantly rural society with a large herding population, arguably the most significant aspect of this was the establishment of the collective farms or *negdels*, which saw herders employed as workers tending state-owned animals and receiving a salary in return (Rossabi 2005:35-6). The negdels facilitated the socialist revolution in the Mongolian countryside: providing employment, healthcare, and education, veterinary and technical support, mechanised transport when moving between seasonal pastures, and even a pension system following retirement (Bawden 1968; Brunn & Narangoa 2004). Coupled with this were support mechanisms during extreme weather and natural disasters, including emergency fodder during the winter and insurance schemes to compensate for herd losses (Rossabi 2005:35). By 1959 more than 99% of Mongolia's herders had been incorporated into a negdel and most of the country's herd animals had been collectivised (Pedersen 2011:18; Sneath 2002).



(Figure 2. Socialist artwork, Ulaanbaatar – photo by author)

In 1991 Mongolia experienced another revolution as the Soviet Union collapsed and the country saw the end of one-party rule. Following democratic elections and the instalment of a multi-party government, the country experienced a dramatic transformation through the withdrawal of all economic support from the former Soviet Union via the demise of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA). The CMEA had hitherto sustained the Mongolian economy through demands for export products through the USSR (Rossabi 2005; Baabar and Kaplonski 1999; Fernandez-Gimenez 2001; Bawden 1968). As the centrally-planned economy was dismantled Mongolia's new government sought a substitute for this support in the form of foreign aid packages from international donor agencies and western countries (Pedersen 2011:2). Soon the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Asian Development Bank (ADB), and World Bank all admitted Mongolia to membership and started providing the country with loans (Brunn & Narangoa 2004; Humphrey and Sneath 1996). As part of this, however, the new government was forced to implement a series of radical neoliberal reforms - informally called 'shock therapy' - including rapid privatisation, the liberalisation of international trade, and widespread cuts to public services (Rossabi 2005). This saw the end of all subsidies for food and other essential goods, the termination of state services such as education and healthcare, and the privatisation of the herding sector (Rossabi 2005:37-8; Sneath 2002; Baabar & Kaplonski 1999; Bawden 1968). Here it was argued that socialism had stifled Mongolia's social and economic potential and it was neoliberal capitalism that would set the country along the correct path. As Morten Pedersen (2011:22) describes it:

> Despite the fact that the government was largely made up of ex-communists, their approach might as well have been borrowed from a textbook on neoliberal reform – and in fact to some degree this was precisely the case. In compliance with the 'advice' of international consultants and donors…over the next several years the country embarked on a process of economic liberalisation, which later was praised by major proponents of 'structural adjustment' as one of the most successful (read: radical) examples of 'shock therapy'.

By the mid-1990s the effects of neoliberal reform began to have a dramatic impact upon large numbers of the population, resulting in widespread unemployment and the collapse of state services. While starvation, homelessness, and illiteracy had all been eliminated during the socialist period (Janes & Chuluundorj 2004; Verdery 1996), privatisation and the transition to a market economy fragmented essential services and access to national markets. The standard of living deteriorated sharply as people struggled in the face of rising inflation and collapsing state support. With few opportunities and burgeoning social problems such as violence and

alcoholism, many people began to question their entry into the so-called 'Age of the Market' (*zah zeeliin üye*) (Buyandelgeriyn 2007; Humphrey 2002; Brunn & Narangoa 2004).



(Figure 3. Socialist artwork, featuring state health campaigns in the countryside – photo by author)

By far the most drastic consequence of reform was the transformation of the herding sector. While during the socialist period the negdels had provided virtually all technical infrastructure and support, decollectivisation threw herding households into an uncertain subsistence economy based on individual household production (Edstrom 1993; Humphrey & Sneath 1999; Brunn & Odgaard 1996). As a result, they became highly vulnerable to the loss of herd animals, natural disasters and the impact of climate change, as well as proximity to roads, regional markets, and access to essential traded commodities (Brunn & Narangoa 2004; Humphrey & Sneath 1999; Janes & Chuluundorj 2004; Addison & Brown 2014). In response, households increased their herd sizes as a necessary survival strategy[10], placing increased strain on the grasslands and creating new conflicts over access to resources (Marin 2010). Meanwhile, the redistribution of herd animals to private households was characterised by many abuses, with the former negdel leaders and their close relations gaining more animals than ordinary herders and thus creating new patterns of inequality (Rossabi 2005:35).

In the remote Shishged Depression[11] where I carried out fieldwork people experienced the same social and economic changes as in other parts of the country (also see Pedersen 2011; Hangartner 2011). Throughout the 1990s the standard of living deteriorated as people felt the effects of decollectivisation, job losses, and the disintegration of state institutions. Access to markets was severely disrupted and what was already a remote region suffered from collapsing infrastructure and support, including the decollectivisation of the two local negdels[12], the shutting down of schools and health clinics, and with the few existing roads no longer being maintained (Pedersen 2011:2-3). In response, the large majority of households reverted to a subsistence economy based on direct or indirect links to animal herding, supplementing their livelihoods with alternate survival strategies such as hunting and informal trading (ibid). By the late 1990s the herding population had increased significantly as unemployed people turned to animal herding, with three-quarters of local residents officially

[10] By 2012, the number of herd animals had increased to approximately 41 million (NSOM 2017:537).
[11] The Shishged Depression is situated in Khövsgöl province (*aimag*), Northern Mongolia, approximately 1000km away from the national capital, Ulaanbaatar, and some 200km away from the provincial capital, Mörön. See Map 3.
[12] In the Shishged Depression, two negdels were established in 1956: The Happy Life Negdel (*Jargalant Am'dral Negdel*) in Ulaan Uul and the Golden Valley Negdel in Renchinlhümbe. In 1985 another *negdel* was established in Tsaagan Nuur specialising in reindeer herding (also see Pedersen 2011). See Chapter 2.

becoming registered as full-time herders (*malchid*) and with animal husbandry being their only official source of income[13]. As Pedersen (2011:2-3) points out, the situation was even more severe in regional centres (*sum*) of the Shishged such as Ulaan Uul, Renchinlkhümbe, and Tsagaan-Nuur, where the majority of households owned only a handful of animals and thus became dependent on herding family members for even basic subsistence.

Much like the rest of Mongolia the collapse of state socialism was perceived in the Shishged as nothing less than the end of 'modernity' (*hogji*) itself, specifically as it had been projected by the former socialist state (Pedersen 2011:3). Following decades of espousing (and implementing) a developmentalist vision of social and economic progress (*devshil*), decollectivisation and the advent of a market economy signified for many the collapse of the socialist 'expectation of modernity' (ibid; also see Ferguson 1999). As a result and, much as in other parts of the postsocialist world (Anderson 2000; Berdahl 1997; Berdahl et al. 2000; Burawoy 2000; Humphrey 1998, 2002; Nazpary 2002; Verdery 1996, 2003; Borneman 1997; Hann 1994, 2002), people in the Shishged experienced the end of state socialism not just as a political and economic change but as a social and existential crisis of meaning, lamenting the loss of once immutable and highly valued state institutions and inculcating nostalgic memories for the socialist past (Pedersen 2011:4). As Pedersen described it after carrying out fieldwork in the late 1990s, the Shishged was "a model case of postsocialist chaos…when what little was left of the old socialist welfare state essentially ceased to exist…and unnerving sense of disintegration spread to nearly all levels of social life" (2011:4).

By the time I arrived in the Shishged in 2012 more than twenty years had passed since the collapse of state socialism. On the one hand, much of what has been described continued to remain visible, with unemployment and poverty remaining significant issues for large segments of the population, including in both herding areas and regional centres. People still struggled in the face of collapsing state support and lamented the loss of collective institutions, as well as criticised the perceived immorality associated with the 'Age of the Market'. The Shishged was still considered remote even by Mongolian standards and households complained about the lack of infrastructure and state support. The majority of people were engaged in animal herding and virtually all Shishged residents were dependent on herding family members for basic subsistence. Most of the population continued to maintain their animal herds for household production only and, without the once familiar support provided by the negdels, people described their increased the difficulties in marketing their animal products, their vulnerability in the face of natural disasters and herd losses, new conflicts over access to resources, as well as the difficulties associated with maintaining previously subsidised costs such as education, health, and veterinary care.

At the same time, however, the social and economic situation had also changed to a significant extent: while people had been catapulted back into a subsistence-based economy they were simultaneously experiencing other more recent transformations associated with the late postsocialist transition. Over the last decade the liberalisation of trade had firmly connected the Shishged to the international commodity markets of China and other parts of the world, with new low-cost commodities fast becoming ubiquitous items. This included, among other things, new appliances such as televisions, washing machines, and DVD players, cheap clothing and household goods, as well as new technologies such as motorcycles, mobile phones, and solar panels, all of which made their way to the Shishged via informal traders who shuttled goods from the Mongolian-Chinese border via the capital city, Ulaanbaatar, and other cross-

[13] Khövsgöl Statistical Yearbook 2010.

border towns (Billé et al. 2012). By 2012 it was commonplace to see people riding motorcycles while moving their herds, using mobile phones, as well as having solar panels attached to the outside of their gers, the latter providing sufficient energy to charge their phones while moving across the steppe and power over-head light-bulbs and other household appliances. Across the Shishged markets were extremely well supplied, as were the numerous private shops set up in sum centres. Connected to this, policies introduced to control inflation had reduced the cost of everyday goods, falling from 325% in 1992 to 8% in 2012[14]. This not only made it easier for households to make purchases, borrow money from family members and enter into lease agreements with market traders, but also to obtain loans from banks (Bruun and Li 2006; Højer 2009; Pedersen 2012).

In addition, new patterns of mobility had emerged between rural and urban areas, largely as result of the liberalisation of travel and new transportation networks. This was manifested in the rapidly expanding long distance mini-bus network, which allowed people to travel regularly and at relatively low cost from places such as the Shishged to the capital city 1000km away and, further afield, to the Mongolian-Chinese border, where thousands of Shishged residents engaged in trans-frontier trade (Pedersen 2006; also see Lacaze 2010). Similarly, new patterns of mobility had emerged within rural areas, as increasing numbers of herders had reduced the scale of their movements and re-orientated their herding strategies around the vicinity of regional centres. Coupled with the burgeoning use of motorised transport many households now travelled shorter distances between their summer and winter pastures but more frequently to and from sum centres, actively harnessing new markets to acquire food and supplies, sell animals and animal products to traders and middlemen, as well as carry out informal work (Fernandez-Gimenez 2001). Many households also moved into regional centres at specific points during the year, giving their animals to more mobile kin relations while they sought informal jobs, travelled to Ulaanbaatar, or simply avoided the difficult winter months. Connected to this, new businesses had been established across the Shishged including shops, restaurants, and mechanical repair centres, while increasing numbers of people were finding employment within the informal sector, including herders who worked as part-time drivers, traders, and mechanics. More broadly, state services such as education and healthcare had resumed in all parts of the region - albeit now in privatised form - while annual events such as the *Naadam*[15] festival no longer attracted only local residents but tourists as well, giving herding households an additional source of income by offering accommodation in the form of ger-stays and working alongside Ulaanbaatar-based tour operators.

While most investment from international donors had not directly affected remote regions such as the Shishged it had resulted in infrastructural improvements in and around Ulaanbaatar, including the upgrading and maintenance of roads which assisted traders travelling to and from other parts of the country. At the same time, while the Shishged had remained one of the few regions in Mongolia not to have experienced significant out-migration immediately following the end of state socialism (Pedersen 2011:156), by 2012 there was an increasing flow of people moving to Ulaanbaatar[16]. This was not only the result of new opportunities – both real and imagined - in the capital city, but because of the extremely severe

[14] International Labour Office (2008).
[15] *Naadam* is a traditional festival held once a year in the summer across Mongolia. Also called 'the three games of men' (*eriin gurvan naadam*), it is a two or three-day festival which includes horse racing, wrestling, and archery. While the biggest Naadam is held in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar, smaller Naadam are organised in the countryside around nearly every sum centre in the country. Each regional Naadam is highly popular and attract people from across the region, including herders and sum residents.
[16] Khövsgöl Statistical Yearbook 2012.

2009-10 *dzud*[17] - winter conditions in which herd animals are unable to access the grasses underneath thick ice and snow. In fact, my arrival in the Shishged was just after one of the worst dzud in living memory, where 10-15 million animals perished nationally and with households losing anywhere between 20% and 100% of their herds, forcing many to abandon animal herding and seek alternate livelihood opportunities in the capital city (UNDP 2011). This movement of people was just part of a much broader rural to urban migration that had been occurring since the end of state socialism. Indeed, by 2012 Mongolia had officially become a predominantly 'urban' society for the first time, with more than 50% of the population living in Ulaanbaatar.

Conceptualising Change and the Teleology of Modernisation

At first glance, what I was seeing here appeared to be a familiar story of postsocialist change. Mongolia, like other so-called developing countries, was seemingly entering a new phase in its postsocialist transition, one characterised by increasing economic stability, further integration into the global market economy, a shift towards more settled and urban patterns of life, and manifesting in new opportunities and improvements in rural and urban areas. This was a view articulated in the everyday discourse of politicians, economists, international finance and development organisations, tourists, the media, investors, and some academics, who readily described Mongolia as a country in the thralls of change, and implicitly equated this with the familiar teleological metanarrative of modernisation. Here the commonplace assumption was that while neoliberal reform may have caused a tumultuous period immediately following the collapse of state socialism, the more recent transformations were an indication that the country was heading in the right direction, moving towards economic development and an increasingly integrated position within the globalised world. As commentators liked to point out during the time of my fieldwork Mongolia had overtaken Qatar to become the fastest growing economy in the world, with a GDP growth rate of 17% in 2012, largely as a result of the booming mining sector (NSOM 2001). The frequent references to Mongolia as an 'emerging economy' and a 'model' for postsocialist change were similarly reflective of this, presupposing a linear trajectory from a traditional, socialist, and disconnected past to a modern, postsocialist, and globalised future.

Of course, this was not at all surprising for conceptualisations of change have long been framed in teleological terms, something that has its roots in 19th and early 20th century European intellectual life and political economy which sought to theorise the radical social and economic transformations associated with industrialisation. The classical social theory of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber were all predicated on the assumption that there was something inherently new about the so-called modern world, which came to be articulated through a series of theoretical dichotomies presuming a linear unfolding of History and which manifested in the anthropological conceptual corpus: tradition and modernity, hot and cold societies, status and contract, mechanical and organic solidarity, Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, the rural and the urban, the pre-capitalist and the capitalist (Arce & Long 2000). In fact, the very word 'modern' and its teleological corollary – 'modernisation' - have themselves served as defining reference points throughout the history of anthropology, specifically as it emerged as a field of study involving so-called 'modern' people (anthropologists) studying 'traditional' or 'pre-modern' people, the latter characterised as undergoing processes of 'change' (read:

[17] A black *dzud* (*khar dzud*) consists of a lack of snowfall combined with freezing temperatures, which causes drought, while a white *dzud* (*tsagaan dzud*) is caused by very heavy snow fall, which makes it impossible for herd animals to feed on the otherwise accessible frozen grass, causing famine (Christensen et al 2004).

modernisation) in the course of economic development (Gardner & Lewis 1996:16; Escobar 2011).

Teleological conceptualisations reached their apex in so-called modernisation theory in the 1950s and 1960s, although as I will argue they continue to exert considerable influence today. At that time modernisation was visualised in terms of a progressive movement towards more technologically complex and integrated forms of society (Arce & Long 2000), a vision that saw the industrialised and urbanised North as a paradigmatic model for the rest of the world. Indeed, modernisation theory drew direct parallels between the teleology of change and both marketisation and urbanisation, as well as the assumed superiority of western forms of social, economic, and political organisation. The understanding was that these emerged in Europe and then diffused, or were imposed, globally around the world (Gardner & Lewis 1996:16)

Of course, during the 1960s modernisation - as both a theory and a set of development strategies - came under criticism for its crude depiction of change. Criticised in particular by Marxist-inspired *dependencia* theory, it was argued that modernisation was essentially an unequalising process. Rather than being undeveloped, countries in the Global South had been underdeveloped by processes of exploitation. Arguably the most influential version of this was World Systems Theory and the notion of centre-periphery relations (Wallerstein 1979), which sought to demonstrate how wealthier nations actually required poorer states in order to remain dominant. It was out of this that the notions of the 'Third World' and 'First World', 'developing' and 'developed' countries first emerged, terms "which explicitly recognised the ways in which nations were divided into different yet interrelated and unequal parts" (Gardner & Lewis 1996:17). Importantly, while modernisation and dependencia theory were extreme political opposites – the first liberal and the second radical - both were teleological in their assumptions about change. Both assumed that nation-states progressed in a linear fashion and that it was capitalism which propelled them from one stage to the next (ibid). Thus, while modernisation theory presupposed a 'trickle down' from profit-making elites to the rest, dependencia theory envisioned change as a progressive social and economic process, leading to an imagined end goal of socialist-communist modernisation.

Today explicit references to teleological metanarratives have become increasingly veiled. It is argued that since the old polarities of the Cold War have become obsolete it no longer makes sense to speak of the Third and First Worlds, developing or developed countries, with the boundaries between the North and South, centre and periphery, supposedly collapsed (Gardner & Lewis 1996). The rapidly emerging economies of East Asia, for example, have overtaken traditional centres of production in Europe and the United States – which themselves are increasingly seen as undergoing processes of de-modernisation since the 2008 financial crisis - while new ethnic and religious revivalisms are said to destabilise the assumption that modernisation occurs in a teleological way (Arce & Long 2000). While much of this is true it would be wrong to assume that contemporary conceptualisations of change are free from the influence of modernist teleological metanarratives. Indeed, it is possible to discern their influence in much current practice and thinking, including in contemporary development policy and national government strategies as they advocate economic 'growth' to avoid 'stagnation', offer aid to poorer countries so that they can 'catch up' with 'the rest', and implement policies designed to compete in the so-called 'global race' (Escobar 2011; Mosse 2005). In fact, it is arguable that teleological metanarratives not only determine contemporary geopolitics but have become embedded within the existential project of neoliberalism itself, manifesting in various social, economic, and psychological guises from setting development

budgets to modernising one's home, buying the latest technologies, working one's way up the job ladder, and moving from the countryside to the city.

James Ferguson (1999, 2006) addresses the hidden afterlives of this teleological metanarrative by stressing the need to understand modernity as an economic status based on global hierarchy. Here the developmentalist vision is not only teleological but semi-mythological: societies move from a traditional status to a modern one as 'developing countries' or 'emerging nations' (e.g. 'post-socialist') through an evolutionary sequence of stages. As Ferguson puts it: "The effect of this narrative was to transform a specialised global hierarchy into a temporalized (putative) historical sequence" (2006:178). Of course, much social science literature has critiqued the developmentalist paradigm as we now see how development aid and modernisation policies have not created social and economic equality between nations (Cooper and Packard 1997; Escobar 2011; Sachs 1997). Moreover, as Ferguson (1999) and others (Tsing 1999; 2015) have documented, many regions of the so-called developing world, particularly where resource development has occurred, have actually experienced economic decline where modernisation has gone 'into reverse' (Gewertz and Errington 2010:80–84): indeed, much like in Mongolia for many people the best times appear to have already come and gone. Modernity, from their perspective, "appears not (as it does to many contemporary anthropologists) as a set of wonderfully diverse and creative cultural practices, but as a global status and a political-economic condition" (Ferguson 2006:187; Geschiere et al. 2008).

Modernity and Globalisation as Teleological Discourse

Now a basic feature of contemporary modernity is said to be characterised by peoples´ conscious awareness that global interactions affect their everyday life, which is generally termed 'globalisation' (Beck 2015; Eriksen 2012). However, at a time when some academics are perhaps too confidently assuming the 'demise of metanarratives' - and characterising all change through the lens of globalisation - it is important to emphasise the polydirectional experiences associated with global change, including those contradictory and reversible processes such as described in Mongolia.

Eric Wolf (2010) and Sidney Mintz (1986) were among the first anthropologists to apply a global framework to anthropological analysis[18]. Whereas Wolf traced global processes and their connections through regions of the world, Mintz focused on one product, namely sugar, and analysed its circulation, consumption, and meaning. Wolf (2010) analysed globalising political-economic forces that developed with European expansion in 1492 by tracing the connections between people and places, expressed through mobility patterns, displacement, and world trade (Asad 1987:594). Wolf´s analysis employed the conceptualisations of modes of production, the capitalist, tributary and kin-structured, in order to trace their systemic interaction. He demonstrated how the expanding capitalist mode interacted with and subverted other forms of organising and regulating social, political, and economic life according to its own requirements. Different to functionalist approaches, which focused on social integration - "how solidarity is fine-tuned, reinforced, and intensified" (Ortner 1984:130) - Wolf and Mintz elaborated the construction and maintenance of social coherence

[18] They were influenced by World System approaches developed in the 1970s (Wallerstein 1979; Frank 1989). While Marxist approaches were frowned upon during the inter-war period (Graeber 2001:24), this changed due to the work of Luis Althusser (1961) who reworked Marxist terms and applied a more flexible approach, detached from evolutionary theory.

despite "the conflicts and contradictions that constitute the normal state of affairs" (ibid). Wolf highlighted emerging relations and connections between different regions of the world and focused on interdependencies of capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production. Based on production, distribution and consumption of goods he demonstrated through a long-term perspective how different societies and regions integrated in a capitalist world economy on a global scale. He argued that these interactions rendered a more globally integrated capitalist world system towards the end of the 19th century. In consequence, he regarded "the world as a whole, a totality, a system, instead of as a sum of self-contained societies and cultures" (Wolf 2010:385; Hannerz 1996). Along with Mintz (1986), he saw processes of globalisation as not emerging after the collapse of the USSR in 1989 but as active at least since the 15th century, and distinguished between mercantilist, colonial, and post-colonial forms of globalisation.

In contrast to Wolf and Mintz, Appadurai (1999) characterised globalisation as radically new. His theory of rupture differentiated current globalisation from previous phases by indicators he theorised as "global cultural flows". His terminology[19] sought to capture the increased intensity in motion/flow of current times, and emphasised the fundamentally altered role of imagination as collective, social fact. Where Anderson (2006) analysed imagined communities by focusing on how new communication technologies altered the role of people´s relations to place and to each other, Appadurai (1999) explored the shift in collective representations due to recent developments in electronic capitalism. The Internet, for example, enabled the emergence of *sodalities* beyond the level of nation-states. Sodalities were defined as cultural groups or generative social spaces that mediated globalised cultural flows and created possibilities for translocal social action (ibid). Electronic means of communication transformed understandings of territoriality and associated framings of culture, or rather, the cultural.

The changing geographical scaffolding is exemplified for Appadurai in the increasing influence of international organisations and institutions on a supranational level (such as the World Bank, IMF, WTO, International Court of Justice etc.), as well as the formation of new regional alliances on an interstate level (EU, the Arab League, ASEAN, NAFTA). The transformations of territoriality through changes in the architecture of global governance are also expressed in the activities of NGOs, which increasingly provide services formerly delivered by states. The hierarchical order of space – local, regional, national, international and global – parallels the hegemonic understanding of vertical structures of globally active institutions of governance. However, 'subnational' agents such as NGOs may act on globally meaningful levels: NGOs form an operating part in transnationally active 'alter globalisation movements', which demand the attention of the new global public sphere since the 1990s (Maeckelbergh 2009; Juris 2008). Summarising the changing relationship between the global and the local, Appadurai concludes that nation-states are no longer imagined as the only territorial infrastructure of governance and the global economy. Locality is newly produced. Overcoming the global-local dichotomy, Appadurai (and others, e.g. Marcus 1999) emphasises that the global is always locally bound and experienced.

Now despite this emphasis on 'the local', it is arguable that the current emphasis on globalisation should be questioned precisely for its propensity to be envisioned as the 'only' model of change in late-capitalism (Beck 2015). After all, what we have come to call globalisation is not simply a process that links together the world but also one that differentiates it along both historical and new economic lines: "It creates new inequalities even

19 Such as ethno-, techno-, finance-, media- and ideoscapes.

as it brings into being new commonalities and lines of communication" (Ferguson: 1999:243; also see Tsing 1999; 2002; Castells 2011). It is precisely for this reason why some suggest that we need to think about change in a way that is both non-teleological but also non-scalar (also see Pels 2015). As Anna Tsing puts it:

> Globalisation draws our enthusiasm because it helps us imagine interconnection, travel, and sudden transformation. Yet it also draws us inside its rhetoric until we take its claims for true descriptions. In the imagery (of globalisation), flow is valorised but not the carving of the channel; national and regional units are mapped as the baseline of change without attention to their shifting and contested ability to define the landscape (1999: 330).

Tsing (1999, 2000, 2002) has directly criticised theories of globalisation as discourse and forcefully shown that local and global dynamics are more complementary than opposed. In her essay on the 'Global Situation' (2002), she evaluated the seductive symbolism of globalisation as a new form of modernisation teleology. Here she unveils and critiques the underlying theoretical paradigm or interests of globalisation research by looking at how the discourses of 'futurism', 'conflations', and 'circulation' underpin the work of anthropologists and others. Futurism involves the turning away from isolated local cultures to looking at the systemic dimensions of global capitalism. Conflations are focused on the mobility of culture, that is cultural connections across national boundaries. In a direct challenge to Appadurai, Tsing argues that the fault of conflation and futurism is to look for a "singular anthropological globalism" (2002:470). Circulation, in Tsing's terms, concerns the flow of knowledge, technology, people, and culture and suggests the newness of the global epoch, although she rejects here the purported novelty of globalisation discourse. She concludes (2002:471) that the circulation metaphor often fails to examine "different modes of regional-to-global interconnection". Tsing (2002:472) believes that with globalisation 'scale' must become an object of analysis. She maintains that "understanding the institutional proliferation of particular globalisation projects requires a sense of their cultural specificities as well as the travels and interactions through which these projects are reproduced and taken on in new places" (ibid). Tsing's nuanced language of 'projects' across different scales offers a more useful approach than the metaphors of globalisation to understanding processes of change, and this applies directly to places such as Mongolia. Indeed, like neoliberalism, Mongolia's 'postsocialist transition' can be seen as one such project, a bundle of ideas and practices as realised at a particular time and place (ibid 2002:472). Here it can be seen how it is possible to unpack this bundle through fieldwork and ethnographic writing, to prioritise local experiences (which may be contradictory) and not presuppose a linear trajectory between the global and the local or a universalist model of change. Tsing's critique is important as she deconstructs the language and practices of global theorisation. Moreover, she argues for the importance of human agency and self-determination on the local level that are more than simple responses to determining global processes.

Approached from this perspective, globalisation, with its emphasis on the movement and flow of people, ideas, and commodities around the world, draws our attention away from the practical, grounded, and quotidian spaces in which such movement occurs. This is why, following Tsing (1999; 2002) and Ferguson (1999), I prefer to think of globalisation on par with modernisation, as a recurring master-narrative which underpins normative conceptualisations of change, and particularly the vision of postsocialist change that was/is supposed to emerge in Mongolia. Here globalisation and modernisation should be seen as part and parcel of what we might call the doxa of change - the taken-for-granted assumption that

whether it be social, cultural, economic, political, technological, or other - change is ultimately a linear, progressive, and globally integrative process. As Ferguson (1999:16) puts it:

> For the attachment…to a linear metanarrative of emergence and progress is clearly an ongoing matter, and not simply an aspect of a now 'out of date' historical past; scholarly thinking continues to be haunted in subtle and not-so-subtle ways by the imagined teleologies of the modern. It is for this reason that I prefer to speak not simply of 'modernization theory' - suggesting a discredited theory that…we have long since 'moved beyond' - but of modernism and modernist metanarratives, which (as so much recent theoretical debate around the question of 'postmodernism' suggests) we are very far from having 'left behind.'

Importantly, this is something that applies equally to anthropological assumptions of change as well, which have arguably remained tied to modernist teleological metanarratives in various ways. Indeed, while few anthropologists would explicitly subscribe to the suggestion that change occurs in a linear, progressive, and integrative way, the fact is that many contemporary invocations of change – 'globalisation', 'marketisation', 'urbanisation' and others – reproduce such teleological assumptions. As Ferguson (1999:16) points out, many of the most influential recent critical analyses of the so-called postmodern era reinstate a teleological narrative, in which 'globalisation' or 'postmodernity' become simply the next level in a social evolutionary ladder (also see Jameson 1991; Harvey 1995; Tsing 2000; Beck 2015). As Ferguson (1999:16-7) describes it, "Nor is it simply that so many…current icons of the up-to-date as 'globalization,' 'democratization,' 'civil society,' and 'economic growth' rely on nakedly evolutionist narratives that reduce a complex and differentiated global political economy to a race for economic and political 'advance'".

In other words, the attachment of scholars and others to Eurocentric modernist metanarratives is still with us since the demise of modernisation theory in the 1960s (Ferguson 1999:17), and they require further critique and analysis. Now while there are various manifestations of modernist teleologies in contemporary social theory I argue that there are four major narratives which continue to influence conceptualisations of postsocialist change. Each of these will be taken up during the course of this dissertation as I explore different aspects of social life as I encountered them during my fieldwork. As I will show, these four narratives fail to capture the full spectrum of co-existing variations as they are experienced by people in Northern Mongolia, and it is against these that I develop my own alternate conceptualisation of postsocialist change based on skilled practice below. Unpacking these assumptions in the context of Mongolia's postsocialist change will be an underlying theme of this dissertation.

This is a view also supported by Friedman and Friedman in their "Anthropology of Global Systems" (2008). Here they argue against an understanding of globalisation as continuous development that generates an integrated world economy, as well as against an understanding of contemporary globalisation as rupture as proposed by Appadurai and others. The Friedmans argue for a systemic approach to globalisation, but regard its processes as a "historical phase within a global system rather than a stage of world-historical development" (2008:245). By postulating the new era of the global, an evolutionary development is always implied, resembling former discourses of modernisation of the 1950s and 60s. They posit that a normative 'ideology of the global' has indeed emerged, constructed by cosmopolitan elites with their humanist values in opposition to nation-states (e.g. Hannerz 1996). As a counter to this they describe historical phenomena of weakening state power related to the decline of hegemonic centres and their financing by the export of capital (Friedman and Friedman 2008). They argue that former periods of increased globalised interconnections, present from the 1880s to the 1920s, were followed by phases of 'deglobalisation' as illustrated by the 1920s

through to the 1950s, and which offers a more comparatively nuanced picture of places such as Mongolia in the late postsocialist period.

The Friedmans also reject *time–space compression* (also see Harvey 1995; Beck 2015) as a qualitative indicator for differentiating the contemporary phase of globalisation from its precursors: "technological acceleration has occurred quite a few times in the past, so it is difficult to gauge its differential significance today" (Friedman and Friedman 2008:246). Instead, globalisation in their view is regarded as a reoccurring discourse of a cosmopolitan elite that indicates hegemonic crisis. It occurs in periods of decline, which are accompanied by economic, social, and cultural fragmentation and a "vertical polarisation that creates a new 'rootedness' at the bottom and a cosmopolitanisation at the top" (ibid:244). However, new technologies were always accompanied by a rearrangement of communication patterns (Anderson 2006), which altered perceptions of space to such a degree that theorising them as a basal shift in sociality or as a rupture to former modes of social organisation might be justified. This not only shows the limits of globalisation theory by highlighting the political and economic circumstances behind its theorisation and the diversity of local experiences in articulation with the global, but also the possibility of economic and technological reversals, such as those currently seen in Mongolia, and which as I show below have been usefully described in other postsocialist contexts.

Moving Past the 'Post': Conceptualising Change in ('late') Postsocialist Mongolia

Anthropological studies of postsocialism have aptly demonstrated that the tools of ethnographic research are particularly well-suited to capturing polydirectional change. With their focus on the fine-grained and quotidian details of everyday life, anthropological studies have contributed to a unique perspective on the transformations associated with the postsocialist transition, as well as simultaneously drawing attention to its multiple dimensions and trajectories (Berdahl 1999; Borneman 1997). Indeed, perhaps more than any other sub-field postsocialist studies have challenged the linear, teleological thinking implicit within normative conceptualisations of change, emphasising instead the non-linear, divergent, and often reversible processes as they are experienced by people in their everyday lives. Borneman (1997), Hann (1994), and Verdery (1996), for example, have all deconstructed the myth of so-called 'capitalist triumphalism' as it was presupposed to emerge following the transition from socialism. Others have focused on the multiple paths that different postsocialist societies have taken, including the varied responses and polydirectional experiences of postsocialist subjects (Berdahl et al. 2000; De Soto & Anderson 1993; Kideckel 1993; Humphrey 2002; Verdery 1996, 2003). Verdery (1996), in particular, has drawn attention to the Eurocentric and teleological connotations associated with a range of familiar narratives - including 'privatisation', the 'market economy', 'democratisation', 'nationalism', and 'civil society' - demonstrating how their ideological imposition has not translated into real-world experiences. Here there has been a concerted effort by those working in the postsocialist world to illuminate the diverse experiences of the postsocialist transition and 'what comes next', destabilising the assumption that change occurs everywhere in the same way and revealing the complex, contingent, and often fractured experiences of everyday life. As Berdahl (2000:26) describes it, ethnographic work can function as a profound critique of teleological ideology: "exposing the discourse of transition to be both a regime of signs employed to justify the subordination of nations to the imperatives of global trade and finance, and a poorly designed and executed blueprint to bring about a new social order". This is particularly apt for the Mongolian context where, despite rapid economic growth and an overall decline in poverty, the insecurity and precarity of

everyday life - which once was thought to be a transitional phenomenon - has remained for a considerable part of the population. This is particularly true for the Shishged Depression, which is still classified as one of the poorest regions of the country (NSOM 2012).

Postsocialist studies have also destabilised the teleological narrative of History as a linear and unidirectional process by emphasising the enduring continuities between the socialist and postsocialist periods. Kideckel (1993) and Creed (1999), for example, have shown the parallels between certain structures and experiences between collectivisation and decollectivisation, while Lampland (1995) has revealed similarities between socialist and capitalist political-economic practices, including where socialist commodification continues to play a direct role in people's economic strategies and decision-making today. More generally, Verdery (1996) and Humphrey (1995; 2002) have both highlighted the continuities between the socialist and postsocialist periods in a number of social, political, and economic contexts, in turn problematising the notion of a clear and definitive 'break' since the transition.
In more recent years, anthropological studies of postsocialism have become increasingly particularistic, emphasising less the broader socialist/postsocialist transformation and focusing instead on the various responses to the collapse of socialist states. Much as described in the context of Mongolia, such studies have revealed the persistent uncertainties associated with newer postsocialist transformations (Burawoy 2000; Berdahl 1999), providing a necessary corrective to the official accounts that fetishise 'capitalism', 'modernisation', and 'globalisation' as the only possible trajectories of change. These studies have not only rejected the notion of a pre-given 'capitalist and 'modern' future, but have simultaneously problematised the very idea of 'certainty' with regards to people's expectations of change. This has been similarly important for anthropologists working in other regions of nonlinear transformation, most notably in Africa, such as Ferguson's (1999) study of the Zambian Copperbelt. He emphasises the contingent and situated responses to the reverse of 'modernity' while simultaneously refusing to conceptualise 'what comes next' in any teleological terms. In order to explain this non-teleological pattern Ferguson argues that miners' lives in Zambia have been and continue to be characterised by two different ways of life: the 'localist' (emphasising rural and 'traditional' values, behaviors, clothing), and the 'cosmopolitan', which coexist alongside one another rather than as a developmentalist transition (ibid:12-14). Each has existed, he argues, since mining began in the 1930s and each involves a set of ideas and behaviors that are reinforced in the course of daily life. Here all linear assumptions are problematised as neither group is identified with a particular class, ethnic group, or urban position, and can be associated with both rich and poor, educated and uneducated (ibid).

For Ferguson, the way out of the teleology of modernisation is to focus on the flexible actions and ideas of people as they move from one field to another, emphasising what he calls the 'bushes' of diverse forms and relations – rather than oppositions – between them (2001:96). This is analogous to Stephen Jay Gould's (1996:252) notion of the 'full house' of variations outside linear conceptualisations of change, and both form an important part of my own conceptual framework. Indeed, such studies reveal the value of long-term and empirically-grounded anthropological fieldwork. As Mertz writes, it is in situations of instability and uncertainty that "we see anthropology pressed to its core, as the women and men who perform the ethnography find themselves...side-by-side with their subjects, digging down to examine the very constitution of selves, agency and society as it occurs from minute to minute in action and interaction" (2002: 359). Such ethnographic accounts raise the fundamental question of how do people perceive and imagine certainty and what does it mean when this is so radically taken away, as well as highlights the potential dangers for anthropologists to normalise

seemingly 'stable' systems - socialist, capitalist, postsocialist, globalist, or other - as if they were ever-enduring and impossible to move 'in reverse' (ibid: 360). In this regard, anthropological studies of postsocialism demand of us as researchers that we question our own pre-theoretical assumptions of certain phenomena which we, as human beings, also implicitly take for granted. Thus, by living and working with people who have themselves seen the familiar narratives stripped bare, whose 'expectations of the future' are no longer what they seem, we are brought into direct contact with the transience of such narratives and forced to question the very conceptual tools which afford us a sense of disciplinary certainty.

On the one hand, the anthropology of postsocialism has much to offer in terms of understanding how my Mongolian interlocutors have experienced postsocialist change. In particular, the ethnographic literature affords good comparative insight into the non-linear ways in which people have experienced the transition and the importance of destabilising normative concepts such as 'modernisation', 'globalisation', 'marketisation', and 'urbanisation'. At the same time, however, I maintain that there appears an important gap between the existing postsocialist literature and the more recent transformations to have occurred over the last ten to fifteen years since the postsocialist transition (also see Creed 1999). Anthropological studies have until now taken 'postsocialist collapse' and the uncertainty of change as its starting point, while today this starting point is increasingly being called into question as the people with whom we carry out fieldwork no longer have any direct connection to the socialist period and are in the process of encountering new processes of change which appear fundamentally 'beyond postsocialism' (Berdahl 1999). Arriving in Mongolia in 2012, I saw that it was no longer possible to describe people's experiences of postsocialist change solely in terms of the collapse of state institutions, the decollectivisation of the negdels, and the return to a subsistence economy. While the people with whom I lived and worked were still living in the shadow of the socialist state, it was also very much apparent that this shadow was becoming tinged with the hues of an expanding and rampant market economy, as well as corollary processes of change which bore little resemblance to the end of state socialism, including genuine improvements such as a reduction in poverty and new opportunities and livelihood strategies. Here the 'anthropology of decline' which Ferguson and others have so aptly characterised in other parts of the world require modification in order to fully capture the realities of life in what I tentatively call 'late' postsocialist Mongolia. Even in remote areas such as the Shishged everyday life has been transformed since the late 1990s, as people have become firmly connected to broader processes occurring across Mongolia and in other parts of the world. Although these newer processes continue to intersect with presocialist and socialist trajectories, I found it impossible not to reflect on the fact that many of the people with whom I lived and worked were themselves born a whole decade after the collapse of state socialism and for whom 'the transition' was less about the end of socialism and more about the advent of marketisation – yet a version of which that was no less uncertain or precarious. This is something that has been raised in postsocialist studies as well, specifically acknowledging that there is now an entire generation entering adulthood with only the earliest memories of a socialist childhood (Hann 2002; Berdahl et al. 2000). In my fieldwork, people up to their early forties had never lived and worked under socialist conditions, suggesting a new context for analyses of postsocialist studies. Here what I felt to be lacking in much of the existing literature was precisely these newer processes of change, which not only problematised the familiar teleological metanarratives but also the corollary narrative of 'postsocialist collapse'.

In their Introduction to an important reader on postsocialism, Hann, Humphrey, and Verdery (2003) put in question whether or how long the term 'postsocialism' might still be

appropriate. I argue that it is still a useful term but one which requires new theoretical and methodological approaches, such as that offered in this dissertation. After all, the term postsocialism was introduced to counter the neoliberal trajectory of a swift and linear 'transition' to a market economy and democratic institutions, but the recent changes to have intersected with these require new ethnographic and theoretical consideration. Taking my cue from this particular gap, I maintain that the anthropology of postsocialism can benefit from the hermeneutic framework developed below, specifically as it is designed to capture the non-linear and polydirectional experiences of change characteristic of the ('late') postsocialist context and does not presuppose 'what comes next'. More specifically, it can serve as a methodology to move beyond not only the teleological metanarratives of change which presuppose capitalist triumphalism and globalisation, but also avoid reifying the corollary teleology of postsocialist collapse, cultural homogenisation, and loss of tradition. Here I present this hermeneutic not just as a method to problematise modernist teleological metanarratives, but also to push the anthropology of postsocialism 'past the post' and closer to the everyday practical and existential realities of life for people in contemporary postsocialist contexts, emphasising their intrinsic diversity and polydirectionality, their positive and negative experiences of change, the new opportunities and restrictions they face, as well as the ongoing ties between change and continuity. In this way, I hope to present an honest and accurate depiction of life in Mongolia as I encountered it between 2012-3.

Towards an Anthropology of Skill

One day, a few hours prior to leaving the house for school, my mother was adamant that she teach me how to tie my shoelaces. Up until then I had always received some kind of assistance, usually half-tying the laces myself and then having one of my parents finish the task while I observed from above. However, as I would soon be starting primary school and spending long days away from home it was time that I learnt to tie my shoelaces myself. Sitting by the front door I was handed a pair of new leather shoes, which had been recommended as part of my school-uniform. Taking them in my hands I placed my foot inside the hard, unworn material, this being the first time I had ever owned such a formal pair. Wrapping the thin cotton laces awkwardly around my fingers I thought to myself how strange the shoes felt in my hands and against my feet: the leather was unworn and tight, the laces crisp and rather painful. Successfully tying an initial knot, I took the right-hand lace and worked it into a loose bow, struggling to maintain its tautness. With my fingers fumbling, I reached for the opposite lace and inserted its tip into the newly created loop, unsuccessfully trying to grasp the other end. I repeated this again and again while my mother offered a series of verbal instructions: 'hold the lace tighter', 'pull the tip quicker', and 'don't let go'. I remember thinking to myself that 'I will never be able to do this' as the shoes felt entirely separate to my own hands and body; the leather, cotton laces, and plastic soles were entirely different to all the other shoes I had ever worn and felt like foreign objects that I simply could not get used to. Eventually, my repeated failures turned to frustration and I gave up, slinging the shoes to the side of the room.

In an attempt to offer his assistance my father recommended that we try a different approach. Whereas my mother had sat beside me and verbalised her instructions, my father sat behind me with his legs on each side, and grasped the shoes, the laces, and my hands simultaneously in his own. Tying an initial knot and loop, he – or rather we - pushed the left-hand lace through the opposite bow together, my father's and my hands reaching for the tip together at the same time. At first, I continued to falter and once again became flustered. Performing the action with me, however, I gradually came to feel how it should work.

Verbalising his instructions and showing me simultaneously, my mother's initial comments of 'hold tighter', 'pull quicker', and 'don't let go' began to make sense within the context of my own hands and body. Progressively my father loosened his grip and I (we) successfully tied the laces again and again. Following several more attempts, my father eventually released his grip altogether and I started to carry out the task alone; my fingers had become more precise, my bow tauter, and my overall ability had improved with familiarisation and practice.
Of course, it would be apocryphal to state that this is how I learnt to tie my shoelaces, for in reality it took time and perseverance. I wore the shoes more and more as the days, weeks, and months passed by, on some occasions tying the laces successfully while at other times requiring assistance from my one of my parents. Here I came to learn the skill gradually, with practice, and inevitably encountering moments of failure. In the process, I came to experience the new leather shoes as less and less alien to my hands and body, but increasingly familiar and part of my everyday lived-experience. Seeing, touching, and using the shoes on a daily basis, they gradually became no longer objects outside myself but mine and mine only; I grew familiar with the leather and laces, the smell of the black polish, and began to notice previously unseen characteristics such as crevices in the thick plastic sole. With more familiarisation, practice, and an ongoing process of engaged and embodied attention, *this* is how I learnt to tie my shoelaces.

All human beings have experienced similar events to that described above. Perhaps one recalls learning to ride a bicycle for the first time, cook a particular meal, drive a car or, as I came to witness in Mongolia, ride a horse or motorcycle, prepare *aaruul* (a dried cheese), herd animals from one area of pasture to another, or navigate the grasslands to find suitable reception to use a mobile phone. In all such cases we tell ourselves, and are told by others, that we 'learnt to do it' - the narrative begins at the level of the novice who, like a child, is said to try, fail and, with subsequent practice, eventually succeed so that s/he becomes competent or even a master in that particular skill. This explanation is so embedded in our experience of the world, in the way in which we learn to do anything, that it is largely taken-for-granted. Just consider for a moment some of the commonplace expressions we use to characterise our learning of skills, such as 'practice makes perfect' and 'if at first you don't succeed try, try, try again'.

This experience of learning has resulted in a hierarchisation between the so-called high skills of the craftsman, artist, and technical specialist, and the 'low' skills of everyday life, such as preparing the evening meal, planting a flower, typing on a keyboard or, in the context of Mongolia, milking a yak, saddling a horse, or placing objects in their correct position inside the ger. Of course, this is not to suggest an isomorphic relationship between all types of skills, for there are important differences between the skills of the craftsman and those of the domestic cook or typist. At the same time, however, stripped of presuppositions and approached from the perspective of the human capacity to be *enskilled*, such differences are largely one of degree rather than kind. After all, is it really possible to position skills on a scale of rank and order? Is it not the case that, much as with my own learning experience, human beings engaged in even the most mundane tasks are, like the skilled craftsman, initially unable to do them and then, with practice, become competent in their execution? Does this not suggest that we should collapse the distinction between 'high' and 'low' skills, at least for the purpose of understanding the human experience of learning? Are there in fact differences, on a phenomenological level, between the way a competent typist executes his/her skill - gliding his/her fingers over the keyboard and touching the individual keys with precision, accuracy, and 'without thinking' - and the skills of the craftsman whose hands reach, hold, place and cut

his/her work materials in a similarly pre-reflective flow of active engagement? Might we not say that both are masters of particular skills, engaged in particular relationships with their hands, bodies, and the materials and objects in their respective lifeworlds (also see Flitsch 2008:105). Approached from the perspective of the human capacity to be enskilled, might we not say that a significant part of being a human being is actually becoming skilled? Is it not the case that as human beings we spend a large proportion of our lives working our way through the world through our skills, improvising, coping and, in the process, learning a multiplicity of different skills? As Ingold writes, "no society, either today or in the past, has been able to do without skill" (2000:336). Put in these terms might we not say that skill is at least one of the major active dimensions of human being itself, a universal capacity that underpins both the 'high' skills of the craftsman and the 'mundane' tasks of everyday life?

Human beings spend much of their lives managing and giving meaning to their social existence through the learning and embodiment of skills. As Ingold describes, skills are "embodied capacities of action and perception that people learn in the course of handling everyday practical tasks throughout their lives" (2000:108). If this is true then it is arguable that anthropologists have devoted comparatively little attention to this domain of everyday, practical life and learning. As Francois Sigaut notes the anthropology of skill is "nearly virgin research territory" (2002:439), with field studies being even more scarce. Anthropological theorising has proceeded, for the most part, as though skills and society constitute domains of activity that are mutually exclusive: "And this has led analysts to turn a blind eye to skill and, in consequence, to treat every technical action as if it were a purely mechanical performance" (ibid:336). Now it is true that some social thinkers and, more recently, anthropologists, have explored certain dimensions of skill in the context of embodied knowledge and practice. It is useful, therefore, to discuss their contributions and relevant literature, in order to show how they support and/or diverge from the proposed theoretical-interpretative framework developed in this dissertation.

Anthropological Encounters with Skill: Techniques, Craft, and Apprenticeships

Marcel Mauss (1973) was one of the first to offer a veiled reference to skills in his classic account of human embodiment, describing so-called 'techniques of the body' as highly developed actions that embody aspects of a given culture. Although not referring specifically to skill, his work was essential in dramatically widening the scope of recognised techniques to include even the most mundane social practices, such as eating, washing, sitting, running, child-rearing and, we could add in the Mongolian context, horse riding, milking herd animals, setting up a ger, etc. Significantly, Mauss also noted how such techniques were often divided according to gender and class distinctions (for example in the manner of walking or eating), which pointed to differentials of power and issues of contestation in the execution and reproduction of bodily techniques. In Mauss's terms, techniques are adapted to social situations and cultural contexts and expressed through bodily comportment and adjustment, such as hunter-gatherers squatting where no seats are available (1973:73). Here techniques of the body are a kind of 'craft' (Latin: *habilis*) that are learnt processually over the course of one's life and inculcated between the generations in particular cultural contexts. It is in building upon this that Pierre Bourdieu (1977) later developed the idea of the *habitus*, the non-discursive dimension of human culture that bind people together into particular groups, including unspoken habits and patterns of behaviour, as well as styles and skills in body techniques. Although also not explicitly referring to skills per se, Bourdieu indirectly emphasised their importance in social practice: in his terms, human beings exhibit their own "practical mastery

of the symbolism of social action – tact, dexterity, and savoir-fair" (1977:10). Preceding later accounts of skill as having both reproductive and imaginative/transformative components, *habitus* highlighted the dynamic element of human practice, "the strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations" (ibid).

Following the development of Bourdieu's practice-theory and ethnomethodological approaches in sociology from the 1970s (Ortner 1984), more anthropological and ethnographic accounts of skill began to emerge in the late 1990s and have continued in the 2000s. Most of these have focused on the learning of craft skills in particular cultural contexts and prioritised apprenticeships as a new field for conducting in-situ ethnographic fieldwork. Jean Lave, for example, was one of the first to incorporate a deeply immersive apprenticeship as part of her ethnographic fieldwork. Through important publications (Lave & Chaiklin 1993; (Lave & Wenger 1991), she offered a formative exposition of the potentialities of the anthropology of skill, seeing skills not just as a locus of cultural transmission but as a way of challenging some of the key presuppositions in anthropological theory and wider conceptualisations of academic knowledge. In her most recent ethnography (2011), Lave interweaves analysis of the process of apprenticeship among Vai and Gola tailors in Liberia with reflections on the evolution of her own research on those tailors beggining in the late 1970s, providing both a detailed account of her apprenticeship and an insightful overview of thirty years of changes in the empirical and theoretical facets of ethnographic practice. Here Lave uses skill as a means of probing some of the major questions within anthropology and ethnographic fieldwork: How is it that fieldwork and social theoretical inquiry shape each other, in practice? What does it mean to take a critical stance as a researcher? And what is involved in making a break from one theoretical problematic to another, starting from the very theory (positivist, empiricist, vernacular) that the field research was intended to challenge and moving towards a quite different theoretical problematic, a relational theory of social practice? Responding to these questions, she follows processes of changing practice amongst her West-African interlocutor-apprentice tailors, and of her own ongoing apprenticeship as well.

Trevor Marchand (2008; 2010; 2013) has also analysed skills in the context of apprenticeships, as a model of education that both teaches technical skills and provides the grounding for personal formation and anthropological enquiry. His research is based on long-term fieldwork with minaret builders in Yemen, mud masons in Mali, and fine-woodwork trainees in London. Through these case studies of on-site learning and practice, he develops an expanded notion of knowledge that exceeds propositional thinking and language and centrally includes the body and skilled performance. According to Marchand, crafts – like sport, dance, and other skilled physical activities – are largely communicated, understood, and negotiated between practitioners without words, and learning is achieved through observation, mimesis, and repeated exercise. In this way, he emphasises the need for an interdisciplinary study of skills and understanding from the body, and suggests a way forward by drawing on linguistic theory and recent neurological findings (also see Downey 2005). More broadly, he shows how a working apprenticeship can serve as a microcosm of almost every affirming principle of human life, a conservatory for the great existential struggle of people which, unfortunately, the standardisation of education [in the West] often fails to answer.

Anna Portisch (2009; 2010) also makes apprenticeship the focus of her anthropological research on skill. Portisch lived and worked for one year among Kazakh carpet producers in Mongolia and emphasises similar aspects of the training process to those pointed out by Lave, particularly the linkage between practice and reflection. As she remarks, "By learning the craft myself, I was gradually able to engage other women in more meaningful conversations and

exchanges by virtue of sharing a set of abilities and activities with them" (2010:65). Here craft skills are not fixed, but change and develop constantly throughout the lives of practitioners. In learning technique, Kazakh women also importantly learn how to assess their work-in-progress and to make adjustments. Portisch illustrates that processes of evaluation and adjustment are continual and conscious, thereby challenging a central tenet of practice-theory: namely, that mastered subjects execute their skills unreflectively. Her ethnography shows how design and form emerge together dialogically *in* the practice of making. The production of decorative domestic textiles, however, is just one activity in the constellation of household chores that women attend to, and craft learning is thoroughly integrated with one's broader social formation as an active, productive member of the family and community (also see Froerer and Portisch 2012).

This relationship between skill and social formation is carefully developed by Thorsten Gieser (2008; 2014), who offers a more theoretical articulation of skill via human emotion and empathy. He notes, following Ingold (2000), that differences in cultural knowledge are more a matter of variation in embodied skills than in discursive knowledge. These skills develop through practitioners' engagement with their environment and in situated social relationships. In order to 'discover' for themselves what is taken for granted for experienced practitioners, they have to 'fine-tune' their perception through observation and imitation. But, Gieser (2008) asks, how do observations and imitations of others' movements actually transfer into shifts in one's own perception? He proposes the answer lies in empathy: when one observes and imitates in a process of learning, one enters into an empathic relationship with a skilled practitioner. Through synchronisation of intentions and movements, it is centrally emotions which spread over and change the practitioners' perception accordingly. Here Gieser describes how learning through apprenticeship works through empathy to show how the imitation of movements along with their intentions, and especially their emotions, leads to the perception of merging between two beings and thus to the 'discovery' of cultural knowledge.

Edward Simpson is another anthropologist who has been "struck by the parallels between anthropological fieldwork and apprenticeship" (2006:51). Based on fieldwork among shipbuilders in Gujarat, Western India, he describes how apprentices spend years in ship construction before they eventually become sailors on the very ships they build, at which point a new cycle of learning begins for them. Simpson's ethnographic observations point to the disciplinary nature of apprenticeship, which not only forms minds and bodies, but also shapes "dispositions towards tradition, religion, and politics" (ibid: 153). In describing apprenticeship as a collective social activity that reproduces and, at the same time, reflects the contradictions of society, Simpson attempts to understand how apprentices perceive the process of learning within particular social and stratified contexts. To do so, he refers to Marchand, who observes that sites of apprenticeship and technical learning always serve as arenas for "competing masculinities and femininities, and a forum for assertions of ethnicity and race, as well as social class" (2010:9).

This focus on the cultural politics of craft, apprenticeship, and tradition are taken up by Michael Herzfeld (2003) in his account of Cretan artisans. His is a critical study of tradition, not merely as an ornament of local and national heritage, but also as a millstone around the necks of those who are condemned to produce it. Herzfeld's ethnography captures a rich variety of small-town artisans' workshops to show how apprentices are systematically thwarted into learning by stealth and guile. In particular, it is their harsh training which reinforces a stereotype of artisans as rude and uncultured. Moreover, the same stereotypes that marginalise artisans locally also operate to marginalise Cretans within the wider Greek nation

and Greece itself within the international community. What Herzfeld identifies as "the global hierarchy of value" (ibid: 12-3) thus frames the nation's ancient monuments and traditional handicrafts as evidence of incurable 'backwardness'.

Now despite the value and importance of these more recent theoretical and ethnographic engagements with skill, I argue that Sigaut is still right to point out the relative lack of attention to skills as a central focus of anthropological analysis. It is noteworthy that the term does not feature in any dictionaries of anthropology or in generalised encyclopaedic overviews of the discipline. This could possibly be explained by historical lag of theoretical concepts, but also, by the rather specific focus of previous anthropologies of skill. While the hitherto mentioned analyses of craft making and apprenticeships are highly useful for elucidating the relationship between embodied knowledge, social learning, and generational expertise – and shall be drawn upon at various points throughout this dissertation - it is arguable that their relatively narrow focus on particularly 'high' crafts has to some extent limited the wider appreciation of skill as a universal feature of human *being*, which I have been discussing here. In this regard, they have unwittingly reproduced the hierarchisation between the so-called 'high' skills of the craftsman, artist, and technical specialist, and the 'low' skills of everyday life. And in the process, and perhaps more importantly, there has been a relative failure to explicitly theorise the loss and transformation of those everyday skills, their contestation in contexts of changing circumstances, as well as how they come to be transposed from one context to another in situations of social and cultural change.

This is something similarly noted by Mark Harris (2005; 2007) who sees much of the existing literature on skills as limited by their focus on a small number of activities such as craftwork, a weak contextualisation in relations of power and history, and a homogenisation of practice. He argues for greater attention to the changes and historicity of skills and, in his work of floodplain fisher people in the Amazon, posits a perspective of skills as differentiated and historicised, understood as composite and improvised abilities made up of historically-constituted capacities (also see Eyferth 2009). Importantly, Harris argues that the way in which skills are reinvented by each generation depends on the particular circumstances they confront, adding a crucial temporal lens. Thus, he describes the transformation of fishing skills over time and conceptualises people's improvisational ability as having roots in the way Amerindians and poor colonists adapted to changes in the colonial economy.

This historical consideration of skills is also taken up by Cristina Grasseni (2009) in her anthropological study of dairy farming, cattle-breeding, and cheese-making Italian farmers at the foot of the Alps. Here Grasseni reveals complex negotiations of tradition *and* modernity by farmers who combine local, inter-generationally transmitted skills, practices, and aesthetics with an acute – and necessary – sense of entrepreneurship and innovation. This is shown, for example, in farmers "promoting their own 'local' (mainly dairy) products, selling them on international markets precisely thanks to their association with the image of the untouched and unspoilt beauty of the Alpine landscape" (2009:63). Traditional skills and local products – or rather their commodified versions – and participation in larger, European and global markets, thus turn out not to be incompatible alternatives but complementary parts of the strategies employed by local farmers (ibid: 177). While many people feel that the impact of technology and the pressure of the market economy leads to a loss of biodiversity, authenticity, and cultural diversity, affecting animal husbandry, local food production, social networks and traditions, Grasseni shows the flexibility of skills and the creative capacity to engage with such changes. By focusing on the many transformations within skilled practice and cultural heritage, she is able to localise the impact of wider processes at the level of everyday bodily skills,

focusing on the ways in which this also means, quite literally, changing one's *vision* of locality: of the landscape, of local products, and of local animals (2009:183-188). Put differently, these Alpine farmers meet changing market conditions through the adaptability of their skills and from their particular cultural location and distinctive habitus.

The works of Harris and Grasseni point to a deeper consideration of skill in contexts of social, economic, and political change that shall form an important part of my own theoretical-hermeneutic framework. Along with Portisch (2012), Gieser (2014), and Simpson (2006), they also emphasise the relationship between skills - as deeply meaningful practices - and people's own existential sense of self and identity, suggesting that a loss or transformation of such skills plays an important role in changing experiences of personhood. This relationship between skill and existential security – as well as the impact of change on everyday skills – will form a major component of this dissertation and of my own theoretical framework developed below. What I am calling for is a wider approach to skill which does not priortise the high skills of craft production but takes as its starting point the universal human capacity to be enskilled. After all, if it is true that human beings spend the majority of their lives engaged in practice rather than reflection, in activity rather than inactivity, and in engagement rather than disengagement – and if living skilfully is an important aspect of being human - then it suggests that we require an anthropology that begins precisely here, at this level of everyday, practical skill and learning. In this way, I follow Tim Ingold's widely acknowledged call for an anthropology that transcends culture, art, and technology and focuses on the subject of skills *at large* (Ingold 2000; 2001; 2010 – my emphasis).

Now like all beginnings it is useful to start with a question, or rather, a series of questions, that together might frame the conceptual apparatus which make up this dissertation. What is 'learning to do something' and 'acquiring a skill'? What takes place when we move from novice to accomplished practitioner? How is it that we learn skills, perform tasks, and what goes on during the minutes, hours, days, months, and years when we become so familiar with a particular skill that we 'just do it' without conscious reflection? How is it, for example, that I can now tie my shoelaces literally 'without thinking'? How did I come to master this skill to such an extent and what does it mean that when I execute it today my hands, body, shoes, and laces are experienced by me as fundamentally intertwined? Perhaps more important is what are the implications of this for anthropology? What does it mean, for example, that human beings learn in *this* way; coming to embody and execute skills 'without thinking'? At the same time, what are the implications for interpreting cultural difference, specifically when we direct our attention to societies other than our own? How do different people learn, envision, and embody skills and how might we approach their experience of the world from the vantage point of skilled practice?

Particularly in the context of the contemporary era, where processes of social, economic, and political change, as well as the effects of late-capitalism and global transformation, are at the forefront of anthropological concerns, what might an anthropology of skill offer in understanding such processes? To presage one of the dominant threads running through this dissertation: what are the implications that a person, after becoming accomplished in a particular set of skills, is forced into a situation where those skills are no longer applicable? How does this person lose or forget certain skills and then go about re-embodying, re-inventing, and re-imagining new skills in the process? What are the existential effects of losing long-term and meaningful skills and how might we track and trace the transposition of skills at the level of personhood as people attempt to rebuild their lives? To put this in more general terms: what would an anthropology of skill look like in a context of social, economic, and

political change such as postsocialist Mongolia? What might a consideration of skill tell us about how people such as my friends and interlocutors in the Shishged experience postsocialist change? In short, what can an anthropology of skill really do?

Ingold's Ecology of Practice

I argue that postsocialist change can be better understood from the perspective of skilled practice. More specifically, I claim that by extending Ingold's concept of enskilment – and developing a processual and polydirectional understanding of skill - one is afforded a useful interpretative lens for elucidating the polydirectional experience of change characteristic of late postsocialist Mongolia. For Ingold, the human person is, before anything else, a being-in-the-world, one that is caught within the ebb and flow of the quotidian. Here human beings are conceived as "immersed from the start, like other creatures, in an active, practical, and perceptual engagement with the constituents of the dwelt-in world" (2000:42). As a result, and, following in the phenomenological tradition, 'meaning', rather than being attributed to the world, is rather generated through practical engagement: "The world is, after all, not something apart from us, but the place in which we live, and it is because we are actively involved with it that it comes into being meaningful" (ibid; also see Willerslev 2007; Grasseni 2007; Harris 2007). Combined with this phenomenological approach, Ingold draws upon ecological psychology and its proposition that perceptual activity consists, not in the operation of the mind upon the body, but in the intentional movement of the whole being (indissolubly body and mind) in its environment. As Ingold puts it: "I start from the proposition that persons endure through a continuous intercourse with their environments. This intercourse is the life process" (2000:166). Developed specifically in opposition to cognitive science, which assumes a static perceiver reconstructing 'data' in terms of pre-existing schemata or mental representations, Ingold follows James Gibson (2014) in re-embedding perception within the practical contexts of people's ongoing engagement with their environments, substituting the mind-body, culture-nature dualisms with an understanding that proceeds from a notion of the mutualism of person and environment. As Ingold puts it:

> Contrary to the axioms of cognitive anthropology, the communion of experience that lies at the heart of sociality does not depend upon the organisation of sensory data, initially private to the perceiver, in terms of an objective system of collective representations. Rather, sociality is given from the start, *prior* to the objectification of experience in cultural categories, in the direct, perceptual involvement of fellow participants in a shared environment (2000:167).

It is on the basis this *ecology of practice* that Ingold develops his conceptualisation of skill, which he defines as "the capabilities of action and perception of the organism-person, indissolubly body and mind, in a richly structured environment" (2000:40). Here skill is not regarded simply as a 'technique of the body', which was the position famously advocated by Mauss (1973) and, before him, Plato (Ingold 2000:168). Mauss and Plato ultimately followed the Cartesian division by separating the body as an object, a separation which, as Merleau-Ponty (1962) has shown, is untenable. Motility, Merleau-Ponty explains, "is not, as it were, a handmaid of consciousness, transporting the body to that point in space of which we have formed a representation beforehand" (1962:139). "Consciousness", he writes, "is in the first place not a matter of 'I think but of I can'. Consciousness is a 'being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body'" (ibid:137). To understand the true nature of skill, Ingold argues, we must "restore the human organism to the original context of its active engagement with the constituents of its surroundings" (2000:198). To this end, Ingold turns to Gregory Bateson for

inspiration, the latter arguing, by way of his example of the skilled woodsman felling a tree, that we need to consider the dynamics of the entire man-axe-tree system (1972:433), a system that is as much mental as physical. Here skill exists not as a property of the body but "as part of a dynamic system in which the body actively engages with the affordances of its surroundings, necessarily encompassing the mental, physiological, and environmental, the total field of relations constituted by the presence of the organism-person" (Ingold 2000:49).

Now it is on the basis of this that Ingold discusses the transmission of skills between people and between the generations. Traditional models of social learning posit that cultural transmission occurs as a process of imprinting, in which so-called 'rules' and 'representations' are transferred from one person to another and thus between the generations. Here the commonplace assumption is that people learn by watching the activity of others and absorbing the rules of practical execution 'in the mind', which then come to be 'passed on' from one person – and from one generation – to another. As Maureen Mackenzie describes this approach: "observation is followed by internalisation and then mimesis" (1991:100). As Ingold notes (2000:36), however, this reproduces the Cartesian dichotomy, specifically as it assumes a division between the body and the mind, with the latter somehow 'processing' the information it receives while the person is observing the activity of the other. In fact, Ingold (ibid) remarks, skills cannot be reduced to mere formulae learnt 'in the mind' – as internal, 'mental representations' – but rather, are generated processually by the person in articulation with his or her own active, perceptual engagement with his/her surroundings: what Ingold terms *enskilment* (ibid:36). In other words, skills are not learnt by simply 'reproducing' them, but rather, by the person re-learning them 'new' for themselves, coordinating their own bodily movements through practice and training, and adjusting them in relation to the specific context in which they are situated. For the novice's observation of accomplished practitioners is not detached from, but grounded in, his/her own active, perceptual learning. It is for this reason why, Ingold remarks, after learning a particular skill, "a person experiences a sense of 'getting it' and 'having the feel' for the practice" (ibid: 37).

This has important implications for anthropological approaches to social and cultural life in general, specifically as it shows how knowledge (and thus 'culture') are not transmitted across the generations as a ready-made corpus of information, but rather, undergoes continual regeneration in the contexts of people's practical engagement with their environments. As Ingold puts it: "[T]he contribution that each generation makes to the next lies in shaping the contexts - or providing the scaffolding - within which people develop their own understandings of the social and cultural world" (2000:37; also see Lave & Wenger 1998; Rogoff 2008; Palsson 1994; Chaiklin and Lave 1996). From this perspective, what we are used to calling cultural variation actually consists, in the first place, of variations in skills. And in this process, each generation contributes to the next not by handing on a corpus of representations, but by introducing novices into contexts in which they must learn for themselves in articulation with the observation of others. This is what Gibson (2014: 254) called an "education of attention".

Skill and the Polydirectional Experience of Postsocialist Change

Now while Ingold's conceptualisation of skill provides much inspiration for thought, it is arguable that it remains a largely unidirectional model. That is to say, while it usefully describes the re/production of skills between people and between the generations – and can be aptly applied to elucidate contexts of social learning such as milking herd animals, riding a motorcycle, and tying one's shoelaces – it does not however account for the transformation of skills, the loss or forgetting of skills, the power relations behind the production or contestation

of skills, or the changing political-economic contexts in which skills come to be taught and learnt. In this regard, while Ingold's conceptualisation is designed to restore the human person to the context of their active engagement with the constituents of their surroundings, it fails to consider the transformation of these constituents in contexts of change, such as when people move from a rural area to the city, acquire a new technology such as a mobile phone, or engage in trade in the new market economy. In short, Ingold's approach only tells one side of the enskilment story.

Building upon this, I argue that the concept of enskilment can be extended in a polydirectional way – specifically to include not only the transmission of skills reproduced between the generations, but also new skills learnt in articulation with change, as well as skills that are lost, forgotten, transformed, adapted, and transposed in relation to varying contexts of social, economic, and political transformation. After all, if skills are not transmitted via the 'passing on' of a corpus of rules and representations ('in the mind'), but rather, regrown by people anew in the process of their own cumulative learning, then it goes to suggest that people will inevitably regrow their skills *in articulation with* the changing contexts in which they happen to be situated. From this perspective, skills are intrinsically related to social change, for when the contexts surrounding the teaching and learning of skills change then their skills will themselves be 'regrown' in new and different ways: while some skills will be re/produced, new skills might come to be demanded, old skills may be lost, forgotten, or rendered obsolete, and pre-existing skills might be transposed from one context to another. Here what we call 'social change' is fundamentally caught up in the transformation of people's engagements with the affordances of their environments, and when these environments change then the affordances presented to them change in turn. In other words, in a context of change there is a transformation at the level of skilled practice, which we as anthropologists can observe to better elucidate people's practical experiences and engagements with such change. This is something which can be illustrated through an ethnographic example. Here I use Mark Harris's description of social change and generational difference amongst flood-plain dwellers in the Amazon. As Harris describes, in this context the issue of generational difference is also one of skill:

> Those fishermen who learnt to fish before relatively cheap nylon monofilament nets were introduced in the 1950s, were practiced in using less predatorial methods, such as hand lines, cotton hand-cast nets, rods, trot lines, bows and arrows, traps and harpoons. The senior generation did not adopt the newer and potentially more effective techniques associated with net fishing. They told me they could not get used to fishing with nets in them open river or lake, it was too different and it devalued their skills as fisherman. The younger fishermen only occasionally use the older techniques. The fish exporting factory rewards volume of catch not individual skill (2005:209).

Here Harris alludes to two important points: first, that certain kinds of skills change with seniority, whereby older people want to be respected and remembered for a particular ability; and second, the changing contexts which each generation faces, with fishing skills not just 'passed down' between senior to junior kin but re-embodied in relation to the new social and economic demands in which the younger generation find themselves (also see Eyferth 2009; Jaros 2008). Thus, these skills are a way of knowing since they offer a form of 'certainty' within the world. Ribeirinho survival depends on the successful implementation and adaptation of certain skills to changing market demands (2005:207). This is precisely the extension of Ingold's perspective I am proposing, whereby 'change' occurs from within the interplay between people's immediate social and environmental relationships, relationships which, of course, are never static, and which demand of people that they learn new skills when entering new contexts of relational activity, but which can also result in the transformation and/or loss

of skills at the same time, such as the younger fishermen no longer using 'old' techniques and materials. Here there is an allusion to the fact that when the context surrounding the teaching and learning of skills change then the skills that constitute that activity are regrown in different ways: new skills are learnt, old skills are lost, some skills are contested, and other skills are transposed from one context to another.

In order to articulate this, I propose an extension of Ingold's theoretical-interpretative terminology: thus, accompanying the term 'enskilment' I suggest the inverted concept of *deskilment*, to describe the processual loss or forgetting of skills in articulation with processes of change. At the same time, I propose the related term *transposition* of skills, defined as the movement of a skill from one context to another. In this way, I not only extend the conceptualisation of skill to include a consideration of its polydirectional trajectories, but also, I challenge the implicit teleologies inherent within normative conceptualisations of change, for here there is no presumption of a particular 'direction' but a purposeful attentiveness to the full diversity of co-existing variations (also see Ferguson 1999). I suggest that this polydirectional terminology can be useful in getting beyond the linear and teleological thinking that remains embedded in normative conceptualisations, giving full weight to the depth of co-existing variations as they are experienced by people themselves or, in terms of what Gould (1996) describes as, the 'full house' of variations. This extended conceptualisation can be usefully applied to the context of postsocialist Mongolia. Approached from the perspective of polydirectional skills we are better positioned to map the multiple changes that people in Mongolia have been living through in nonlinear and non-teleological ways, taking seriously the range of variation in everyday social life. More specifically, I argue that by observing the polydirectional transformation of skills in articulation with people's changing engagements with the constituents of their (also changing) environments, then we are afforded a useful lens for elucidating the polydirectional experience of change characteristic of the late postsocialist context. Here the anthropology of skill is widened to become what I call a political-economy of skill, an analytic framework that accounts for the complex relations of interdependence between minds and bodies - as explored so fruitfully in earlier accounts of craft and apprenticeship - but placed more explicitly within a broader context of the changing environments in which people are situated. This approach finds inspiration from the expanding literature at the intersection between phenomenology, practice theory, and embodiment, but incorporates a polydirectional focus of change, contestation, and uncertainty, such as that I encountered in late postsocialist Mongolia. As I will show, this approach allows us to consider peoples experiences of change from the perspective of everyday skills, outside the linear and teleological metanarratives described above, and it is this which I apply to my analysis of various contexts of life as I encountered them during my fieldwork.

Fieldwork in Mongolia

The fieldwork upon which this dissertation is based was carried out primarily in the Shishged Depression of Khövsgöl province (*aimag*), Northern Mongolia, between 2012-2013. The Shishged Depression is located west of Khövsgöl *Nuur* - Mongolia's largest freshwater lake - southeast of Russia's Tuvan Autonomous Republic. The area is surrounded by the Sayan and Khordil Sar'dag Mountains (2500 – 3500 metres), approximately 1000km away from Mongolia's national capital, Ulaanbaatar, and some 200km away from the provincial capital, Mörön. The landscape of the Shishged is somewhat unique in Mongolia (Pedersen 2011:9), consisting of one-third grassland and two-thirds taiga. The actual Depression is a flat basin

where the large majority of people live and where households engage in herding. Typical winter temperatures reach below -30º C, while in summer temperatures often reach 35º C.

My fieldwork was carried out primarily with communities of Darhad people, who consist of 18,000 herders, hunters, and village-dwellers. The origins of the Darhad are not entirely clear, though it is likely they comprise a mix of Mongolian and other ethnic groupings (Pedersen 2011:14). The Shishged has always occupied a particular position in the Mongolian cosmo-political imaginary. As Pedersen notes, "For centuries, if not millennia, the region and its indigenous inhabitants have been known as a destitute, barbarian, primitive, and shamanic backwater whose fate was always to hover at the edge of civilisation" (2011:10). By the rise of the Mongolian Empire in the thirteenth century the Shishged was not governed by any single central authority (ibid). As Pedersen hypothesises, "It is reasonable to assume that...for nearly four hundred years, until the final defeat of the Jungar (Oirat) federation by the Qing or Manchu Empire in 1757, the Shishged was caught in endlessly shifting alliances and antagonisms between different polities" (ibid:12). In the mid-eighteenth century, the Shishged saw the establishment of the Darhad Ih Shav' (Darhad Great Ecclesiastical Estate), which was part of Mongolia's Buddhist Church under the authority of the Jebtsundamba Khutuktu. The Ecclesiastical Estate came to define the Darhads as a homogenous group of ecclesial subjects (*shabinar*), corresponding to a bounded territory of land (Pedersen 2011:12-3). It was this Ecclesiastical Estate that established Buddhism in the region, which had long been a centre of shamanism (ibid).

The establishment of the Darhad Ih Shav' had a profound impact on Shishged social life. Importantly for the purposes of the present discussion, the transformation, much like the establishment of the collectives in the middle of the twentieth century, actually laid the foundations for the reproduction of specific skills. One reason for this was that despite being integrated into the Darhad Ih Shav', the Darhad were able to maintain the practices of herding and hunting in a relatively undisturbed fashion, something which allowed for the embodiment of knowledge and skills between the generations. The impact of the Darhad Ih Shav' also applied to Darhad shamanism (*Darhadyn boo morgol*) (Pedersen 2011:13). Most notably, the ecclesiastical estate allowed Buddhism to consolidate its power in the region, which caused complications for local shamans (ibid:13). As Pedersen writes, "This did not come about without a fight. Darhad lore is full of narratives about the conflicts between Buddhist lamas and local shamans at the time" (ibid). However, shamanism and Buddhism coexisted side-by-side, giving rise to the commonplace conception that Darhad people consist of a 'black side' (Shamanist) and a 'yellow side' (Buddhist) respectively (Pedersen 2011:116; Hangartner 2006). Though, as Pedersen notes, "the presence…of the country's Biggest Buddhist ecclesiastical estate did have the effect of pushing the shamans and their occult objects of worship farther toward and into the forest. Thus…most Darhad shamanic spirits (*ongod*) are today found in or around the edge of the taiga, while the region's flat steppe zone is dominated by Buddhist (or Buddhist-influenced) spiritual entities such as mountain spirits (*gazryn ezed*)" (2011:13). This is something explored in Chapter 4 in the context of Darhad hunting.

Mongolia is divided into twenty-one provinces or *aimags*, each of which is subdivided into a number of *sums* and *bags*. Each sum (district) is subdivided into a number of bags, which exist largely to organise herding households within each sum. Each aimag has an administrative centre and each sum has a district centre (*sumin tov*). Mörön is the administrative capital of Khövsgöl aimag, the largest province in Northern Mongolia. Ulaan Uul is a sum of Khövsgöl province. It includes a district centre ('Ulaan Uul') and a surrounding area of mixed forest-steppe. In 2012, the total population of Khövsgöl aimag was 124,000, while the district centre

(Ulaan Uul) had approximately 1000 residents (Khövsgöl Statistical Yearbook 2012; NSOM 2001; Cuolombe & Altankhuyag 2012). Of the 18,000 Darhad residing in Khövsgöl province, around 12,000 were in 2012 engaged in the herding economy. Some of these households moved relatively long distances of approximately 80-100km between summer and winter pastures, while others herded their animals in the vicinity of regional centres, moving just 10-20km (Khövsgöl Statistical Yearbook 2012; National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2009). A large proportion of Darhad men are also avid hunters and spend extended periods of time out in the taiga, which is an important part of people's ontological presuppositions and perceptions of the environment. Darhad village dwellers are generally engaged in non-herding employment such as informal trading, while a substantial number are officially registered as unemployed. Importantly, however, the large majority of village dwellers also own animals that are tended to by herder family members, thus affording subsistence in the form of milk and meat and maintaining a direct connection to the herding economy. Importantly, these village dwellers are also highly mobile in a number of ways. During the summer season, many travel to the grasslands to stay with herding family members and to work part time as herders themselves, which has important implications for the transposition of skills. Many others move around regularly both within the province and even to Ulaanbaatar, to seek out informal work, engage in trade, or to stay with friends and family members. Many Darhad households own wooden dwellings (see Figure 22.) on the grasslands which, although sedentary, are characterised by a high degree of internal mobility: they house different people in different seasons from a wide network of friends and families, and are also left unoccupied for long periods of time as people move between different kinds of work and lifestyle. A smaller number of Darhad also reside in the provincial capital, Mörön, but the predominant Darhad regions remain the three districts (*sums*) of Ulaan Uul, Renchinlkhümbe, and Tsagaan-Nuur.

Throughout my fieldwork I travelled by horseback, motorcycle, and jeep between the three sums of Ulaan Uul, Renchinlkhümbe, and Tsagaan-Nuur, visiting a broad spectrum of households including highly mobile families who travelled up to 100km between summer and winter pastures, relatively mobile families who moved 20-30km, as well as more sedentary families who remained more or less permanent in regional centres. I also carried out fieldwork inside the taiga with groups of Darhad hunters, with trans-frontier traders travelling between the Shishged and Zamyn-Üüd/Erlian – the busiest trans-frontier point between Mongolia and China - as well as with recent migrants to the ger-districts of Ulaanbaatar. Maintaining a high degree of mobility was a fundamental aspect of my fieldwork as it correlated with the movements of people at different times of the year and in varying social and economic contexts. It is important to recognise that although herding dominated the day-to-day lives of most Darhad in the Shishged – including indirectly the 6000 village-dwellers – it was impossible to demarcate the 'herding' from the 'non-herding' populations, specifically because of the web of relations that cut across both mobile and sedentary lifestyles, rural and urban divisions, as well as formal and informal employment. For example, it was commonplace for children to spend part of the year in sum centres where they attended boarding school and part of the year living with their families out on the grasslands. At the same time, it was common for village-dwellers to spend at least some of the year living on the pastures, just as mobile herders spent time living in regional centres. In this regard, even those village-dwellers and rural residents who live in sedentary dwellings should be seen as partly nomadic, moving between different kinds of residence and lifestyle at different times and seasons. This is somewhat typical of postsocialist contexts where social and economic uncertainty inculcates a high degree of flexibility in seeking out opportunities for survival (Hann 2002). It is, however,

more prominent in the Mongolian case given the long history of nomadism and the fluid connections between the mobile and sedentary lifeworlds.

As shall be shown, this flexibility between landscapes, sedentary and mobile housing, and forms of work is an important part of my conceptualisation of skill, as maintaining old skills, learning new skills, and transposing existing skills from one context to another are important elements of how people experience the postsocialist transition. Throughout my fieldwork people would not only congregate near the three main Darhad settlements at specific points during the year - such as during *Tsaagan sar*, or Mongolian New Year, and the annual Naadam Festival - but would also move regularly between the Shishged and the taiga, the Shishged and the capital city, as well as the Mongolian-Chinese border. These movements were representative of people's experiences of life in the postsocialist context and tracing and tracking them at different times of the year was central to my own conceptual deconstruction of the normative assumptions associated with 'herders' in contemporary Mongolia.

The ethnographic material which comprises the dissertation is presented through the prism of a number of key households and individuals with whom I spent the majority of my time. This included Batukhan's household who, together with Batukhan's parents - Dogsomjav and Narantuya – form an extended herding household (*khot-ail*); Batukhan's younger brother – Davanjaam - and his own family who live more sedentary lives in close proximity to the regional centre; as well as with his old school friend – Davaadorj - who is an expert hunter and who introduced me to taiga based hunting through which I explored Darhad ontological presuppositions of the environment. In total, I spent seven months of my fieldwork (over the course of an entire year) with Batukhan's household and his wider social network, including periods of time with Davanjaam's and Davaadorj's households. Separate to this I spent a total of two months with informal traders – notably Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg – and their wider social network, travelling between the Shishged and the Mongolian-Chinese border, and three months with Baatar and Gogi – who gave up the herding lifestyle and moved to Ulaanbaatar.

I maintain that presenting my ethnography through the prism of these households and individuals is heuristically important as it allows for a more intimate characterisation, and to better capture the processuality of enskilment and deskilment over the course of people's lives. Here I support the notion that even though the idea of the individual subject remains intellectually unfashionable in much contemporary anthropology (Jackson 2005; Abu Lughod 2000; Csordas 2004), a focus on individual lives can and should be emphasised if only to remind us that life is not lived at the abstract level of analysis (in 'societies' or 'cultures') but in the practical moments of everyday lifeworlds (also see Desjarlais 2003; Jackson 2005; Turner & Bruuner 1986; Kleinman & Kleinman 1997; Throop 2002, 2010). This is of particular relevance for observing enskilment and deskilment because it is individual people who learn and embody skills, and it is the everyday relationships between people – such as fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, and grandparents and grandchildren – through which skills come to be taught and learnt, as well as lost, disrupted, transposed, and transformed in contexts of change. By presenting my ethnographic material in this way I demarcate what Lave and Wenger (1998) call 'communities of practice': social groups where skills can be observed in their making and described ethnographically in the social contexts of their teaching and learning, showing how they are intertwined with peoples' own construction of culturally acceptable forms of social identity and expression. As Cristina Grasseni (2009) writes, a community of practice provides a social context within which to locate apprenticeship as a process of 'education of attention' (Ingold 2000:156; also see Coy 1989) that shapes specific skills of relation, cognition, and perception. Approaching my interlocutors from this

perspective allows me to describe the enskilment and deskilment of different people at different times of the year and in relation to the transforming seasons, adopting an ethnographic style that is intentionally narrative-driven to elucidate the human and non-human contexts in which skills are generated and how they intersect with the changes brought about by the postsocialist transition. Also embedded here is an account of my own ethnographer-enskilment in which I describe my prior skills and knowledge of Mongolian life and how, through long-term fieldwork, these came to be displaced by those of my interlocutors. Thus, I present examples of my own embodied-learning which, over the course of many months, sedimented as skilled practice, in turn emphasising the transformative capacity of ethnographic fieldwork and the practical foundations of generating ethnographic knowledge (also see Portisch 2010; Grasseni 2009).

Outline of the Dissertation

The following chapters explore different dimensions of late postsocialist change in Northern Mongolia. Chapter 1 introduces the herding lifeworld and lays the foundations for the broader unfolding of the dissertation, providing an ethnographic account of the most fundamental aspects of herding life which shall be referenced at various points in the subsequent chapters. In the process, I show how these various aspects come to be taught and learnt between the generations through the informal apprenticeships within herding households and through the intimate relations between people and their herd animals. Chapter 2 describes how herding life has intersected with the collapse of state socialism and the return to a subsistence economy, as well as some of the corollary changes associated with the postsocialist transition such as the advent of marketisation and shifting relations between the mobile and settled sections of rural life. Here I show how these changes have manifested at the level of skilled practice and how they are experienced by herders in polydirectional ways as intertwined with continuities in herding life. In the process, I problematise the normative assumption that change occurs as a linear process from 'tradition' to 'modernity', which intersects with a presupposition of a teleological conceptualisation of temporality, emphasising instead the non-linear experiences of herders themselves, the mutual co-existence between continuity and change, as well as the permeable divisions between the presocialist, socialist, and postsocialist contexts.

Chapter 3 explores the availability and use of new technologies in herding life, specifically motorcycles, solar panels, and mobile phones. As shall be shown, these are fast becoming ubiquitous features of life throughout rural Mongolia, incorporated into herding practices, generating alternate livelihood strategies and, despite being relatively unexplored in ethnographic terms, resulting in significant changes. While notions of technological change have long been tied to the teleological metanarrative of modernisation, I argue against such accounts and emphasise the polydirectional ways in which herders experience technological change. Implementing the theoretical-interpretative framework, I demonstrate how motorcycles, solar panels, and mobile phones are not experienced in linear terms – as a transition from 'tradition' to 'modernity', as a singular 'improvement', or as replacing pre-existing technologies in a uniform way. Instead, they are experienced in polydirectional ways and from within the context of the postsocialist transition and the return to a subsistence economy - as simultaneously providing benefits and disadvantages, producing losses and gains, and resulting in enskilment and deskilment. Chapter 4 explores the relationship between postsocialist change and the ontological presuppositions. Here the chapter takes the form of an ethnographic account of a journey with a group of hunters into the taiga, performing an

informal ritual at an ovoo and spending time in the forest engaging in hunting. Through this, I describe the skills associated with these practices and elucidate the ways in which novices come to learn via participation, as well as demonstrating how these skills are intertwined with those of 'properly' relating to nonhuman agencies, specifically as manifested in the form of sacred mountains, the ritual ovoo, the taiga forest, as well as certain wild animals. At the same time, I describe how people's ontological presuppositions have intersected with both the collapse of state socialism and the advent of a market economy. In the process, I contribute to the recent theoretical debates concerning the notion of multiple ontologies and the revitalisation of the concept of 'animism' in the context of Northern and Inner Asia. Here I problematise what I see to be a teleological narrative implicit within the so-called 'new animism', arguing instead for a processual conceptualisation of ontology based on the perspective of skilled practice, specifically positing that people's experiences and understandings about 'what exists' are not determined 'in the mind' but come to be generated through cumulative processes of both enskilment and deskilment.

Chapter 5 explores the practice and experience of trans-frontier trading, specifically in articulation with herding life in the Shishged. The chapter begins with an outline of Mongolia's broader informal economy, through which I delineate the specific political-economic context out of which trans-frontier trade has emerged. This is then followed by an ethnographic account of one of the journeys I took with two trans-frontier traders travelling from the Shishged to *Zamyn-Üüd/Erlian* – the busiest trans-frontier point between Mongolia and China - stopping along the way at *Naram Tuul*, Mongolia's largest market situated in central Ulaanbaatar. Here I describe the everyday practices of trans-frontier trading, including the vast journeys that people undertake, the role of new transportation networks, people's relationships with settled retailers in both Mongolia and China, as well as the difficulties associated with navigating the new market economy. As shall be shown, trans-frontier trading has not only afforded people new opportunities but demanded the embodiment of new skills on the part of traders themselves, including the flexible transposition of pre-existing skills into new contexts. This includes, among other things, the organisation of travel arrangements and withstanding difficult travel conditions, engaging in trade and developing multiple retail networks, adopting new forms of embodied 'style' when moving between rural and urban areas, as well as navigating the institutional authority at the Mongolian-Chinese border. In the process, I demonstrate how informal trading cannot be understood in terms of a linear transition from a pre-capitalist (or socialist) to a capitalist economy, or from the 'logic' of the neoliberal market and the purportedly universal goal of capital maximisation. Instead, I show how they remain fundamentally tied to specifically non-economic factors such as maintaining social obligations (*hariutslaga*), ontological presuppositions and experiences of the soul (*suld*), and culturally-specific understandings of wealth and capital (also see Hojer 2012), something suggesting an alternate experience of marketisation outside the official neoliberal narrative.

Chapter 6 explores what is arguably the most significant yet neglected aspect of herding life in Mongolia, namely, the migration of herding households to the capital city, Ulaanbaatar. The chapter itself takes the form of an ethnographic account of life and survival in Ulaanbaatar's ger-districts, specifically through the prism of one particular household who, during the time of my fieldwork, migrated from the Shishged to the capital city. Here I describe the entire process of rural to urban migration, beginning with the preparations required prior to departure, the 1000km journey itself, the arrival of the household in the ger-districts, as well as finding an appropriate plot of land upon which to erect their ger. At the same time, I describe the everyday experiences of life in the ger-districts, including the quotidian tasks of acquiring food,

water, and household supplies, moving across the city and seeking out informal work, as well as negotiating with local government and international development organisations. Here I show that survival in the ger-districts is fundamentally intertwined with the learning of new skills, as well as the flexible transposition of pre-existing skills into the urban context. At the same time, I consider the new problems, limitations, and restrictions associated with life in the ger-districts, as well as how these come to manifest at the level of skilled practice. Here I show how for some people life in the ger-districts is characterised by an inability to learn new skills, a process of deskilment, as well as the failure of pre-existing skills which, while having an important place in rural Mongolian life, to be applicable in the new urban context. In the process, I push the anthropology of skill towards an articulation of the relationship between skills and people's sense of existential security, developing what I call the political-economy of skill, whereby broader processes of social, economic, and political change can be traced at the level of human embodiment and experience. Also in this chapter I consider the broader implications of migration in relation to conceptualisations of the rural and the urban in Mongolia. Here I show how despite the large numbers of people moving to the capital city, this cannot be understood simply in terms of a rural-urban dichotomy or as a linear and irreversible process of 'urbanisation', but rather, as alternate forms of quasi-urban/rural living which have been demanded out of the specific cultural and environmental context in late postsocialist Mongolia.

The conclusion encapsulates the broader arguments outlined in the introduction and offers some reflections on the wider potentialities of the proposed hermeneutic framework. It also describes some of the limitations with this approach and ends with a call for renewed consideration of the practical skills of everyday life in anthropology and cognate disciplines. It argues for a more grounded approach to the study of social change that is able to deconstruct the modernist teleological metanarratives that remain embedded in wider academic thought.

1. Apprenticeships, Social Relations & Human-Animal Co-Enskilment

Introduction

In this chapter I describe the everyday skills of herding households and the social (human and animal) contexts in which they come to be taught and learnt. This includes working with, milking, and breeding herd animals, riding and training horses, slaughtering, castrating and using animals for various livelihood strategies, as well as producing and storing food. Approaching these from the perspective of skilled practice, I present ethnographic material demonstrating how such skills come to be taught and learnt between the generations through the informal apprenticeships within herding households, specifically employing the concept of enskilment (Ingold 2000) to elucidate their processual re/production over the course of people's lives and in relation to the transforming seasons of the Shishged environment.

Also in this chapter I describe the intimate relationships between human beings and their herd animals, as well as highlight the cultural specificity of Mongolian herding as grounded in particular conceptualisations of the 'domestic' and the 'wild', 'nature' and 'culture'. Here I argue that the normative western understanding of 'domestication' fails to capture the full spectrum of human-animal relations as they are experienced by herders themselves, who adopt a multi-species perspective which recognises animal agency and personhood and the mutual co-learning of herd animals alongside human beings. I argue that by approaching herder-herd

relations from the perspective of skilled practice allows one to better capture local experiences of 'domestic' and 'wild' animals, where 'domestication' is seen as a generative process of building and maintaining a condition of 'tameness' through long-term and cumulative social-practical relations between human beings and their herds - what I refer to here as *cross-species co-enskilment*.

Both this and the subsequent chapter are structured so as to follow the cycle of the seasons over a typical herding year, beginning at the start of summer in this chapter and ending in winter in Chapter 2. This temporal frame is important to help capture the significant seasonal variations in the Shishged and the seasonality of different skills demanded at different times of the year. It also serves to capture the specificity of many Mongolian herders' experience of time as grounded in the cycle of the seasons and the needs of herd animals, something which reveals a mutual co-existence between processes of change and continuity, which will be taken up further in the next chapter.

Waking up in Batukhan's Household

It was early morning in the spring of 2012 and Bayarmaa woke just as the sun was beginning to rise. Walking outside the ger she loosened the ropes covering the *tonoo* – or circular frame in the centre of the roof - pulling the canvas flap to one side and allowing light to flood in. The ger was situated, as it usually was during the summer months, on an area of grassland along the steppe-forest borderland at the foot of Ulaan Uul ('Red Mountain'), approximately 200 kilometres from the provincial capital, Mörön and 1000km from the national capital, Ulaanbaatar. Re-entering the ger Bayarmaa added kindle to the fire in the stove (*juuh*) and set about preparing the morning tea, first throwing a small amount of the boiled water outside the door as an offering to the spirit-owners (*ezed*) of the site (also see Brandisauskas 2007). As the ger became warmer and the scent of freshly-brewed tea filled the air, the remaining members of the household slowly began to wake up. It was May 2012 and I had only just arrived at Batukhan's spring encampment (*zuslan*), and perhaps unsurprisingly everyone in the household, including myself, was tired from a late night spent drinking. As is customary in the Mongolian countryside the way in which a guest is welcomed into many herding households follows a series of culturally prescribed actions and gestures (Sneath 2000; Humphrey 1996), including the visitor being seated in the eastern part of the ger reserved for guests and served *süütei tsai*, or milk-tea[20], along with various homemade snacks. On more special occasions - such as a visit from a distant family member (or foreign anthropologist) - it is also customary for the male head of the household to open a bottle of alcohol, which similarly follows a series of highly ritualised steps. First, the host removes a special drinking bowl from the cabinet in the northern and most respected part of the ger known as the *khoimor*, and then opens the bottle and flicks the first few drops of the alcohol into the air as an offering to the *ezed* of the site. Next, he pours a serving into the bowl and presents it to the visiting guest, who is expected to sip and return the bowl to the host, who then adds another serving and takes a sip himself, the process then repeating itself until everyone in the household has had a drink and often continuing until the bottle is finished and the family sing songs late into the night. Anticipating this I had presented Batukhan with a bottle of high-quality *Chinggis Khan* vodka upon my arrival, handing it to him with my left hand supporting my right elbow as is the customary embodiment of respect (also see Lacaze 2003). Knowing that I would be staying with the

[20] Mongolian tea is made of black brick tea boiled for long before milk and salt are added, and then brought back to the boil before being served. Typically, women will make tea first thing in the morning and keep it warm in water canisters or flasks during the day. Herders consider milk tea to be highly nutritious and an indispensable part of everyday life.

household for an extended period of time, and with Batukhan and Bayarmaa having agreed to allow me to share their lives during the course of my fieldwork, including performing everyday tasks and activities, engaging in herding and hunting, and following them on their migrations between seasonal pastures - this embodied gesture was, I felt, even more significant than usual.

As can be seen from this ethnographic vignette everyday life in herding households unfolds as a series of tasks and activities, the majority of which are regular and quotidian and inculcate the teaching and learning of particular skills. Typically, a day begins just before dawn as the mother of the household lights the fire in the central stove and starts to prepare tea, always offering a small amount to the spirit-owners of the site in which the encampment is situated. Then, after the other members of the household have woken up, the family sit down to a simple breakfast usually consisting of *süütei tsai* (milk-tea), *aaruul* (dried curds), and *booz* (deep-fried dumplings), and during the summer months accompanied by homemade *tsötsgiin tos* (butter) and *öröm* (sliced dried cream). After breakfast, gender roles and division of labour dictate the structure of the unfolding day and the kinds of activities performed by different members of the household, with women spending their time cooking and preparing food, washing and mending clothes, cleaning the ger, taking care of the children, as well as milking animals if necessary and looking after the younger or smaller animals that remain close to the encampment. In the meantime, men spend much of their day out performing tasks associated with the herd, including moving animals to their respective areas of pasture, driving them to appropriate water sources, riding, training, and breaking-in horses, as well as slaughtering and castrating animals depending on the season. Similarly, men are usually responsible for undertaking general tasks around the encampment, such as making and repairing enclosures, fixing saddles and harnesses, chopping trees for firewood, and setting up new corrals.



(Figure 4. Batukhan and Bayarmaa's Spring encampment in 2012 – photo by the author)

The division of labour within a herding household inevitably determines the teaching and learning of skills, with children introduced to gender-specific tasks from a young age and which come to define them in terms of culturally acceptable forms of social identity and expression. For example, every morning while Batukhan and Hurelbaatar sat down to eat breakfast, Oyun assisted her mother in the kitchen area of the ger, serving tea, washing cups and bowls, as well as checking on the fire in the central stove. Every morning, Oyun would also dress her younger brother and carry him over to the table to help feed him, and throughout the day Bayarmaa would ask her daughter to help assist in various tasks such as fetching water from outside the ger, looking after the younger animals, and preparing food. As David Sneath writes: "[T]he

domestic division of labour in Mongolian pastoral communities amounts to an association between age and gender on the one hand, and certain skills and types of work on the other, so as to form a fairly flexible guide to action" (2000:180). Assisting her mother and grandmother each and every morning, Oyun has learnt skills deemed culturally appropriate for females and which she has come to learn since childhood. In a similar vein, Hurelbaatar has learnt those skills deemed culturally appropriate for males and which he has come to learn through assisting Batukhan and his grandfather, such as herding, castrating, and training animals, moving them between pastures, hunting in the taiga, as well as assisting in seasonal migrations. In both cases, the learning of skills is not just a matter of executing particular tasks, but is part of a cumulative enskilment process, intertwined with the formation of people's social identities and relative positioning within the household. As Tim Ingold writes: "By becoming 'enskilled' in intergenerational, customary learning, one becomes a *person*, to the point that the actual 'objectives of production' (are) the constitution of persons" (1991:339 emphasis in original). In other words, for a young herder to learn the skills of preparing the morning tea, fetching a pale of water, driving the animals out to pasture, and even dressing one's younger sibling, are actually ways of learning how to *be* a female or male person in Mongolia, where enskilment is constitutive of both the division of labour and the construction of personhood within a household.

Here it is instructive to note that Mongolian culture is particularly rich in terms of the ways in which symbolically meaningful practices provide the basis for institutionalised modes of social expression, which suggests an important relationship between enskilment and the construction of social identities (Atwood 2004). The Mongolian word *yos* ('rules' or 'manners') is indicative of this, referring not simply to social conventions but, when applied to persons themselves, indicates that they know how to behave and perform 'properly' (Sneath 2000:217). As Humphrey puts it: "These symbolic acts should be seen as obligations and their enactment is a creative part of the social process. Manners in this sense are not some frill on a basic structure consisting of something else, but themselves make up the constitution of social life. In these rules, we see an important indication of how rural Mongol society is meant to be" (ibid:217-8). Much as with the ritual serving of alcohol, the opening of the tonoo each morning, and the offering of milk-tea to a guest, the learning of skills is a central component of the ways in which institutionalised forms of social expression come to be formed, for just like rules or manners, everyday tasks also need to be performed 'properly' and thus require the successful learning of relevant skills. Seen from this perspective, the enskilment process of younger herders such as Hurelbaatar and Oyun cannot be disentangled from their learning of Mongolian social categories and conventions.

After breakfast, herding households typically set about undertaking the rest of the tasks for the day, and in Batukhan's family the women typically cleared away the table and, in summer, started carrying out the first milking session of the day. Meanwhile, Batukhan and Hurelbaatar would typically open the brightly adorned chests at the side of the ger and start removing their respective deels – the traditional clothing worn by the majority of Mongolian herders when working in the countryside. Once dressed, they would take down their saddles from the side of the wall which, as with most objects in the dwelling, have specifically demarcated places inside the ger – hung immediately to the left-hand side of the entrance beside those other items typically used by men only, such as bridles and the family gun (also see Sneath 2000). Then, after helping themselves to a final cup of milk-tea Batukhan and Hurelbaatar would swing their saddles over their shoulders and, picking up a bundle of leather harnesses, made their way out of the ger and onto the grasslands surrounding the summer encampment.

Life at the Summer Encampment

Like many herders Batukhan's household undertake four migrations per year – each of which coincides with the start of a new season – and erect their ger at distinct spring, summer, autumn, and winter encampments. This is in accordance with the customary land-use pattern in Mongolia which involves four seasonal movements per year between three or four distinct areas of pasture (Miller & Sheehy 2008). The households' migrations are orientated over a use area that has remained relatively the same since the collapse of state socialism in 1990, based on a combination of access to forage and water sources, historical ties to land through birth and employment with the former negdel[21], as well as proximity to regional centres. Like the majority of herders Batukhan's household have reduced the scale of their movements since the collapse of the negdels (see Chapter 2), although unlike increasing numbers they live permanently on the steppe and visit regional centres intermittently to acquire supplementary supplies. In this regard, Batukhan's household can be described as practicing fully mobile pastoral nomadism (Khazanov 1984) or as 'full-time' herders[22].

The household's summer encampment is located on the open steppe of the Shishged Depression in the sum of Ulaan Uul, about 20 kilometres south of the regional centre of the same name. This is an extremely well-watered region for Mongolian standards and one that is ideal for letting the animals graze during the summer. To the west of the encampment is *Ulaan Uul*, or 'Red Mountain' and, beyond that, the *Khordil Sar'dag* range, the tips of which are covered in snow throughout most of the year and the rest blanketed in dense taiga forest. For most of the year the grasslands in the Shishged are frozen and consist of little more than parched brown stalks. During the summer season, however, the landscape thrives with life: the upper levels of the soil thaws for the first time in months, it rains frequently, flowers scatter the grasslands, and flies are so persistent that they bother both humans and animals alike. As a result, grasses at the summer encampment are often knee-high and, having not been grazed for an extended period of time, provide high levels of nourishment for feeding the hungry herds after the difficult winter months.

Batukhan's household arrive at their summer encampment every year between May and June and stay until frost begins to form at the end of September, when they move on to their autumn encampment about 20 kilometres away. The encampment is situated on a relatively flat area of grassland elevated above a wide, fast flowing river, close to the foot of a small mountain, and surrounded on two sides by clusters of forest. As Batukhan explained, this is an ideal location from a herder's perspective as it is advantageous to be able to observe one's herd animals as they leave the encampment and graze during the day (also see Jagchid & Hyer 1979). At the same time, having access to a water source is essential for both the herds and the household and, being close to a forest or wooded area allows the family to chop wood for fire[23] and to make enclosures for the animals.

Like the majority of full-time herders, the household's summer and winter encampments are the most established of the four – with the locations remaining fixed and where the household stay for the longest periods of time. This is in contrast with the spring and autumn encampments which are inhabited for shorter periods and erected in more varying locations, typically only a short distance from the summer and winter sites (also see Fijn 2011). In 2012,

[21] Batukhan and his parents were born in the countryside of Ulaan Uul *sum* and have lived all their lives in the Shishged region. Bayarmaa was born relatively nearby in Alag-Erden *sum*.

[22] I use the term 'full time' to refer simply to those households that live on the steppe for the entire year. They are distinguished from those that spend part of the year on the steppe and part of the year in regional centres.

[23] In the more forested regions of Northern Mongolia herders tend to heat their stoves with wood, while in central and southern Mongolia it is common to use *argal*, or dried sheep dung.

there were three ger erected in relative proximity to one another around Batukhan's summer encampment, the first belonging to Batukhan and Bayarmaa, the second to Batukhan's parents – Dogsomjav and Narantuya – and the third to Batukhan's cousin and his own wife and children. Throughout rural Mongolia the social network between households varies according to the seasons and, during the summer months, herders generally congregate in extended encampments of multiple ger, otherwise known as *khot-ail.* In the Shishged, as in other mountain-steppe regions (Fijn 2011), a khot-ail typically consists of between two to six ger, usually comprising an extended family group with grandparents, parents, and grandchildren, who combine their animals together as one herd during the summer. Since the collapse of the negdels, khot-ail have formed the basis of social organisation in herding areas of Mongolia (Humphrey & Sneath 1999), with households pooling resources and offering assistance to one another in the form of labour and even loans (Brunn & Odgaard 1996; Fernandez-Gimenz 2001). While the transformation of the khot-ail shall be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, it is significant to note that they provide an invaluable base for herders in the postsocialist era, typically sharing rights to pastures and provide money and support such as veterinary care and supplementary fodder (Sneath 1998). At the summer encampment, pastures are recognised as common grazing land and herds belonging to different households, graze in close proximity to one another. This arrangement changes at the end of summer when the larger encampment breaks up and each household (*ail*) heads towards their respective autumn and winter sites, although it is common for two or three *ail* to remain together throughout the year, such as in Batukhan's case where his parents move alongside him and his immediate family[24].



(Figure 5. The sheep and goats in a summer corral – photo by the author)

Summer is widely considered the best time of the year and, although there is still a considerable amount of work to be done, it is also the time when Batukhan's household socialise and relax the most. With temperatures typically reaching thirty degrees during the day, the household take the central stove out of their ger and Bayarmaa and Narantuya cook and prepare meals outside. As it is the summer holidays, the family encampment also increases with children visiting from boarding schools[25] and family members from regional centres

[24] In this regard, Batukhan's household exhibit the traditional Mongolian kinship system of virilocal relations, whereby a husband and wife will stay with the father's parents after marriage, typically erecting their *ger* beside them and forming a single *khot-ail.* For a discussion of Mongolian kinship (see Empson (2011).

[25] Typically, children from herding households spend nearly nine months attending boarding school in regional centres, visiting a few times during the holidays. The longest holiday is during the summer when they remain with their families for nearly three

coming to spend time with kin relations out on the steppe. During this time women are particularly occupied as it is the primary milking season and the time when all milk from the herds needs to be consumed or fashioned into milk-products[26] which must be preserved as a result of the higher temperatures and lack of refrigeration.

Besides the ger, Batukhan's summer encampment includes two small corrals used for housing the cattle calves and the lambs and kids respectively during the evenings, specifically to protect them against predators such as wolves. These shelters are constructed from poles of pine harvested from the surrounding forest and are erected just beside the dwelling to enable easy access to the animals. As throughout the year, Batukhan's herd grazes in different areas of the landscape during the day and either return - or are driven back - to the encampment in the afternoon. The composition of the herd is typical of the large majority of herders in the Shishged, comprising horses and cattle - the latter including Mongolian cattle, yaks and cattle-yak hybrids – as well as sheep and goats. Much as in other forest-steppe regions of Inner Asia there are far more horses and cattle and far less goats and camels in the Shishged, which is in contrast to the semiarid grasslands and desert elsewhere in Mongolia where camels and goats tend to be more numerous (Pedersen 2011).



(Figure 6. Horses grazing under the foot of Ulaan Uul mountain – photo by the author)

It is considered culturally inappropriate to ask herding households exactly how many animals they have as it is thought to bring about misfortune to both the herd and household (Fijn 2011). This was a particularly sensitive issue at the time of my fieldwork because one year prior to my arrival Mongolia suffered an historic winter *dzud* - weather conditions in which herd animals are unable to access the grasses under thick ice and snow (Christensen et al 2004). In fact, the dzud of 2009-10 was one of the worst in living memory, with an estimated ten to fifteen million animals perishing and with households losing anywhere between 20% and 100% of their herds. It was only after spending an extended period of time with Batukhan and his family - as well as observing the herd on a daily basis – that I calculated the household had, in 2012, approximately 350 herd animals in total[27].

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months. While Oyun still attended boarding school in 2012, Hurelbaatar had finished high-school one year before my arrival and lived permanently with the household.

[26] Milk products are known as 'white foods' (*tsaagan idee*) in Mongolia and include up to one hundred different products, the majority made from milk taken from cattle and yaks. Herders have developed unique methods for processing milk, including boiling, adding bacteria from yoghurt, adding sugar, flour, as well as drying. All of these serve as important preservation techniques which allow milk to be stored for extended periods of time. This has fundamental implications for skills between the generations and for survival, as it allows households to sustain themselves while moving between encampments.

[27] These included the animals belonging to Batukhan's parents.

Herding in Mongolia

Mongolia comprises little arable land and is dominated by hilly, mountainous, or mountain-forest steppe. These are ecological conditions which have made the country highly suitable for animal herding throughout history. As Batukhan's father, Dogsomjav, once told me, Mongolia's environment was "designed by God for herding", an expression which helps convey both the ecological suitability and cultural-historical importance of herding in local life. Mobile herders have lived in the steppe and forest-steppe region to the north of China for over two thousand years. The frontier between this and the contemporary Peoples Republic of China coincides with a prominent ecological-cultural demarcation that continues to have saliency today: between the sedentary agriculturalists to the south (China) and the mobile herders to the north (Mongolia) (Jagchid & Hyer 1979; Atwood 2004; Barfield 2011; Lattimore 1938). As Jagchid & Hyer (1979:19) point out, this division was even noted in the *Shih Chi*, the oldest Chinese historical record dating from the first century B.C. It states that herding and hunting were not only characteristic features of the everyday life of the peoples in 'the North', but had come to define their attitudes, patterns of behaviour, dress, diet, and virtually every other aspect of their lives.

There are various definitions of herding depending on the relationship between human beings and herd animals, as well the extent and type of mobility. Khazanov (1984) distinguishes six types, ranging from fully mobile nomadism to sedentary animal herding, including variations in-between based on different forms of seasonal and altitudinal transhumance. Ingold (1980:148) defines herding in more ecological terms as "that mode of economic production which uses the technique of animal husbandry – involving degrees of taming, herding, and breeding – and where animal populations are allowed to increase naturally under human protection". From this perspective, animals are tapped either parasitically – as in milch or blood herding – or by predation – as in carnivorous herding – and where social relations typically involve divided access to animals but common access to land Ingold 1980:148; also see Ingold 2000). This definition is useful for understanding herding life in Mongolia and aptly prioritises the practical dimensions that distinguish it from other modes of economic production – including consideration of herding, taming, and breeding which shall be considered below. It is important to recognise, however, that within Mongolian herding variations also exist between different 'types', both historically and since the postsocialist transition (Jagchid & Hyer 1979). Thus, while Mongolia features fully mobile nomadism such as that of Batukhan's household, it also includes more sedentary forms such as that practiced by those who live part or all of the year in regional centres (Brunn & Narangoa 2006), something that has increased since the collapse of state socialism and which, as we shall see, has important implications for the transformation of skills. Similarly, human-animal relations in Mongolia cut across the divide between milch and carnivorous herding, with people tapping their herds for both milk and meat, as well as for other herding products such as wool, hair, and hides.

Today, herders constitute approximately 30% of Mongolia's total population[28], with some estimates suggesting they account for as much as 50%, a discrepancy owing to the fact that the division between the herding and sedentary populations is often fluid and changes over time (Barfield 2011). Unlike the majority of herding peoples, Mongolian herders remain a fundamental aspect of contemporary life in the country, contributing significantly to the national economy where animal herding represents approximately 20% of GDP (Fernandez-

[28] In 2012, Mongolia had a total population of 3.1 million people, of which approximately 930,000 were registered as herders.

Gimenez 2001). At the same time, animal herding is intrinsically related to Mongolia's informal economy through the sale and trade of animal products and, more recently, the increasing consumerism among herding households, something that shall be returned to in Chapter 5. As Brunn & Narangoa (2006:15) write, animal herding "continues to be a vital ingredient in the livelihood of the Mongols and despite urbanisation the contribution of pastoral production to GDP has remained impressive. Far from being an ancient and inefficient form of production, herding remains imperative as a provider of livelihood for rural people and of wealth for urban societies in Inner and Northern Asia".

In 2012 people herded 41 million herd animals in Mongolia on what remains the largest common grazing area in the world (NSOM 2017:537). At the time of my fieldwork, nearly three-quarters of the 124,000 inhabitants of Khövsgöl province (*aimag*) were registered as herders *(malchid),* with animal husbandry being their primary, and in many cases only, form of livelihood[29]. In 2012 Khövsgöl was home to about 4 million heads of animals, including 1.5 million goats, 1.5 million sheep, 300,000 cattle, yak, and hybrids, 200,000 horses, 3000 camels, as well as 1,500 reindeer[30]. In the three Darhad districts (*sum*) of Ulaan Uul, Renchinlkhümbe, and Tsagaan-Nuur herding was also the primary form of livelihood, with approximately one-quarter of the population practicing fully mobile nomadism, while the others engaged in various forms of semi-nomadic and sedentary herding complemented with other informal activities.

Learning the Skills of Herding Life

As Batukhan and Hurelbaatar made their way out of the ger on the first morning of my fieldwork I quickly rushed to finish my tea and followed the pair outside. Standing together on the grasslands of the summer encampment, I watched as they saddled their horses and prepared themselves for a day of herding, with Batukhan scanning the hundreds of animals that comprised his and his neighbours' herds and glancing passed the two other ger in the khot-ail. As the male head of his household, it is Batukhan's responsibility to move different parts of the herd to their respective areas of pasture each and every morning, regardless of the weather or season, as well as to check on the location and well-being of the herds in general. While some animals such as cattle and yaks leave the encampment each morning on their own accord, others such as sheep and goats have to be driven out, just as horses need to be rounded up if they have grazed too far away or if any animals need to be watered or prepared for milking. As the eldest son in the household it is Hurelbaatar's responsibility to assist his father in all aspects of the herding process, with the morning task of driving the sheep and goats being the first of at least four herding sessions they will undertake that day, although this number is not fixed and depends on a range of factors including the season, weather conditions, location of encampment, as well as the needs of different animals.

[29] Khövsgöl Statistical Yearbook 2012.
[30] Ibid.



(Figure 7. Batukhan out herding on the grasslands – photo by the author)

As we have seen, herders within a khot-ail erect their ger in close proximity to one another and it is commonplace for animals from different households to mix amongst themselves. When I first arrived at Batukhan's household his cousin was preparing to pack up his encampment and move to another khot-ail some twenty kilometres away because of a recent marriage in his family. As a result, before driving the sheep and goats to pasture Batukhan first had to separate his and his father's animals from those belonging to his cousin, something which involved identifying each member within the sheep and goat herds and moving them into appropriate groups. Accompanied by Hurelbaatar, Batukhan guided his horse through the herd and casually incited his and Dogsomjav's animals to move forward, embodying a series of physical gestures, vocalising commands, and occasionally calling out the name of an individual sheep or goat to gain its cooperation (e.g. 'Brown Tail, get moving!'), while simultaneously ensuring that his neighbour's animals remained at the encampment. Observing this, I wondered how was it that Batukhan was able to differentiate his animals so easily from those of his cousin? How could he locate his and his father's two hundred sheep and goats amongst a herd of nearly three hundred, identifying differences which appeared – at least to me – to be imperceptible? Also, how was it that the sheep and goats responded so casually to Batukhan's commands, calmly walking into the correct direction and separating themselves from the others in the herd? This is something that came to the fore throughout my time with the household, such as when Batukhan and Hurelbaatar would be out riding and would spot a number of animals grazing in the distance and, much to my amazement, would recognise them as their own, then ride off towards them and set about rearing them back to the encampment. Similarly, towards the end of autumn, one of Batukhan's family members gave the household their animals to integrate into Batukhan's herd, specifically while they went to live in the regional centre for the winter (see below). When they returned nearly four months later, I was again amazed how Batukhan immediately knew which of the animals were his and which belonged to his family member, taking only a few minutes to separate them into appropriate groups.

Directing my query to Batukhan on that first morning at the encampment, I explained that to my untrained eye all of the sheep and goats "looked the same", even if considering some of the more obvious indicators such as size and colour. What could he see, I asked, that I could not and, perhaps more importantly, how was it that younger herders such as Hurelbaatar learnt to identify herd animals in this detailed and intimate way? As Batukhan explained:

> It is because you don't know the herd yet. When you live with your herd all your life you learn which are your animals and which are somebody else's. Each one of our horses, sheep, goats, and cattle is different from the others – they have markings, their hair colour and texture are different, and have other features which we recognise. (Pointing) Look at that goat over there; he has horns which turn sideways, while that one has horns facing the other direction, and his hair is coarser and more brown. Each animal also has its own personality and position in its herd: there are leader (*tolgoilogch*) animals, calm and peaceful (*dölgöön*) animals, difficult (*omgolon*), lazy (*zailkhuu*), bad-tempered (*aashtai*), and stubborn (*zürüüd*) animals. And the animals also learn which household they belong to; they recognise us, follow us in the morning and afternoon, and listen to our commands. When I call the sheep and goats they know where I want them to go and how fast to run. For herders (*malchid*), our animals are like our children – they are part of our extended family (khot-ail). We look after each animal from the time they are born until they die and each is given a name. We know our animals and our animals know us.

Domestication and Human-Animal relations

Herding in Mongolia - and the human-animal relations that constitute it – are generally described as a characteristic example of 'domestication', where human beings have come to control their animal's behaviour and reproductive capacity through dominance and breeding over a period of hundreds of years (Bökönyi 1989). Indeed, the emergence of animal herding in Inner Asia is said to have been based on an earlier history of animal domestication by agricultural peoples to the south, following which sedentary foragers began using domesticated animals to practice more mobile herding in search of seasonal grazing land, and which eventually resulted in mounted nomadic herding (Ellen 1996:212)[31].

It is important to recognise, however, that the normative understanding of domestication is founded upon a series of presuppositions that remain firmly rooted in a western ontology of the environment. Indeed, it presupposes a separation between 'wild' and 'domestic' animals and between 'nature' and 'culture', with the process of domesticat*ing* seen as a human (i.e. 'cultural') intervention into the 'natural world' (Ingold 1994, 2000; Ellen & Fukui 1996; Descola 1992). At the same time, this characterisation is also heavily one-sided, where animals are seen as passive in the domestication process and controlled purely for human ends (Fijn 2011). In this regard, the normative understanding of domestication is part of the teleological metanarrative characteristic of western evolutionism, which presupposes a linear transition from 'wild' to 'domestic', from 'nature' to 'culture', and is ultimately tied to the assumption that domesticating animals is an evolutionary 'development' of human mastery over the 'natural world' and the commodification of animals for human use.

As could be seen in Batukhan's remarks, as well as the way in which he and Hurelbaatar interacted with their sheep and goats, Mongolian herders view and engage with their herd animals in more complex ways than as suggested by the normative concept of domestication. In particular, they perceive them as individuals with their own unique personalities and behaviour, living within their own social groups, and having the capacity to learn and communicate with both their fellow animals and human beings. In short, herders experience their herd animals as *persons* with agency whose lives exist in relation to human beings, and who take part in what we typically call the domestication process as active and engaged participants. As Humphrey & Onon write, herding life in Mongolia "creates a domain in which personhood transcends the limits of purely human existence" (1996:45). For people such as Batukhan, the hundreds of sheep, goat, cattle, yak, and horses that make up his herd each have their own name, social characteristics, and varying capacities to learn with human beings. Throughout my time with the household people would regularly discuss the personality and learning of individual animals, commenting whether an animal is 'tame' or 'quiet' (*nomkhon*), 'bad tempered' (*aashtai*), 'lazy' (*zalkhuu*), 'violent' (*dogshin*), or 'calm' (*dolgoon*).

[31] As a typical definition puts it, domestication is: '[T]he capture and taming by man of animals of a species with particular behavioural characteristics, their removal from their natural living area and breeding community, and their maintenance under controlled conditions' (Bökönyi 1989:24).

The normative understanding of domestication fails to capture the full spectrum of human-animal relations and how herding skills come to be taught and learnt between the generations in articulation with the agency and co-learning of animals themselves. In fact, Mongolian herders do not draw a distinction between 'domesticated' and 'non-domesticated' animals, nor do they experience herding life in terms of a nature-culture dualism upon which the western concept of domestication is based. Although herders do differentiate between herd animals (*mal*) and wild animals (*zerleg*), the distinction is not perceived to be the result of a historical process of domestication, but rather, as one of different levels of social engagement between human beings and animals: thus, 'wild' animals are considered 'wild' because they have no social contact with human beings, whereas herd animals have social relationships with human beings in herding encampments (Fijn 2011:67). As Fijn puts it: "To Mongolian herders, "wild animals" are those that do not enter the domesticated sphere of the encampment. Herd animals are seen as part of the extended family…A co-domestic animal is "fed by people" and nurtured as part of the co-domestic sphere (*geriin tejeever*). The domestic is distinct from the wild but only in degree, and this degree is often gauged in terms of the extent of an animal's…association with humans" (2011:67). Connected to this, the terms 'nature' (*baigal*) and 'culture' (*soyol*) do not exist in strict opposition in the Mongolian cultural imaginary and, as a result, the line between what is 'natural' and 'human-influenced' in herding strategies is highly fluid (Williams 2002). Indeed, the Mongolian term 'nature', or baigal, is derived from the word *baidal*, which means 'state of being', 'what is' or 'what exists', and is not distinct from, but includes, the realm of human sociality (Humphrey 1995:136). At the same time, one of the characteristic features of Mongolian herding is that herd animals are able to survive without human beings; that is, their physical and behavioural characteristics render them suitable for the harsh Mongolian climate without human intervention (Hanson 2004). In this regard, human-animal relations are not characterised by the removal of herd animals from their 'natural' environment and the placing of them in a human-controlled ('cultural') domain such as a stable or farm, but rather, with human beings living with herd animals in the same environment in which they themselves thrive (i.e. on the grasslands).

What this suggests is the need for a more appropriate characterisation of human-animal relations grounded in the ontology of Mongolian herding - which recognises animals as having agency, the capacity to learn as persons, as well as living within their own forms of social organisation. This is something that has already been proposed by Ingold (1986; 1994) who suggests that we rewrite the history of domestication from the perspective of human-animal socialisation, expanding the concept to include descriptions of human beings taming, socialising, and *living-with* nonhuman animals in various cultural contexts (also see Noske 1997; Anderson 1986)[32]. Natasha Fijn makes a comparable point in her excellent ethnography of human-animal coexistence in central Mongolia, characterising the mutual interdependence of herders' relations with their herds as a "co-domestic relationship" (2011:19)[33].

While both of these emphasise the social relations between human beings and herd animals – and recognise the agency of animals against the anthropocentric western understanding of domestication - I argue for a consideration of the more practical dimensions of human-animal relations as they come to be generated and maintained over time through skills, specifically based on what I call *cross-species co-enskilment.* Taking my cue from Batukhan's remark that

[32] As Ingold writes: 'I do not mean selective breeding towards a form that is physiologically dependent on man, but the element of socialisation of the animal into a human environment' (1974:524)

[33] '[I]n contrast to the intensive, consumer driven animal husbandry techniques used with 'domestic' animals on Western farms…My definition of a co-domestic relationship is the social adaptation of animals in association with human beings by means of mutual cross species interaction and social engagement' (Fijn 2011:19).

"we know our herds and our herds know us", I see human-animal relations in Mongolia as generated in articulation with animal agency, the co-learning of herd animals, and knowledge of the 'natural' social organisation of animal herds – all of which shape and determine the teaching, learning, and embodiment of skills on the part of herders themselves. This is something that can already be seen in the example of Batukhan above. When he says that he 'knows' his herd animals, for example, he is describing the after-effect of a long-term process of cross-species co-enskilment, one where his learning to attend to the different features, personalities, behaviour, colours, hair, shapes, sizes, and smells of his herd has emerged in articulation with the animals' own agency and co-enskilment living and working *with* him: as Batukhan put it, the sheep and goats recognise the humans within the household, listen to their calls and instructions, and follow them during the day – in other words, they have learnt to know *their* human beings just as Batukhan has learnt to know his herd animals. This is also visible when observing herders working with animals other than their own; while the skills associated with identifying and moving animals can certainly be carried from herd to herd, there is a widespread assumption that one is most skilled when working with one's *own* herds. Approached from this perspective, domestication can rather be seen as an ongoing process rather than a fixed state or event in time[34], something that is being constantly generated/re-generated by both human beings and animals, and which is maintained through the everyday practices of herding, riding, training, milking and other forms of human-animal co-enskilment. Here the understanding is that without cross-species co-enskilment the particular human-animal relations characteristic of herding life would not exist, and herd animals would simply live apart from human beings on the steppe. This is something which also affords a better understanding of how herding skills come to be taught and learnt between the generations, specifically as it is recognises people's reciprocal relationships with their herd animals and the flexible adjustment of skills in the process. At the same time, it affords better insight into how human-animal relations are reproduced over time and in relation to broader processes of change such as the postsocialist transition, including how herd animals are themselves a part of the cultural continuities in herding life and what people identify as the re/production of 'tradition'.

In the section below, I describe the most important skills in Mongolian herding from the perspective of cross-species co-enskilment, beginning with an outline of Batukhan's herd animals and followed by a more detailed account of the everyday practices of herding, riding, training, breeding, and milking which serve to maintain human-animal co-enskilment. In the process, I show how herding skills come to be taught and learnt through the informal apprenticeships between the generations and in articulation with animal agency and co-learning, in turn offering a culturally-specific account of the domestication process as grounded in the lived-experience of herders themselves and laying the foundations for the analysis of postsocialist change.

The Five Snouts

Herders in Mongolia characterise themselves as the people of the 'five animals' (*taivan khosigu mal*) or 'five snouts', referring to horses, cattle (including Mongolian cattle, yak and cattle-yak hybrids), sheep, goats, and camels. These animals, all of which fall under the category of

[34] It is significant to note in this regard that even the archaeological record suggests that dogs – which were the first animals to be domesticated – were domesticated as a consequence of a pre-existing (practical) symbiosis between packs of 'wild' canids and human populations (Losey 1996; Ingold 1993), suggesting a more fluid relationship between 'wild' and 'domestic' animals and the processual emergence of 'close' or 'tame' relations rather than a fixed moment when animals moved from being 'wild' to 'domesticated' (Anderson 2000).

ungulates - or hoofed mammals – form the basis of herding life and survival, and their coexistence with human beings over thousands of years have defined Mongolian herding as it is lived and practiced today. As herders themselves emphasise, all of the 'five snouts' are social animals, with each living within individual herds and each herd organised according to a specific social structure. As a result, herders consider it imperative to understand herd structures and the differences between both species and individual animals, specifically so that they may enter into relationships with their animals, influence (and teach) the herds, as well as assert themselves as dominant members. As with any skilled practice, the way in which herders come to learn herd structures and the behaviour of different animals is through cumulative practical engagement living with their herds. "A good herder" (*sain malchid*), Batukhan once remarked:

> [I]s able to understand (*oilgokh*) and influence his herd. Each species is different and needs different skills. Cattle are the easiest because they graze on their own, while sheep and goats have to be moved out otherwise they only eat the grasses around the encampment. Yak are more intelligent (*medeelsin*) than cattle and can be better trained for pulling carts; sheep are more intelligent than goats, but goats graze faster and need to be moved more often. Horses always require the most work because they need to be trained for riding and grazed away from the encampment; but they are also the most special animal because a loyal horse will always remain by your side.

There is a recognised structure or hierarchy of herd animals in Mongolia, with herders always referring to the 'five snouts' in a set order: beginning with the horse, then cattle (including yak and hybrids), followed by camels, sheep, and finally goats. Each of these serves a variety of functions in herding life and are recognised as having their own particular physical and social characteristics, with people entering into different relationships with each species and out of which are generated specific kinds of human-animal co-enskilment.

The horse is by far the most important of the five snouts. There are around 3 million horses in Mongolia, which is approximately the same number as people. Physically, the Mongolian horse is distinct from most other horse breeds around the world in that they are short, sturdy, and strong (Hanson 2004). This makes them highly suitable for riding, herding other animals, and migrating between pastures in different seasons. Although occasionally used for meat, horses are primarily kept for riding and milking, with herders using different horses for different activities and in relation to the changing seasons. While in winter, for example, horses with thick hides and coarse hair are favoured, those with thinner hides and hair are preferred as the temperatures begin to rise and people use their horses more frequently during the day (Jagchid & Hyer 1979). At the same time, while some horses are used for riding longer distances or travelling through the taiga, others are used for racing or herding animals. This differentiation demands specific knowledge of different horse 'types' and a recognition of individual horses within a herd, with people referring to 'good' and 'bad' horses for different activities and seasons and alternating between them at different times of the year, something that has important implications for selective breeding.



(Figure 8. Herders with their horses – photo by the author)

As a result of their importance in everyday life there are a plethora of skills associated with horses in herding households. Firstly, all herders must be able to ride competently from a relatively young age – with most children learning between the ages of four and five. Secondly, mares must be habituated to being milked every summer - specifically to make *airag*[35] - with milking being a gender-specific task performed solely by women and thus forming an important aspect of mother-daughter enskilment. Thirdly, horses must be trained for riding and for use in herding, something that is selective for particular horses and usually only performed by the men in a household, thus forming an important aspect of father-son enskilment. Indeed, while women and children might assist in working with the cattle, sheep, and goats, horses are generally handled by men and it is common for particular men in a khot-ail to be recognised by their ability to not only herd but also to tame untrained horses, break-in stallions (*azarga*), and catch geldings for riding (also see Fijn 2011:63).

As horses require much greater territory for grazing than other herd animals they are not pastured near the encampment, but rather, on areas of grassland surrounding the encampment and usually a few kilometres away. Typically, herders will only round up their horses a few times a year, once during the summer so that women can milk mares, and whenever moving between pastures (Fijn 2011:64). For the rest of the time, horses are essentially left to roam free, although herders do monitor their location to ensure that they do not graze too far away, as well as periodically visit the herds to collect new geldings[36] for riding (see below). This has important implications with regards to the structure of horse herds and the cultural specificity of human-animal relations. Indeed, given that horses are left to graze independently and rounded up only a few times a year, there is minimal restriction on the social behaviour of horses, with herders allowing them to organise themselves according to their 'natural' behaviour and herd structure. While the reproductive capacity of horses is controlled through the castration of males, people specifically emphasise the importance of allowing horses to graze autonomously away from the encampment and letting the stallion act as the 'manager' of the herd – including interacting with mares and challenging bachelor males - which is said to

[35] *Airag* is fermented mares milk and has a mild alcohol content. It is made by pouring milk into a cow skin bag and churned with a starter up to one thousand times and left to ferment overnight. It is only made in the summer when mares can be milked and thus its production and consumption form central parts of summer life.

[36] A gelding is a castrated male horse. In Mongolia, geldings (*mor*) are the most common horse used for riding, specifically as castration is said to make the animal quieter and thus more suitable as an everyday working animal.

be in line with the behaviour and social structure of ('wild') horses living apart from human beings.

Connected to this, herders organise their horses by dividing them into two separate bands which replicate their 'natural' herd structure. As Batukhan explained, 'wild' (*zerleg*)[37] horses live in several small bands which share a given territory, and these bands organise themselves in a 'harem model' consisting of one adult male, or stallion, and a group of mares, surrounded by other bands consisting solely of bachelor males. Like most herders, Batukhan's household mimic this structure by dividing their twenty-five horses into two bands: the stallion's band - which functions to breed young and to allow Bayarmaa to obtain mare's milk - and the geldings - which are used for riding and which form an equivalent to the band composed of bachelor males (also see Fijn 2011:65). Importantly, this division is only partly human-controlled, for in letting their horses graze independently the split between bands comes to be maintained ('naturally') by the horses themselves, with the stallion remaining with the mares and challenging the other males and thus reproducing the 'wild' structure of horse relations within the 'domestic' herd. As Batukhan explained:

> We let the stallion (*azarga*) live with the mares (*güü*) to produce offspring and milk during the summer, and keep the geldings (*mor*) separated to be used for riding and training. This way the herds are just like wild (*zerleg*) horses and they produce healthier foals and a better amount of milk. It is important not to control a horse's behaviour too much: instead, you need to work with the horse's abilities and personality to perform different tasks. A faster horse or a galloper (*tsogio mor'*) is not suitable for herding so you use it for racing; an easy riding horse is good for herding but not for travelling longer distances; and a livelier horse is good for migrating between pastures. It is also important not to control the stallion too much because he is the manager of the herd: he helps to drive the geldings and round up the mares, and works with the herders in the household. This is why we never cut the stallion's mane - it is left to grow long so that the other horses follow him as the leader.

Here the line between 'wild' and 'domestic' horses, and 'natural' and 'human-controlled' behaviour, is highly fluid, with the household specifically allowing their horses to organise themselves according to their own herd structure, as well as harnessing their 'natural' behaviour in order to manage the herd, including letting the stallion act as manager. This is an apt example demonstrating the cultural-specificity of human-animal relations, with herders not engaging with horses in terms of a division between 'domesticated' and 'non-domesticated', but rather, as autonomous persons living within their own herds and in articulation with which herding practices (such as milking and riding) must be performed.

Cattle are considered the second most important animal in Mongolia. They are subdivided into three-distinct species: namely, Mongolian cattle (*ukher*), yaks (*sarlag*), and cattle-yak hybrids (*khainag*). The first are smaller in size and produce less milk than most other cattle breeds around the world, but they are characteristically strong and develop a thick coat and hide during the winter, making them highly suitable for the harsh Mongolian climate (Jagchid & Hyer 1979). Yaks are larger than Mongolian cattle and tend to be found predominantly in mountain-steppe regions such as Khövsgöl province, where they are well adapted to the higher altitude and possess characteristically large lungs producing three times as many blood cells (Hanson 2004:25). There are approximately 5 million cattle and yaks in Mongolia, with the majority of herders favouring cattle-yak hybrids which, as Batukhan explained, tend to live longer than ordinary cattle. As we shall see below, this has important implications with regards to the skills of selective breeding and human-animal co-enskilment, specifically in the context of selecting particular cattle or yaks to be trained for key activities such as pulling carts. Cattle and yaks play a fundamental role in herding life and survival: milk from both is used to

[37] *Zerleg* means 'wild' or not habituated to humans. From a herding perspective, it is closely related to 'un-tamed' or 'un-trained', or simply a horse that is not socialised by humans (Fijn 2011:64-5).

produce a variety of food products - including drinks, cheeses, and creams – they provide meat, and their hair and hides are fashioned into rope, saddles, and boots (Jagchid & Hyer 1979). Cattle and yaks are also used for pulling carts to transport firewood and water, as well as to carry a household's possessions and dismantled ger when moving between seasonal encampments, something which has become more important since the collapse of motorised transport formerly provided by the negdels. Both Mongolian cattle and yaks are herded together and, in contrast to horses, live and graze much closer to the encampment, making them relatively easy to herd and care for during the day.

Batukhan's household have around forty cattle within their herd, made up of nearly equal numbers of Mongolian cattle (*ukher*), yaks (*sarlag*), and hybrids (*khainag*). As in all households, the animals are free ranging - waking up early in the morning and leaving the encampment on their own, grazing on grasslands relatively close to the ger and then returning in the afternoon. The behaviour of Mongolian cattle and yaks is considered similar, although herders recognise the former as being more placid and the latter more 'wild' (*zerleg*) (also see Fijn 2011), something that demands specific skills when performing tasks such as pulling carts and milking. As Bayarmaa explained: "Yaks are slower to adapt to changes but they are more intelligent than cattle; this is why they make good animals for pulling carts. Yaks are also very good mothers and will defend their calves more than cows, so it is important to have a good relationship with the mothers for milking. But yaks are much more sensitive than cows and it takes longer for them to trust you: for example, they will not let a stranger milk them or handle their calves".



(Figure 9. Yak and cattle-yak hybrids grazing on the grasslands – photo by the author)

Much as with horses, there is minimal restriction on the social behaviour of cattle and yaks (Fijn 2011) and, throughout most of the year, Batukhan's household allow them to organise themselves according to their 'natural' behaviour and herd structure. Besides castrating males, the primary human intervention is their separation into different groups during the summer season: the first including the dairy cows and a single bull; the second including the pre-maternal cows and all castrated males; and the third including the young (one and two-year-old) calves who still nurse their mothers. This is comparable to the division of horse herds described above and is intended specifically to allow Bayarmaa to obtain milk during the summer. Camels are considered the third most important animal and have been herded in Mongolia for at least three thousand years (Hanson 2004). Camels are used for their milk,

meat, hair, and hides, as well as for transporting heavy items such as the ger. Well-adapted for life in cold, dry and rugged areas, they are characteristically known for being able to travel long distances and are found primarily in and around the Gobi Desert. Although a number of herders in the Shishged own camels, Batukhan's household have never kept any and I had little personal experience with them during my fieldwork.

Sheep are considered the fourth most important animal and are differentiated into two types. The most common has a fat, round tail and black head, while the other has a longer tail and lighter-coloured head. Sheep produce wool, milk, meat, and hides, and their tails are an important source of nourishment during the winter (Jagchid & Hyer 1979). Sheep are arguably the most important animal in terms of everyday subsistence as they supply not only meat and milk but also wool and hides for clothing and for felt - the main covering of the ger (Hanson 2004). In regions where wood or other types of fuel are unavailable, *argal* – dried, pressed sheep dung – also serves as a vital source of fuel for warmth and cooking[38]. There are approximately 18 million sheep in Mongolia, with Batukhan's household having one hundred and twenty.

Goats are the least popular of the five snouts and were formerly kept by only the poorest of households (Jagchid & Hyer 1979). Goat meat is generally disliked and although goats are milked, it is their ability to produce cashmere and angora wool, both of which are in great demand as export items, which determine their ubiquity in Mongolia (Hanson 2004). Cashmere sells for between £20-30 per kilogram and although a single goat only produces a limited amount per year, the economic incentive is such that herders maintain increasingly large goat herds (ibid:30), providing households with a supplementary source of income. Goats are well suited to the Mongolian landscape as they are able to graze in dry or remote areas, as well as being able to mix freely with sheep. As a result, they are extremely numerous (12 million) in Mongolia. As noted above, there is an underrepresentation of both camels and goats in the Shishged and, as a result, Batukhan's household only have sixty goats within their herd.



(Figure 10. Sheep and goats grazing together – photo by the author)

Much as with other animals, the household do not considerably alter the social structure and herd behaviour of both sheep and goats, instead coordinating their practices in articulation with the animals themselves. Sheep and goats are highly mobile when grazing because they feed on a diverse range of vegetation, something that demands specific skilled practice such as

[38] With no distinct odor, *argal* is a tremendously useful byproduct as a fuel and is typically collected by women and children.

regularly monitoring the animals and herding them to ensure they do not graze too far away. Connected to this, sheep and goats have to be driven in and away from the encampment multiple times a day, otherwise they will only eat (and overgraze) the grasses around the ger. This was readily brought to the fore as I assisted Batukhan and Hurelbaatar in herding the sheep and goats on a daily basis, the animals being my primary responsibility during my time with the household.

Herding in the Mongolian Environment

One of the most fundamental skills in Mongolian rural life is the practice of herding - the physical movement of herd animals between different parts of the landscape. People's survival is dependent on herd animals being moved to appropriate areas of grazing land so that they may sustain themselves, produce offspring, and so that households can obtain milk, meat, and other animal products in return. At the same time, herding is essential in order to maintain the sustainability of the grasslands and avoid overgrazing, specifically through rotating the herds and ensuring that pastures are allowed to regenerate (Miller & Sheehy 2008; Fernandez-Gimenz 2000; Miller 1998; Brunn 2006).

In Batukhan's household different animals are herded in different ways and to varying extents. Cattle require the least amount of herding as they leave the encampment to go grazing on their own and return in the afternoon, although it is necessary to drive cattle the last few metres back to the encampment and ensure that they are in a safe position for the night. This can easily be done on foot and performed by anyone in the household, typically involving embodying gestures to incite the cattle to move, vocalising a command such as '*khai*' (the generic signal encouraging an animal to move forward), or calling a particular cow or yak by name to gain cooperation (e.g. 'Big Horn, come closer'). Throughout my time with the household Bayarmaa and Oyun spent every afternoon checking that all of the cattle had returned safely, with Oyun typically taking on the role of driving the animals to an appropriate area for the night. This informal but regular contact between younger herders and cattle serves as an important aspect of human-animal co-enskilment, specifically as it familiarises both with one another and habituates the latter to being handled, something which comes to be manifested at other times during the day such as during milking.

Horses are always herded on horseback using a specially-trained gelding and require skilful maneuvering on the part of the rider. In Batukhan's household, this was only ever performed by Batukhan or Hurelbaatar, largely as horses are considered to require specialist handling and skills. In herds that graze apart from human beings, horses tend to move across the landscape in single file, typically with the stallion driving the herd from the rear. As a result, it is considered effective to replicate this while herding horses between pastures, which is said to be more effective in controlling their direction and offering protection against predators. As Hurelbaatar explained: "By staying at the back of the herd the horses feel more comfortable and are easier to move; wolves attack from behind so horses are used to having the stallion at the back". When horses need to be herded for more specific purposes, such as to break-in untrained horses or catch geldings for riding, Batukhan and Hurelbaatar typically used a *shelbuur* - or two-metre long elongated whip - or an *urga* - or lasso-pole - while herding.



(Figure 11. Batukhan observing the condition of the grasslands – photo by author)

Sheep and goats require the most amount of herding because of their rapid grazing of the grasslands, their tendency to wander long distances, and their susceptibility to attack from predators. Batukhan and Hurelbaatar spent the majority of their time herding the sheep and goats - driving them out every morning, remaining with or checking on them during the day, moving them to appropriate areas if they had grazed too far away, and herding them back in the afternoon. Throughout my time with the household the sheep and goats needed to be monitored constantly so that they did not venture within forested areas - where they are more susceptible to predators - and so that they did not graze any 'reserved' areas of pasture (see below). As noted above, my primary responsibility in Batukhan's household was to assist in herding the sheep and goats, and this is something I performed on a daily basis over the course of many months. As a result, it served as a prominent domain in which to observe how herding skills came to be taught and learnt between the generations and via cross-species co-enskilment. It also served as an important aspect of my own ethnographer-enskilment, specifically in terms of my ability to recognise herd animals and my changing perception of the herding landscape.

Every morning Batukhan and Hurelbaatar exited the ger and made their way to the horses tied to the tethering line (*zel*) just outside the dwelling. Every household keeps at least one trained gelding apart from the main horse herd for the purposes of herding, with Batukhan generally keeping a pair for this task. After saddling the horses, Batukhan and Hurelbaatar headed towards the 100 sheep and goats already grazing beside the ger and, aligning their horses with the herd, vocalised a '*chuu*' sound - the command used to drive one's horse forward. In the process, they steadily roused the sheep and goats and worked them into a particular direction; always remaining at the back of the herd, they manoeuvred their horses from the left-hand to the right-hand side of the animals in order to 'cup' the herd and round up any stragglers. Within seconds, the sheep and goats responded and started influencing each other's movements, with the first part of the herd inciting the others to jog forward in the chosen direction. Much as with herding horses, people tend to drive sheep and goats from the back of the herd while heading out to pasture, specifically because wolves target weaker or slower individuals from the back. At the same time, it is considered easier to drive the herd forward and influence their direction, controlling their speed and stopping any animals from falling away from the group. While heading forwards, Batukhan and Hurelbaatar constantly scanned the horizon for other herd animals, to ensure that the sheep and goats were heading in the right direction, and to watch for any potential predators. As Batukhan explained, sheep and

goats have a tendency to keep their heads down while moving and so it is important for herders to protect them and 'act as their eyes'.



(Figure 12. Using altitude to graze the herd – photo by the author)

While this description aptly characterises the general practice of herding, it is in fact more difficult to capture the physical and embodied nature of herding in words alone, for when performed fluently it consists of a series of embodied gestures between human being, horse, and herd, with the subtle movements of one intertwined with those of the others. At various points while herding, Batukhan would make small, implicit adjustments sitting in his saddle, which would influence his horse's movements and redirect the herd. At other times, he would twist, pull, or flick the reins in his hands to communicate with his horse and also redirect the herd. As with any accomplished practitioner, Batukhan executes these bodily movements in a largely taken-for-granted way, his skills having been generated through a lifetime of practical experience and which are manifested in the mutual embodiment between rider and horse.
In fact, when observing Batukhan I was reminded of Bateson's (1972) well-known example of the blind man's cane and the impossibility of identifying the precise point at which he 'sees' or experiences the world, specifically because of the indivisibility between cane and environment, body and mind. Similarly, with regards to herding, I found it impossible to locate the precise point where herding actually occurs: is it in Batukhan's bodily adjustments on top of the horse, in his hands as he pulls the reins, or in the horse's own movements as it gestures to the sheep and goats in order to drive the animals forward? Of course, the answer is that it is in-between all three, with the skills of herding intertwined with those of riding, the skills and learning of the horse, and the relationship between the horse and the sheep and goats that Batukhan harnesses by herding the animals on horseback. As we shall come to see, increasing numbers of herders are using motorcycles to herd their animals because of new technological affordances available since the postsocialist transition. While, at first glance, this may seem like a 'loss' of 'traditional' herding skills, in fact herders explicitly emphasise the experiential similarities between motorcycle and horse riding, specifically in terms of the shared indivisibility between rider and 'vehicle' (or horse) while moving across the landscape.

As with all herding skills, Hurelbaatar has himself learnt to herd the sheep and goats through active participation and assisting his father on a regular basis. As the pair drive the animals forward, Batukhan offers few verbal commands or instructions, instead allowing (and expecting) Hurelbaatar to put pressure on the herd whenever he feels necessary and generally assisting as a co-participant. As a sixteen-year-old male, Hurelbaatar is already considered a

working member of the household and expected to be able to ride competently and herd animals in appropriate ways depending on local conditions. Like all herders, the household do not randomly move their animals while herding but strategically select areas of pasture on the basis of season, weather conditions, and the needs of different species, with the aim of herding being to take full advantage of forage conditions within a particular area while still maintaining rangeland sustainability. This 'science of herding' comes to be imparted to younger generations such as Hurelbaatar in a largely informal and cumulative way, specifically through observation and practice, as well as subtle and often implicit comments and advice. For example, Batukhan occasionally pointed out particular areas of pasture which the household were to avoid grazing the sheep or goats, either because they needed to be rested until the following season or because of their unsuitability for particular animals. On other occasions, Batukhan informed Hurelbaatar to speed up or slow down so as to better control the moving herd, while at other times he commented on certain animals' behaviour or condition that required adjustment (e.g. "This area is weak from last season"; "Grey tail is looking tired").

An important aspect of herding sheep and goats is that they retain the same relative positions within the herd while being driven between pastures, with some positioning themselves at the front of the group, others remaining at the back, and others shifting to the sides, something which comes to be reproduced every time the animals are moved to and from the encampment[39]. This is a result of the fact that herders do not significantly alter the social organisation of the animals but allow them to maintain their 'natural' herd structures, something that influences the enskilment of herders themselves. As Batukhan explained:

> As we drive the animals forward each sheep and goat moves into the same position within the herd: some go to the front, some stay at the back, and others move into the middle or sides. These positions are the same every time because the animals organise themselves within the herd: sheep and goats have their own hierarchies and relationships. When a young sheep or goat joins the herd, it learns to find its place from the other animals, and after a few days you can see where it sits. It is important to learn these positions because then you understand the herds and the relationships between the animals: you learn which are the good (*sain*) and bad (*muu*) sheep and goats and which require more work; some like to fight with each other and cause problems while herding, while others like to walk away from the herd and graze on their own. You have to know each sheep and goat and watch them closely.

When a new sheep or goat enters the herd, it learns to find it place by interacting with the other animals according to their 'natural' behaviour (also see Fijn 2011:77), something which Batukhan and Hurelbaatar do not influence but which they harness in order to develop knowledge of individual animals and identify particularly 'difficult' sheep or goats that require additional attention. This came to the fore throughout my time herding the sheep and goats as Batukhan informally imparted herding advice to both Hurelbaatar and I on the basis of the animals' relative positioning within the herd. On numerous occasions, he instructed us to 'watch' a particular sheep or goat that he knew had a tendency to move away from the herd because it was 'difficult' (*omgolon*), calling out the animals' name and/or describing its physical characteristics (e.g. 'Black head is running away'). In response, Hurelbaatar (and gradually I) would scan the herd until he located the individual and then rode off towards it, following which he would set about herding it in an appropriate way. At other times, Batukhan pre-emptively warned Hurelbaatar to incite certain animals to 'keep up' as they were known to be the 'lazy' (*zailkhuu*) ones in the group. On another occasion, Hurelbaatar was maneuvering his horse beside a particular goat which appeared to be moving out of its place; Batukhan told his son to leave the goat as he was one of the two 'leaders' in the herd and would not venture

[39] This is something that is also reproduced when the sheep and goats are placed inside the corral or enclosure during the evening, and where individuals within the herd retain the same positions on a nightly basis (Fijn 2011:77).

too far away; instead, he should watch another 'bad' (*muu*) goat who regularly failed to listen. Here the ability to herd effectively is in direct relation to the animals' herd structure and co-learning to remember their own positions within the group, which allows herders such as Hurelbaatar to learn the individual personalities and relationships within the herd, including their own capacities to learn (or not) in relation to human beings. In fact, this is something that became a central part of my own enskilment, specifically as I used the 'fixed' positions within the herd to recognise individual animals and gradually learn their behavioural eccentricities. Herders such as Batukhan possess expert knowledge of the sheep and goats within his herd (as well as all other herd animals), specifically because of the large amounts of time he spends sitting, observing, and interacting with the animals on a daily basis. Indeed, I calculated that Batukhan spent an average of between four to six hours a day herding the sheep and goats depending on the season, and which included a range of activities from actively driving the animals between pastures to simply sitting quietly on the grasslands and observing them on horseback. As a result, Batukhan has a highly developed perceptual awareness of the physical characteristics of his herds, and is able to identify individuals on the basis of size, colour, hair, muscle composition, and specific features such as horns, teeth, and even sounds. By assisting his father regularly since childhood – spending hours on the grasslands observing the animals and learning which are the 'good' and 'bad' animals and which require specific attention - Hurelbaatar simultaneously learns to recognise individual animals and attend to their unique features, developing his own visual awareness of their colour, size, hair, shape, and other characteristics. This is an apt example of what Grasseni calls 'skilled-vision', whereby skills of perception are trained and shaped over time through practice and active participation: "Enskilment can be extended to those practitioners who daily go about defining and creatively extending the 'visual environments' of their practice. Cattle breeders, archaeologists, laser surgeons, even police consultants do each have a different world in front of their eyes, because they were each trained to see it differently" (2004:43). By working with the same animals regularly over time, Hurelbaatar comes to cumulatively train his vision and pick up on the subtle variations between individual animals that others, including the novice anthropologist, might not see. Here his enskilment is quite literally the learning to see a particular lifeworld, in this case one in which the differences between hundreds of animals are recognised and related skills learnt in the process.

Of course, this is precisely the reason why I myself was unable to recognise the differences between individual sheep and goats at the beginning of my fieldwork. Over time, however, I too came to develop my visual enskilment and began noticing more physical characteristics of particular animals. A few weeks into my fieldwork I started recognising one or two of the particularly mobile (or as I called them 'naughty') goats because they caused more trouble than the others when being driven out to pasture. As a result, I came to notice their individual features to a greater extent, including picking up on the differences between their colour, size, hair, and unique features such as teeth sticking out or the position of their horns. After a few months, I could recognise about thirty individuals within the herd, including recalling their names and some of their personal eccentricities. I even started identifying particular animals using local descriptive terminology, telling Batukhan and Hurelbaatar, for example, that "Round Horn is very calm" or "Black ears is too spoiled". The more I participated the more my body (and vision) incorporated my daily contact with the animals as a kind of phenomenological 'sediment', manifested in a growing familiarity with what were no longer simply animals but individuals with their own physical and behavioural characteristics. Of course, this is something not only reserved for anthropologists working with herd animals but

comes to the fore in all ethnographic encounters: thus, an ethnographer in an urban environment will develop visual enskilment in terms of identifying roads, buildings, neighbourhoods, or large populations of people, while someone carrying out fieldwork in the stock exchange will see numbers in a more perceptible way (Hertz 1998; Zaloom 2003). As with so many aspects of ethnographic fieldwork, this visual training actually comes to be sedimented as a permanent transformation in the lived-experience of the ethnographer him/herself: thus, when I returned home I could not help but look at sheep and goats differently than before, specifically noticing things that I would 'never have seen' and being able to identify subtler variations than prior to my time spent in Batukhan's household

While the sheep and goats were being driven between pastures, Batukhan and Hurelbaatar regularly communicated with the animals through a series of verbal signals and commands, some of which were directed at individual animals while others were intended for the herd as a whole. These included short, sharp sounds to drive the animals forward, to stop the herd, or to change their direction, as well as longer more drawn-out sounds to slow or calm the animals down (also see Fijn 2011:60). The most common command was '*khai*' – encouraging the herd to move forward at a faster pace – although by varying the tone and volume of the command it could also be used to impart differing levels of urgency – for example, '*khaaai*', indicating the animals must move but in a more relaxed way.

Herders in other parts of the world use a range of verbal commands and whistles while herding, typically directing a sheep dog to round up herd animals. Herders in Mongolia do not use dogs but call directly to their animals (Fijn 2011; Upton 2010) which signifies an important example of cross-species co-enskilment. Indeed, herd animals are seen as not only responding to verbal commands and instructions but learning and understanding their meanings over time, as well as being expected to listen to the commands and adjust their behaviour accordingly. Thus, Batukhan used different calls depending on whether the herd was moving out to pasture or if they were grazing in one particular area, as well as whether the situation was considered relaxed or more urgent. For example, he vocalised a series of short sounds instructing the herd to quickly change direction as they were heading towards an area of forest. On another occasion, a couple of goats began falling away from the herd while heading out to pasture; as a result, Hurelbaatar vocalised a loud '*pphh*' sound which, like many calls and commands, has an onomatopoeic quality that reproduces the snorting of a goat and is designed to replicate their warning-call (also see Fijn 2011:60). Within seconds the animals responded and re-entered the herd, with Hurelbaatar calling out the names of the two or three that had run away and gave them a verbal warning, specifically to 'keep close!' and 'listen!' (e.g. "Fat-tail, keep close!", or "Round face, listen!"). This reminded me of how I myself discipline my dogs through similar verbal commands if they behave badly, such as run across a road or bark at an inappropriate time. In both cases, there is a recognition of animal agency and the capacity for animals to learn and remember, including when to speed up, slow down, as well as recognise the emotional state of human beings.

Having assisted his father since childhood, Hurelbaatar has already learnt the majority of these verbal signals and commands through informally observing, listening, and spending time with Batukhan. At the same time, however, Batukhan occasionally offered Hurelbaatar advice on how to adjust his vocalisations so they become easier to understand, typically vocalising the command himself and then having Hurelbaatar reproduce the sound. For example, Batukhan advised Hurelbaatar how to adjust his vocalisations in relation to particular sheep and goats which were known to have a tendency to ignore or had not yet learnt a particular command. A few months into my stay I noticed a number of sheep appearing to ignore Hurelbaatar's

vocalisations, something which caused him to become frustrated. As Batukhan explained, this is because the sheep belonged to a neighbouring herder who had integrated his animals into the household's herd and, as a result, it was understandable that they had not yet learnt his particular calls. As Batukhan explained: "The more time you spend with the herd the more commands they learn, with older animals remembering your commands; some animals are smarter and learn faster than others so you have to remember which commands and how to give them. Most goats are very stubborn and you need to train them to listen more than sheep; but sheep can be lazy and sometimes giving a command is not enough". Here herd animals are granted a degree of agency not typically associated with normative characterisations of domestication, recognising their own cumulative learning in relation to living with human beings. For herders such as Batukhan and Hurelbaatar, vocalising a command is seen as a direct way of teaching a herd animal to listen and follow their instructions, something that is considered fundamental in order to effectively move them across the landscape. Here cross-species communication, including both vocal commands and embodied gestures, is an important aspect of maintaining the close relationships between herders and their animals, keeping the latter trained and habituating them to living with humans within the household.

After driving the herd to an appropriate area of pasture Batukhan and Hurelbaatar either left the sheep and goats to graze alone or remained with them for a period of time, depending on the location and condition of the pastures, the season, and weather. During the spring, for example, it is essential that herders remain with the animals and continue herding because goats are highly mobile at this time as they graze the first shoots of new growth after the winter (Jagchid & Hyer 1979; Upton 2009). In late summer and early autumn, however, the animals can be left alone for longer periods as they graze in more localised areas, while in winter herders again spend more time with their herds ensuring they can access sufficient grasses underneath the snow and ice.

Enskilment in the Mongolian Environment

To the untrained eye, the areas in which Batukhan and Hurelbaatar left the sheep and goats to graze appeared virtually the same as all other parts of the landscape – comprising between three and four species of grass, a few rocky surfaces and, depending on the location, differing shifts in elevation. As I came to learn by performing this task on a daily basis, however, there are fundamental differences between areas of pasture, all of which have important implications for herding and the sustainability of the grasslands. Some areas, for example, are completely unsuitable for grazing sheep because of the spiky grasses and thistles that penetrate their wool, making it imperative that herders drive the animals around these areas so that they do not begin grazing. These areas, however, are suitable for grazing horses, which have thicker hides and are generally higher off the ground, while areas unsuitable for horses are particularly apt for grazing cattle and yaks. This relationship between different areas of pasture and the needs of herd animals demands – and generates - specific perceptual and practical skills, with herders having to learn which areas of pasture afford grazing for which species and how to rotate the herds at different times of the year. As Owen Lattimore put it over eighty years ago:

> Few people realize that herding needs rotation of pastures just as much as farming needs rotation of crops. Overgrazing of sheep and goats is especially bad, because their sharp hoofs cut the surface and expose the soil, leading to wind erosion. On top of this there is the damage done as pastures gradually grow 'stale'. According to the Mongols, no pasture ought to be grazed year after year by the same kind of stock – sheep for instance. A pasture ought either to be rested altogether from time to time or grazed by some other kinds of stock, like cows or horses. If it gets no rest or change the steady accumulation

> of the urine and dung of the same kind of animal ceases to be fertilizing and becomes 'poisonous'; the feed becomes less nourishing for all animals, and as they lose vitality the danger of epidemics increases. (1962:165)

Normative accounts of animal herding characterise this ability to rotate herd animals in explicitly formalised terms, something that can be seen in much of the literature in human ecology, environmental science, as well as certain subfields of anthropology, where herding is characterised as a 'system of resource management' (Barfield 2011; Harris 1992; Vayda 1969). As a characteristic example puts it: "Over hundreds of years herders in Northern and Inner Asia acquired intricate ecological knowledge about the environment and the animals they herded. This *body of information*, often termed indigenous knowledge or traditional ecological knowledge, reflects generations of acute observation, experimentation, and adaptation by herders to a harsh environment… herders in Mongolia should be considered as 'professional' rangeland managers" (Miller & Sheehy 2008:254 my emphasis). While such a characterisation aptly describes certain features of the herding process, the way in which this is articulated misleadingly presents herding as coterminous with a clearly defined body of 'traditional environmental knowledge', one that exists 'in the mind' of herders and which comes to be executed - and thus reproduced between the generations - in a formalised way. Certainly, herders such as Batukhan are aware of the empirical aspects associated with herding and, if asked, he will explain the different areas of pasture surrounding his encampment and the corollary needs of different animals. However, this is not how herders themselves experience the practice of herding, or how it is taught and learnt between the generations. Indeed, when moving the animals each and every morning, Batukhan would not rationalise the different areas of pasture and the needs of herd animals, but rather, performed this implicitly within the unfolding tasks of everyday life. Of course, this does not imply that the skills of herding are somehow beyond conscious experience; instead, it is because they are executed fluently that they come to be experienced as taken-for-granted. As Ingold writes: "Knowledge becomes skill at the point where it is fully incorporated into the bodily modus operandi of the expert agent: at this point it is no longer a science to be applied, but exists only as the agent's practical application of his or her own *self* to the task at hand" (2000:336).



(Figure 13. A summer downpour in the Shishged Depression – photo by the author)

This has important implications for understanding how the skills of herding come to be taught and learnt between the generations. Indeed, the concept of 'Traditional Environmental Knowledge' presupposes that 'knowledge' is 'passed down' between the generations on

account of some a priori representational system learnt 'in the mind', following a conventional model of social learning where the novice is said to "gradually internalise a cultural code or a superorganic script" (Descola & Palsson 1996:6; also see Ingold 2000: Sigaut 1993; Marchand 2010). However, if we actually look at how herders such as Hurelbaatar come to learn, they do so in a far more informal way and by active participation, with 'knowledge' indistinct from the actual practice of herding itself. Indeed, Hurelbaatar has come to understand the pastoral landscape and the needs of different animals by growing up in Batukhan's household, assisting his father in moving the animals and learning to attend to different features of the landscape. When he himself moves the sheep and goats it is not 'knowledge' that is being cognitively formulated ('I must do this', 'I must do that') but skills that are being embodied out of his own engagement with the herd animals in the landscape. Here skills are at once a form of knowledge *and* embodied engagement, a context-dependant 'know how' acquired through practical learning and repetition (Nelson 1983; Gieser 2008). This is precisely where the standard model of the social learning of technical skills goes wrong. As Ingold puts it: "For in attributing the intergenerational conformity of movements to rules that are transmitted and internalised in advance of their practical application in mimesis, the model assumes that practice is a matter of executing identical, rule-governed movements over and over again" (2000:357). It is for this reason why Mongolian herders (and so-called indigenous peoples) often characterise their own 'environmental knowledge' as a 'way of life', not reducible to a cognitive system but involving both knowledge *and* practical application. As Blaser puts it: "Rather than being the knowledge of *how* to live, it is the actual *living* of that life" (2004:79).

To problematise this normative characterisation of herding has an important implication: namely, how to understand herders' experience of social change. As a sixteen-year-old male, Hurelbaatar is just reaching the age that many younger herders commonly decide whether to continue working as herders or seek out other opportunities, such as finding work in regional centres, migrating to Ulaanbaatar or, if possible, pursuing further education. As he explained, a number of his friends had already left their households to find informal work in Ulaan Uul and Mörön, specifically as long-distance drivers and traders. Hurelbaatar, however, was adamant that he continues working as a herder and acquiring his own ger and herd animals: 'I like living in the countryside and working with herd animals; whenever I was in school I missed my family and moving between pastures. The herding life can be difficult but I do not want to live in the city or Mörön; there may be new opportunities but too many people struggle. With a ger and your own herd you can always survive'. Whenever we were out herding I commented to Hurelbaatar how impressed I was that at the age of sixteen he already knew so much about the landscape, including which types of pasture suited which species and how to rotate the herds at different times of the year. As Hurelbaatar himself admitted, however, there was an important gap in his practical experience because of the many years he spent living away from his household in the regional centre. Indeed, like the majority of rural youth, Hurelbaatar spent just over ten years attending boarding school in Ulaan Uul, living apart from his family for up to nine months of the year and returning home during the holidays to assist his household and participate in herding life.

This issue came to the fore one morning as we were riding back towards the ger after leaving the sheep and goats to graze. Along the way, we passed an area of grassland that was in visibly poorer condition than any other I had seen, with the grasses appearing brown and with no new growth. Asking Hurelbaatar why it was in such a state he replied that it must be from overgrazing, specifically from goats which had a tendency to eat the grasses down to the very bottom of their roots. At that point, Batukhan interjected and told us that the condition was not

the result of overgrazing but because of a fire last year on the grasslands, started from a lightning strike. Dismounting his horse, Batukhan ran his fingers through the grass to show Hurelbaatar and I how the damage differed from that caused by overgrazing: "You see, it is burnt below the surface; if it was only overgrazed then you would still see the bottom of the roots. (To Hurelbaatar) You have not seen many lightning strikes because they normally occur in late summer when you were at school. It is important because now we cannot graze the herd here as the grasses will not grow for a whole season".

At that point, Hurelbaatar commented that he had in fact learnt about lightning strikes affecting the grasslands while at school, as well as how in the United States herders implemented so-called 'controlled-burnings' in order to regenerate the pastures. Hurelbaatar then commented that perhaps such controlled-burnings could be of use in Mongolia to counter the increased overgrazing in central regions such as around Ulaanbaatar. Batukhan replied that he knew nothing about the situation in the United States but that the technique had been used in some regions of Mongolia during the socialist period, thought by the state to remove inedible grasses and encourage new growth. However, herders were critical of the practice because Mongolia's high winds render the potential for wild fires extremely dangerous, and with the cold winters meaning that regrowth is actually limited.

This exchange was interesting as it revealed how Hurelbaatar's enskilment is an ongoing process, something that is constantly being accumulated through practical experience. By dismounting his horse and showing Hurelbaatar the difference between the damage caused by overgrazing and a lightning strike, Batukhan was teaching his son something about the landscape, including its implications for the household's own animals and their herding strategies. This reveals the differences between learning about herding as understood from the formalised perspective of 'Traditional Environmental Knowledge' and skilled practice, for here learning is a tactile, sensory, and embodied experience *with* the landscape rather than a disembodied and abstract knowledge *of* it. Indeed, this is the reason why herders were generally critical of the overly formalistic rotational policies of the negdels (Rossabi 2005:54), as they did not allow for a consideration of flexibility and adaptation according to practical experience. At the same time, we can see how Hurelbaatar's enskilment is intertwined with his own personal experiences from attending boarding school in the regional centre, something which has simultaneously limited his familiarity with the landscape but also provided him with alternate points of reference with which to think about herding. This demonstrates not only the processuality of enskilment over the course of people's lives but the ways in which skills diverge between people on the basis of their differing life experiences, which can serve as the source of relatively small differences as in this case but also potential conflicts as we shall see in later chapters.

Coming to understand this over the course of many months was a fundamental aspect of my own ethnographer-enskilment, something which forced me to problematise my own initial perception of the landscape. Indeed, when I first arrived in the Shishged I perceived the region from a specifically western and naturalistic perspective - as a 'remote' and beautiful 'environment' which I constantly wanted to photograph. As I came to learn, however, herders do not experience the landscape in this way, but as something that affords different possibilities for action: thus, while some areas afford grazing for sheep and goats, cattle or yaks, and horses, others afford water sources, trees for firewood, or rocky outcrops for protection against the wind and cold. In Mongolia, the landscape is vast and demanding and experienced by herders as ontologically alive, requiring that they understand and harness its different energies and features in order for both human beings and animals to survive. This is

the reason why herders refer to *baigal gazar*, what is best translated as 'landscape' rather than 'environment' (Humphrey 1995), and which is a term that includes human beings as part of the eco-social landscape. As Humphrey writes:

> In Mongolian culture…landscapes are more in the nature of practices designed to have results: it is not contemplation of the land (*gazar*) that is important but interaction with it, as something with energies far greater than the human. The Mongols do not take over any terrain in the vicinity and transform it into something that is their own. Instead, they move within a space and environment where some kind of pastoral life is possible and 'in-habit' it. That is to say, they let it pervade them and their herds, influencing where they settle, when they move, and what kinds of animals they keep. However, this is not a pre-reflective or spontaneous existence, but one recognising human choice and agencies, which are conceived as interrelated with and subordinate to the agencies attributed to entities in the land (1995:135).

By herding the sheep and goats on a daily basis, I myself gradually came to 'see' the landscape less as an 'environment' and more as *baigal gazar*: what I had initially perceived to be wild, remote, and beautiful became a landscape of potentialities - I began remembering the location of rivers to water the herds, picking up on the subtle changes in grass type, elevation, amount of rock, and recognising which areas of pasture were suitable for which animal. After a few weeks, I could stand outside the front of the *ger* and locate the different areas of pasture in which the animals were grazing, such as the horses to the east, the sheep and goats to the north, and the cattle to the west. A few months later, I could start to recognise the differences between three or four species of grass and which were suitable for which animal, as well as the potential problems associated with particular areas of the landscape such as rocks blocking the sheep from grazing, depressions making it difficult to locate the horses from a distance, as well as forests enticing the ever-active goats to potential sources of danger. One morning I was out herding with Hurelbaatar as a violent storm passed overhead. As the winds blew and a mix of ice and rain beat down on the herd, Hurelbaatar recommended that we find a sheltered area for the sheep and goats; at that point, I remembered a rocky outcrop on the other side of the mountain where Batukhan had taken me a few months earlier, specifically to shelter the herd from a comparable storm. After making our way there Hurelbaatar commented that he was surprised that I knew the location, admitting that he had not thought about it and that I was beginning to 'see like a herder'.

This is an apt example demonstrating how ethnographic understanding comes to be generated through ethnographer-enskilment, specifically by participating in another lifeworld and learning to attend to the world in the way one's interlocutors do: "to notice the qualities of the environment that have local relevance" (Harris 2005:201). This example of my gradual apprenticeship into the herding lifeworld (Coy 1989; Lave & Wenger 1998; Palsson 1994) captures the practical dimension of ethnographic fieldwork, whereby knowledge is generated through engagement and learning. As Grasseni writes: "Our knowledgeability consists in the capacity to situate information and understand its meaning within the context of a direct perceptual engagement with our environments. And we develop this capacity, by having things *shown* to us…To show something to somebody is to cause it to be seen or otherwise experienced…by that other person. It is, as it were, to lift a veil off some aspect or component of the environment so that it can be apprehended directly. In that way, truths that are inherent in the world are, bit by bit, revealed or disclosed to the novice" (2009:12). In the process, I came to learn something of the relationship between herding households, the landscape, and herd animals, specifically herders' experience of *baigal gazar* and their capacity to 'know' (at once 'mentally' and 'physically') the relationship between the affordances of the landscape and moving animals from one pasture to another - experiencing the landscape not as an external 'environment' but as a place in which to live and make a living, and eventually call home.

Riding and Training Horses

Another fundamental skill in Mongolian herding is the riding of horses and their training for specific purposes. Horses are at the very centre of herding life as people ride between neighbouring encampments and when collecting supplies from, or visiting friends and family in, regional centres. Herders also spend large amounts of time riding horses while herding, with many developing close personal bonds with particular horses. As Batukhan explained, in a remote region such as the Shishged it is commonplace for herders to spend many hours a day alone on the steppe and, as a result, a horse is often one's only companion.

The style of riding in Mongolia is more closely aligned with Western rather than British riding (also see Fijn 2011:65), presumably because both are based on the herding of animals. Having had little horse riding experience before, I myself took lessons with a Western trainer prior to my arrival in Mongolia with the intention of developing at least some basic skills, including familiarisation with different horse gaits and how to perform everyday tasks such as saddling. As I came to learn, however, there are fundamental differences between Western and Mongolian riding, including how herders learn to ride, how horses are trained, as well as the ontological presuppositions of human-horse relations, all of which have important implications for the teaching and learning of skills.

The most basic yet fundamental skill associated with horses is learning to ride, with both male and female children typically learning between the ages of four and five. The common scenario is for the father, uncle, or older brother of a household to 'teach' the child via practice, placing him/her on the saddle in front while performing everyday tasks and, giving the child the reins, imparting the necessary skills through active participation. Indeed, children in rural households are generally introduced to riding informally by assisting and travelling with their family members. It is commonplace across Mongolia to see children riding on the front or back of a horse with their parents or older sibling, which introduces them to the experience of riding and serves to inculcate skills such as the embodiment of co-ordination, balance, and overcoming fear. In herding households, children grow up riding horses from a young age and learn to respect and approach the animals with care, as well as being taught to recognise their defensive behaviour and the potential of being kicked by a stallion or a particularly threatening horse. Every summer during the *Naadam* festival[40] youngsters socialise on the back of their horses out on the grasslands, particularly teenage boys testing each other's riding skills.



(Figure 14. Rearing the horses back to the encampment – photo by the author)

[40] *Naadam* is a traditional festival held once a year in the summer across Mongolia. Also called 'the three games of men' or '*eriin gurvan naadam*', it is a two or three-day festival which includes horse racing, wrestling, and archery. While the biggest *Naadam* is held in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar, smaller *Naadam* are organised in the countryside around nearly every *sum* centre in the country. Each regional *Naadam* is immensely popular and serve to attract people from across the region, including herders and *sum* residents.

A few months into my stay with Batukhan's household Hurelbaatar's five-year-old cousin, Baichu, visited for the summer holidays. As soon as he arrived, he implored Hurelbaatar to let him assist in herding the sheep and goats, asking to be placed on one of the horses and to drive the animals out to pasture. As a five-year-old, Baichu had already sat on a horse numerous times before although he was still yet to ride alone. Positioning his cousin in-between the front of the saddle and his own body, Hurelbaatar gave Baichu the reins and, after inciting the horse to trot, offered virtually no instructions for the rest of the day other than "go left', 'go right', 'go straight' and 'stop', instead allowing his cousin to manoeuvre the horse himself, letting him speed up and slow down at will, as well as attempting to vocalise commands to herd the sheep and goats. At one point, the horse became startled at something and suddenly veered off to one side, causing Baichu to lean sideways and nearly fall off. Hurelbaatar, however, said nothing to his younger cousin, instead letting him experience and adjust to the situation himself.

On the way back to the ger, Baichu asked Hurelbaatar whether they could ride for a short while through the forest as he had never ridden there before. Hurelbaatar agreed but commented that the three-year-old gelding they were riding had also never travelled through the forest before and, as a result, he might become difficult to handle. As they ventured into the trees and the gelding became flustered, Batukhan offered no technical advice but rather advised Baichu to sing a song, specifically one which many herders are familiar with and whose lyrics extol the strength and virtues of the Mongolian horse. When I asked Hurelbaatar what was the connection to the song he explained that it would elicit an emotional response on the part of the horse and make him more 'calm' (*dölgöön*). A few minutes later, Hurelbaatar told Baichu to elongate the vowels of certain lyrics while singing as this would make the horse feel 'brave' (*zoriltoi*). By the time we returned Baichu was riding more competently than when he had first arrived, telling Batukhan and Bayarmaa about his experiences inside the forest. At the same time, the gelding had himself calmed down considerably, with Hurelbaatar rewarding him by releasing him back into the herd with the other horses.



(Figure 15. Children and their horses – photo by the author)

This is an apt example demonstrating the cultural specificity of learning to ride in Mongolia and how riding skills are generated in articulation with animal agency and co-enskilment, as well as revealing the broader attitude towards learning characteristic of the herding lifeworld. Indeed, when I took riding lessons with my Western trainer the lesson always began with a 'theory' class, which were typically of a technical nature outlining the physical and behavioural characteristics of 'the' horse, during which I was instructed to write down notes and draw pictures of horse anatomy. This was designed to generate 'knowledge' about horses (as a

species) and horse riding which could then be implemented 'in practice', specifically following a teaching model characteristic of western education which distinguishes 'knowledge' from 'practice' and which prioritises learning 'in the mind' before being applied to a 'real-world' scenario, which is founded upon a series of culturally-specific dichotomies such as body-mind and subject-object (Ingold 2000; Portisch 2010; Bourdieu 1977; Grasseni 2009; Marchand 2008). As the example of Baichu demonstrates, however, Mongolians do not experience or learn to ride horses in this way: rather than giving the novice verbal commands and instructions – either on the ground or on the back of the horse – s/he is taught informally and as part of performing everyday tasks such as herding or travelling across the landscape. In fact, the way in which Baichu learnt could not be said to have been through a 'lesson' at all, but rather, an accumulation of embodied knowledge, specifically via what Jackson (1996) refers to as 'kinaesthetic learning', where learning occurs with the novice carrying out the activity themselves. By allowing Baichu to direct the horse and handle the reins himself, Hurelbaatar was introducing him into the taskscape (Ingold 2000) of riding and letting him develop the skills for himself. This is an apt example of what Ingold calls 'guided rediscovery' (2000:356), where the novice is enabled to gain proficiency for him/herself by joining in the taskscape of his/her teachers/parents, and where the novice does not reproduce the experts' skill on account of a representational system of knowledge learnt 'in the mind', but seeks to bring his/her own bodily movements into line as close as possible to those that they have seen performed by others.

Importantly, this is something that applies equally to all contexts of enskilment in Mongolian herding life. Indeed, whether in herding, milking, preparing food, or working with herd animals, herders generally allow novices such as children (as well as the anthropologist) to try and learn skills for themselves – participating in daily life, assisting in tasks with their parents and siblings – and without explicit instruction and teaching[41], as well as, of course, making mistakes along the way. As Fijn writes: "Mongolian children, like herd animals, are expected to gradually learn from trial and error and experience, rather than coaching and instruction" (2011:147).

Perhaps the most explicit example of this that I encountered was when three-month-old Sukh crawled on the floor one day just centimetres from the hot stove in the centre of the ger and, concerned that he would burn himself, I quickly rushed to pull him away. Upon seeing this, Bayarmaa giggled at what she considered my over-reaction, specifically commenting that if the stove was indeed too hot then Sukh would certainly learn that for himself. Of course, this is not to suggest that herders purposely put their children in harm's way, but it reveals a different attitude to learning (and childhood)[42] which prioritises the individual's own experience over explicit instruction and rule-making (also see Portisch 2010). Much as with Baichu learning to ride, herders consider it more effective for the individual to develop skills on their own terms, and although it is the role of those around them to assist in the enskilment process, there is a recognition that learning comes from direct experience, even if it means falling from the horse or burning oneself on the metal stove.

[41] For a comparable discussion amongst reindeer herders see Anderson 2000; Habeck 2006.

[42] It is significant to note in this regard that every year a number of international children's organisations petition the Mongolian government to set a limit on how young a jockey can be for the annual Naadam festival, as they argue that children of five and six-years-old are too young to race. The fact that this request is regularly criticised by the Mongolian government, as well as by herders themselves, captures the cultural specificity of Mongolian attitudes to not only learning skills but the definition of childhood.

In the context of Baichu learning to ride, more important than instructions or rules was the recognition of animal agency and co-enskilment, which are understood as a central feature of riding horses with differing levels of experience and in varying conditions. By singing a song to the gelding, Hurelbaatar acknowledges the personhood of the horse and its own particular enskilment, including its unfamiliarity with riding in the forest. In the process, he indirectly teaches Baichu how riding is performed in articulation with animal agency and co-learning, with the song serving as a practical mechanism to control the horse and ride safely. Mongolian herders have a wide repertoire of songs which they sing on a variety of occasions, many of which focus on herd animals and, in particular, horses and their relationship with human beings. While out herding or travelling long distances it is commonplace for herders to sing to their horses, who are recognised as understanding the songs and responding in various ways, including adjusting their riding style, becoming more calm, energetic, or experiencing other emotional reactions. On a number of occasions, I observed Hurelbaatar and Batukhan singing to their horses while herding or travelling through the taiga, with both explaining that it made their horses 'feel more comfortable', 'made them calmer', or 'made them braver', depending on the situation.

On another occasion, I observed young jockeys sing to their horses before racing during the *Naadam* festival, something similarly intended to induce an emotional response and prepare the horse for racing. The well-known feature film, *The Story of the Weeping Camel* (Byambasuren 2003) is another apt example of this, in which a mother camel who refuses to accept her young after birth is played music with a horse-head fiddle (*morin khuur*) in order to evince emotion and make it 'cry', specifically to encourage her to accept the calf. In all of these cases there is a recognition of animal agency and personhood, as well as the perception that animals have the capacity to learn not only through physical coercion and control but through inciting emotional responses. For herders such as Baichu, an important aspect of his riding was to recognise the personhood of the gelding and 'enskil' the (novice) horse through cross-species communication. Here there is a recognition of emotional depth on the part of Baichu's horse not typically emphasised in western human-animal relations (also see Noske 1997; Ingold 2000), something that is considered important from a Mongolian herding perspective and in relation to which skills such as riding come to be taught and learnt.



(Figure 16. A saddled horse prepared for riding – photo by the author)

One of the most basic riding skills that I learnt prior to my arrival in Mongolia was how to direct a horse by 'adjusting one's seat', which involves using one's calf muscles to apply pressure in a repetitive pattern on either the left or right-hand side of the horse, 'massaging' it into the correct direction so that the horse walks, trots, or canters comfortably and the rider retains control. This is a characteristic feature of Western riding and is also particularly effective with horses in dressage (also see Irwin 2001). However, after just a few minutes riding in Mongolia I soon realised the incompatibility of this technique with Mongolian horses, not only because they are smaller in size - meaning one's legs sit in a different position on the horse – but because they have been trained – and themselves have learnt – to ride in a different way. This came to the fore as Batukhan watched me riding towards the beginning of my fieldwork and explained that I needed to pull the reins more vigorously rather than (trying) to use my legs. As he explained, Mongolian herders do not direct their horses with their legs at all, but rather, use a combination of pulling the reins, vocalising commands, adjusting their body, as well as sometimes using a *tashuur*, or short whip, if riding a particularly unresponsive horse. As I explained to Batukhan, I felt bad to pull the horse's reins (as well as use a *tashuur*) because of the sharp, metal bit in its mouth; indeed, the whole purpose of using one's legs in Western riding is to limit pulling the reins, instead using one's body and holding the reins to rather 'channel' the horse in a particular direction. As Batukhan explained, however:

> In Mongolia horses have learnt to ride differently than in your country; they know how to turn with the reins not with the legs. A good rider can use his body to control their horse but not with their legs: you can slide your seat to the left and right to make the horse turn and you can flick the reins to signal to the horse. Mongolian horses have learnt these techniques for a long time so you need to learn them too; if you do not pull the reins the horse will not know what you want to do. And it also depends on the horse: some horses are more difficult to control (*dogshin*) than others and so you need to use different techniques to tell the horse how you want to ride: sometimes you need to pull the reins hard and other times gently. Our horses are also much stronger than other horses and are used to having metal bits in their mouths: our horses do not live indoors in stables but out on the grasslands in the summer and winter, and live in their own herds just like 'wild' horses.

While I initially interpreted Batukhan's remarks to mean that Mongolian horses had become used to (or 'forced' into) a style that would be considered inappropriate in Western or British riding, I gradually came to realise that the difference was actually reflective of a varying perception of animal personhood. Indeed, while learning with my Western trainer I was taught that such methods as 'adjusting one's seat' and directing the horse with one's legs have universal applicability to *all* horses, specifically because of their physical and behavioural characteristics as a single species. From this perspective, horses are understood in terms of a naturalistic ontology – as animals whose learning is dictated by their ('biological') physical and behavioural capabilities ('all horses are the same'). From Batukhan's perspective, however, Mongolian horses are 'different' because they have learnt culture-specific riding techniques through their practical interaction with herders over generations. At the same time, Mongolian horses are considered 'stronger' than others horses because of their specific ecological conditions, namely, living out on the grasslands and within their own herds. As a result, their familiarisation with being pulled on the reins and using different riding tack is not the result of being 'forced' into a riding style but the emergence of a style of riding generated out of the cross-species co-enskilment between herders and their horses, something which has been maintained by both human beings and horses alike. In this regard, in order for me to ride a Mongolian horse I needed to adjust my own technique to the way in which Mongolian horses had themselves learnt to be ridden, rather than trying to apply a ('universal') technique to 'any' horse on account of them being members of the same species. At the same time, I needed to apply different levels of pulling the reins to different horses depending on their own particular behavioural characteristics and degrees of learning, for while some horses needed to be pulled

aggressively as they were 'stubborn' and 'refused' to learn, others could be directed more gently as they were 'tame' and had 'learnt better'.

This emerged throughout my time with the household as I gradually came to 'un-learn' much of what I had been taught in Western riding and how I interacted with horses more generally. Progressively, I came to pull the reins more and more frequently while riding, realising not only the incompatibility of using my legs but how the horse itself responded in far subtler ways to my pulling the reins. Connected to this, I gradually became used to using a *tashuur*, typically to give a quick smack to the rump of the horse and incite it to move forward. Of course, much of this changed without my own realisation and was brought to my attention by Batukhan, Hurelbaatar, and other people around me. For example, a few months into my fieldwork I travelled with some other men into the taiga to go hunting: as this involved riding for nearly eight hours a day over a period of three days, it was impossible for me to maintain the ('correct') upright posture that I had learnt from Western riding; instead, I 'slouched' my body to the left and right of the saddle, specifically because it felt more comfortable for both myself and the horse. As one of my travelling companions spotted this, he commented that I was 'riding more like a Mongolian', specifically because herders tend to slouch in their saddles when travelling longer distances, not only for their own comfort but because horses are said to have 'learnt' in this way.

Another notable change was the way in which I altered my interaction with horses on a physical level; while I had grown accustomed to stroking and patting horses during my lessons with the Western trainer (much as I would any other 'domesticated' animal), this is something that I stopped doing in Mongolia as local horses had simply not learnt to expect it. In fact, on many occasions when I tried to caress my horse it reacted violently and turned away its head. This difference is again reflective of two culturally-specific forms of human-animal co-enskilment, for while in Western and British riding it is common for the rider to groom a horse every day - something that trains it to accept physical handling – in Mongolia horses do not receive this kind of attention and thus do not respond well to being patted, groomed, or fed by hand (Fijn 2011:78). Coupled with this is that while in Western (and British) riding horses are primarily kept in stables and interact with human beings on a daily basis, in Mongolia horses engage primarily with other horses rather than human beings; indeed, in herding households each horse is typically only ridden for a few days before being left to re-enter the herd and then roam free for months at a time, something that generates a different experience of horse personhood and, as a result, animal learning. While in Western (and British) riding horses are primarily seen as 'domesticated' animals and accorded anthropomorphic characteristics, in Mongolia horses are first and foremost animal-persons living within their own autonomous herds and who are not categorically different from ('wild') horses living apart from human beings. This reveals the culture-specific experience of 'domestication' as something that is processually developed by both human beings and animals, who co-participate forming human-animal relations through socialisation and learning over time (also see Haraway 2003; Anderson 1986). Indeed, when I returned home after fieldwork I again reverted to 'Western' human-horse relations - caressing the horses, refraining from pulling on the reins, and never using a whip: what my horse had learnt to accept as normal riding and handling techniques differed from those that horses had learnt in Mongolia, something that raises interesting questions concerning the 'culture' of animals and the ways in which different members of the same species interact with human beings in their own (culturally specific) ways. As the above examples indicate, an important aspect of animal enculturation is animal co-enskilment,

whereby particular forms of animal life are generated out of the everyday practical relations with human beings, including through verbal and corporeal communication and learning.

Another fundamental skill associated with horses is selecting and training them for different purposes. While some horses in a herding encampment are used specifically for riding and herding animals, others are trained for more particular tasks such as capturing (untamed) horses or for use in racing[43]. Horses may be trained depending on the size and needs of a household, as well as the season and physical and behavioural characteristics of particular horses. Different horses are selected for different purposes depending on a range of characteristics including their size, muscle composition, speed, and temperament, with many herders developing expert skills in identifying these characteristics and breeding horses in order to retain specific physical and behavioural qualities.

Batukhan's household have a relatively small number of horses and their primary use is for riding and herding other animals. As we have seen, herders generally use geldings for riding and these are separated into their own horse band. Much as in other households, Batukhan and Hurelbaatar ride a particular gelding for a short period of time – usually for a few days or one week – and then release it back into the herd and replace it with a fresh mount. This generates specific skills such as recognising particular geldings within a herd and the ability to match their physical and behavioural characteristics to particular tasks at different times of the year. For example, when I first arrived Batukhan was unsure of my horse riding ability and, as a result, selected what he described was a 'quiet' (*taivan*) and older gelding for me to ride. As he explained: "He is very tame (*nomkhon*) and has a lot of experience riding in the household. He is not a galloper and will not become too hot while herding in the summer, but he is not fast so you will always be at the back of the herd; if your riding improves then you can switch to a faster and more alert (*sergelin*) horse later in the year". Here Batukhan's selection was made on the basis of his familiarity with all of the horses within his herd, including their social and physical characteristics and level of training, which he intentionally matched to both my riding ability and the specificities of herding during the summer months. A few days later, my horse was replaced with another 'quiet' gelding and one that had also been trained for use in herding. While I then kept alternating between these and a few other horses over a period of weeks, Batukhan eventually selected what he described as a 'faster' gelding and one with a 'brave' (*zoriltoi*) temperament for me to ride, specifically as we intended to travel into the taiga to go hunting. While I then alternated between geldings for a period of months, Batukhan again recommended a particular horse as the temperatures began to fall and riding through snow became necessary, specifically explaining the need for a more 'lively' horse (*agsam mor'*) with more muscles and coarser hair better suited for the harsher weather conditions.

The practice of riding geldings for a short period of time and periodically returning them back into the herd is a characteristic feature of Mongolian herding and one that problematises the normative western characterisation of domestication. Indeed, while all of the geldings have been castrated and thus 'controlled' through selective breeding, the fact that they regularly return to the herd and graze autonomously - sometimes for months at a time - renders the division between 'wild' and 'domestic' highly fluid. For herders such as Batukhan, his geldings are not experienced as different from the other horses within his herd on account of their 'domestication', but rather, in terms of their own practical abilities and co-learning for use in

[43] Many herders train horses for racing in the Naadam festival. Unlike Western horse racing, which consists of short sprints generally not longer than 2 km, racing in Naadam covers a distance of between 10–30km. Children are chosen as jockeys specifically because they are light weight. As Fijn (2011:161) shows, while jockeys are an important component, the main purpose of the races is to test the skill and speed of the horses. For an excellent discussion of horse riding in the Naadam festival see Fijn (2011).

different tasks, such as riding or herding animals. In fact, whenever a new gelding is taken from the herd, it was common for Batukhan and Hurelbaatar to spend a short period of time re-training (or 're-domesticating') the horse, specifically because it was said to have become 'unfamiliar' with (or 'forgot') the experience of riding.

The process of selecting and re-training a gelding to be ridden typically began with Batukhan and Hurelbaatar riding out to the location of the geldings and discussing which of the horses should be removed from the herd. As in all households, Batukhan alternates between geldings depending on the season and activity required, specifically matching social and physical characteristics to particular tasks such as herding or hunting, as well as the season and weather conditions. For example, if it was late summer and the household would soon be leaving for their autumn encampment, Batukhan mentioned the names of three of four geldings which he thought would be suitable for herding and for traversing the more mountainous areas surrounding the autumn encampment. Hurelbaatar suggested one particular gelding who he had worked with very well during the previous autumn: "*Khök* ('Blue') is a good riding horse (*khöngön khöltei*) and was very responsive last autumn; he is a little slower than *Alt khöl* ('Gold Leg') but since we have to start taking the herd further up the eastern slope we need a horse that is stronger. I don't want to use *Mod Noos* ('Wood wool') as he is too pampered (*erkh)* and gets tired quickly. *Khök* also has coarser hair for when it starts to snow and get icy on the ground". Like all tasks the regular selection of geldings serves as a prominent domain in which younger herders come to learn the social and behavioural characteristics of particular horses. Much as with herding sheep and goats, Hurelbaatar is already familiar with each of the horses within the herd, having spent long periods of time with and without his father on the steppe, including matching different horses to various tasks and seasons. After agreeing on one particular gelding, Batukhan instructed Hurelbaatar to catch it using an *urga* - or lasso-pole – and drive it back to the encampment. Typically, castrated horses are relatively easy to catch because they are usually tethered as foals for use in mare milking, making them habituated to being handled and ridden later in life. However, this particular gelding had not been ridden for a longer period of time and was considered more 'un-trained' and difficult to handle. As a result, Hurelbaatar approached the gelding on horseback holding the *urga* and, as it began running away, he rode alongside it at a fast pace and threw the loop around the horse's neck, who immediately slowed down and stopped running. After catching the gelding, Batukhan and Hurelbaatar then drove it back toward to the encampment and placed it inside one of the corrals, to ensure that it could be re-trained relatively quickly and without running away. Next, Hurelbaatar used the lasso-pole to run the horse in a circle, designed to train it to respond to being pulled around its nose, which is where the reins will be positioned. Finally, Hurelbaatar mounted the horse and rode it for a short while, specifically to re-familiarise it with the experience of being ridden and 're-train' it. During this time, Batukhan constantly watched the horse's behaviour, at various points commenting on the changing position and flicking of its ears which indicated its mood. At one point, the horse's ears turned backwards and went nearly flat, to which Hurelbaatar yelled loudly to instruct the horse to 'stop'. After around twenty minutes, the horse was considered 're-trained' and tied to the tethering line outside the ger, then used for herding later in the day.

Breeding and Selecting Animals

As we have seen, herding in Mongolia is characterised by a limited degree of human intervention into animal herds, with herders instead co-ordinating their practices in articulation with what people consider to be 'natural' behaviour and herd structures of the

animals themselves. At the same time, herders do exert one fundamental influence upon their herds in the form of selecting particular animals for breeding and castrating others. In Batukhan's household, at least one male is selected as a breeding animal within each herd, while the other males are castrated. Unlike in an industrial setting, however - where castrated males are deemed 'useless' (and thus typically slaughtered) - castrated males continue to play a fundamental role in herding life, used as the primary working animals within a household, with geldings used for riding and castrated oxen to pull carts.

The skills of selecting herd animals to be bred and castrated have emerged over centuries of practical experience, with herders relying on what is locally called the *arat*, or 'folk', method of breeding (Fijn 2011:56-7). This method is based on the overall condition (*shinj*) of a particular animal, its ability to produce young, milk, or other products such as wool, the quality of its offspring, and its ability to handle harsh weather conditions (ibid). As Bayarmaa explained: "When an animal has a good quality it is important to breed this animal to keep this quality; a yak that is calm will produce calm offspring, while a sheep with good wool will produce offspring with good wool". Importantly, this method does not follow strict rules but is dependent on cumulative experience and coterminous with people's ability to 'know' their herd animals and be able to identify both physical and social characteristics that are considered 'good' for further breeding. As we have seen, Mongolian herders embody a complex system of recognising and describing herd animals, articulated via a range of terms based on the animal's physical appearance, behaviour, age, sex, and particular characteristics. Recognising and describing these directly influences the selective breeding process, with some animals said to have 'good' characteristics and others 'bad'. It is on the basis of this that herders choose whether an animal is retained for producing young, or castrated and used for riding or pulling carts.

The skills of breeding and castrating animals are something that was brought to the fore as I assisted the household during the summer months castrating the newly-born lambs and kids. As in all households, different herd animals are castrated at different times of the year; lambs and kids in the spring/summer and cattle and horses in the autumn. As with all events associated with the life-cycle of herd animals, castration is a prominent occasion and typically includes multiple households within a khot-ail. As Batukhan explained, castrating herd animals is one of the most important events as it has a direct influence upon the number of animals within the encampment, the structure of the herds, as well as the productivity of the household. As a result, the castration of animals follows a series of highly ritualised steps.

To begin, Hurelbaatar and Oyun began collecting the young animals that had been selected for castration, with Batukhan and Bayarmaa selecting ten lambs and six kids. These animals had been chosen on the basis that they were males and had not inherited any particular social or physical characteristics. Next, Bayarmaa prepared a bowl of 'white foods' (*tsaagan idee*) and positioned it on the floor besides where the animals were to be castrated, specifically as an offering for the castration process. As Batukhan prepared himself, Bayarmaa asked her husband whether he had checked the calendar to ensure that it was a 'good day' to do the castration. As Batukhan responded: "Yes, it is a good day, all of them were born one year ago in June; June was a sheep month and today is a sheep day". Bayarmaa then asked about the 'line' of the animals and why the others had been kept as breeding animals: "The darker ones are from that *khon* (breeding female) so they will produce good quality woo". "Yes", Bayarmaa responded, "but they will also be very lively!". This brief exchange contains within it a number of important points concerning the skills associated with castration and selective breeding. Firstly, it reveals the implicit skill of recognising different herd animals, with both Batukhan

and Bayarmaa able to identify specific individuals based on their colour, age, sex, and names. At the same time, it reveals the ways in which herders identify and select herd animals based on their 'good' and 'bad' qualities, specifically by tracing their respective lineages. As with all animals in their herd, Batukhan and Bayarmaa are able to trace their herd animals back five or six generations, recalling the names and physical and behavioural characteristics of individual animal-ancestors. As Bayarmaa explained: "Many of these lambs have had ancestors in our herd for generations and they have always produced good, thick wool. (Pointing) That pair there have some of the best wool; their mothers and grandmothers were so thick with hair".

By assisting their parents during events such as castration, Hurelbaatar and Oyun come to take part in an informal apprenticeship which involves learning to identify physical and behavioural qualities and their relevance for breeding. Much as with learning to identify animals while herding, Hurelbaatar and Oyun come to learn by participating in the taskscape of castrating. In the process, they develop perceptual skills concerning which herd animals to castrate and which to breed, which animals belong to which lineages, and compartmentalising specific individuals as 'good' and 'bad' for different purposes such as 'having good wool'. As Batukhan put it: "Hurelbaatar helps me every year so he learns all of the differences within the herd: he knows which animals will be castrated next season, which are to be kept for breeding, and which are to be used for riding and pulling carts. When he rides past the herds of other households he knows which animals belong to who".

Importantly, the exchange also reveals the relationship between identifying and selecting herd animals and culturally-specific experiences of auspiciousness. Indeed, as Bayarmaa herself remarked, it is considered imperative to perform any task associated with the herd - including castration and slaughtering (see below) - according to a specific date in the Mongolian calendar, which has a composition with different years and dates represented by different animals. Aware of this, Batukhan chose this day to castrate the sheep as it was a 'sheep day' and in a 'sheep year', thus making it an appropriate (and lucky) time to castrate the animals. This is something that itself demands specific skilled practice, such as recognising the relationship between good and bad fortune in relation to specific days and times of the year (Empson 2011; Humphrey 2006). As Bayarmaa explained, neglecting to consult the calendar may result in conducting the castration on a 'bad' day which could cause the animals to become ill or for the household to experience misfortune. In this regard, the skills of breeding and castrating 'correctly' are, as with so many 'rules' (*yos*) in Mongolian social life, fundamentally intertwined with everyday survival.



(Figure 17. "White Foods" drying in the summer sunshine – photo by the author)

As well as undertaking tasks according to auspicious days there are specific 'rules' to abide by when castrating. As herders explicitly emphasise, the embodiment of such rules is of paramount importance so that the animal does not suffer unnecessarily and so that the household does not experience misfortune. This emerged as Batukhan and Hurelbaatar began the castration process. First of all, Bayarmaa arrived at the castration area holding the ceremonial bowl she had prepared earlier, including dried dairy products and sweets, which she placed on the floor as an offering to the nonhuman agency of the site. Oyun, as the youngest family member, collected the first lamb and pushed it into the hands of Hurelbaatar, who then positioned the animal on its back with its limbs stretched outwards. Batukhan then kneeled down in front of the lamb and, locating the testes, used a scalpel to make a small incision in the skin, pulling the entire testicle out and then repeating this with the other testicle. The testicles were then placed inside a bucket of milk and water and, once all of the animals had been castrated, Bayarmaa boiled these in water and all of the people involved consumed them together. Throughout the castration procedure it is considered imperative that people behave in a respectful manner, avoiding speaking loudly, acting flamboyantly and, most importantly, not speaking the name of the castrated animal, something that is considered to bring about bad fortune. As Bayarmaa explained: "It is important that people behave 'properly' (during the castration process). It is to show respect for the animal involved; this is why I told you not to take photographs as it would be unlucky for the animal".

Here again we see the cultural specificity of human-animal relations, for while the activities of selective breeding and castrating males function to control the animal's reproductive capacity, they are intertwined with a series of culturally-specific dimensions that are not typically accounted for in normative characterisations of the domestication process. As can be seen from the above, herders recognise themselves as being situated within personalised relationships with the animals on whom they depend, something that is manifested in the specific 'rules' and modes of embodiment deemed 'appropriate' when interacting with herd animals. By following these rules and coming to teach them between the generations, herders grant their herd animals a degree of agency that is considered imperative and in relation to which the skills of castrating and breeding need to be taught and learnt.

Milking, Slaughtering, and Consuming Herd Animals

Another fundamental skill in Mongolian herding is the milking of herd animals. Milking is at the very centre of herding life as it provides households with sustenance on a day-to-day, year-round basis, with milk serving as the primary ingredient for the herders' diet and an important source of nourishment for working long days and enduring harsh winters. At the same time, milking is a central mechanism through which human-animal relations come to be generated and maintained, specifically through the regular, physical contact between herders and their animals facilitating habituation across species (also see Fijn 2011:132). Indeed, the primary reason why herd animals become habituated to human beings is that they are handled regularly during the early years of their lives while being milked, something which inculcates the condition of tameness and lays the foundations for all other forms of human-animal interaction (Fijn 2011:133; also see Ingold 1980). As noted above, as Mongolian native breeds are capable of surviving without human influence: thus, if they were not milked they would not be reliant on humans at all, something which positions milking at the very heart of the co-domestication process.

In Batukhan's household herd animals are milked on a regular basis during the lactating seasons of different species, with the majority of milking undertaken during the spring and

summer months. Different animals are milked in different ways and provide varying quantities of milk, with the majority taken from cattle and sheep, as well as mares during the summer. As we have seen, milking is performed solely by the women in a household and thus forms a central aspect of mother-daughter enskilment, with young female herders growing up assisting their mothers and learning to develop milking and handling skills through observation and active participation. Throughout Mongolia it is commonplace to see children of five and six years-old already milking competently on their own, as well as embodying a taken-for-granted familiarity with herd animals that has come to be generated through regular milking. During my time with Batukhan's household I participated in milking during the summer months, primarily with the cattle and horses within the herd. This served as an important domain through which to observe how milking skills come to be taught and learnt between the generations, as well as the specific forms of cross-species co-enskilment associated with particular animals.



(Figure 18. Bayarmaa milking a yak, with calf tied beside – photo by the author)

At the time of my arrival Bayarmaa and Oyun were in the middle of the cattle milking season and spent a few hours each day milking the cows within the herd. Twice a day – once in the morning and once in the afternoon – the pair would take two wooden pales and make their way to the corrals erected just beside the ger. Milking began with Oyun first driving the cattle calves into the wooden corrals to keep them separate from their mothers. As one and two-year-old calves still nurse, it is essential to keep the young animals inside the corral until after the adult herds have left to go grazing and when the household wish to milk the cows, otherwise they will constantly remain with their mothers and feed, thus leaving no milk for the household. As Oyun stood with the calves inside the corral, Bayarmaa called out the name of the first cow she intended to milk, following which Oyun located the calf belonging to that cow and carried it over to its mother. Positioning the calf underneath its mother, Oyun allowed it to suckle for a few minutes and then removed it while Bayarmaa continued to draw milk from the cow. As Oyun then carried the calf back to the corral, Bayarmaa moved to the next cow and again called out its name, with Oyun locating its calf and the pair then repeating the process until all of the cows had been milked or a sufficient quantity had been acquired. As with all herd animals, herders obtain milk from their herds by first allowing the young animals to suckle, something which triggers the flow of milk from the udder. This method not only has a practical function but is indicative of the co-existence between herders and their herds characteristic of Mongolian herding. Indeed, unlike milking techniques in an industrialised

setting – which typically involve a definitive separation between mother and young and where the suckling process is mimicked via the use of a milking machine (Noske 1997; Grasseni 2009) - Mongolian herders allow young animals to grow up alongside their mothers and facilitate milking by inserting themselves in-between the mother-young relationship. This is something which requires specific skills as herders have to coordinate their milking with the needs of the animals themselves, specifically balancing how much milk they take with how much to leave for the young animal in order for it to grow and survive. As with so many skills this is not explicitly measured but comes to be generated through practical experience; thus, an experienced herder such as Bayarmaa implicitly knows how much milk to draw from a cow while ensuring the young animal has enough to survive, specifically based on her intimate knowledge of the individuals within the herd, their specific needs and requirements, as well as how much milk she herself requires in order to produce different milk-products for her own family. This is something that Oyun comes to learn by assisting her mother closely on a regular basis, observing how much milk her mother draws from each cow and how much is left for the young animals. Occasionally, I observed Bayarmaa offering advice to her daughter on how much milk to take and leave; for example, as Oyun placed a calf underneath its mother, Bayarmaa watched closely and would tell her daughter "that's enough", while at other times telling her to "let it drink more". Here there is a recognition of animal personhood and an understanding that human beings and herd animals are dependent on one another, with their lives inextricably interlinked.

As Bayarmaa herself emphasised, milking requires skill, specifically because a herd animal can choose to let down its milk or not, depending on its emotional state and familiarity with the person milking. Indeed, if a particular cow, yak, or mare feels threatened or is being handled by a complete stranger, the animal will typically not allow itself to be milked at all. As Bayarmaa put it: "You can only milk an animal if it feels comfortable. If the animal knows you are a stranger or is stressed, then it will not let down its milk or you will only be able to collect a small amount. Some animals such as cattle are easier and learn quickly, but others such as yaks are very sensitive and will never let a stranger milk them". This is something that came the fore when I first asked Bayarmaa whether I could assist in milking and she immediately recommended that I try with a Mongolian cow rather than a yak, specifically because the latter was deemed 'too sensitive' to a stranger such as myself. After learning the basic technique, I found that I could barely obtain even a small amount of milk, something I attributed to my own inability to milk 'properly'. As Bayarmaa explained, however, my technique was in fact correct; the problem was that the cows were not yet familiar with me and did not feel comfortable. Over time, I gradually came to milk more competently as both I and the cows grew accustomed to each another, and what began with me collecting just a few small squirts gradually turned into an average amount of milk. Here my learning to milk was dependent not only on my own technique and practice but the individual personalities and co-learning of the cows and yaks, including their gradual familiarisation with me as a new member of 'their' herd. It is instructive to note in this regard that even after months of practice I still never managed to milk a yak very effectively, something which captures the importance (and difficulty) of developing long-term and personalised relationships with herd animals in order to milk effectively.

As most of the human contact with cattle and yaks is with the cows during milking, it is women and their daughters who spend the large majority of time with the animals. This renders women particularly knowledgeable about cattle and yak herds, as well as the personalities and behavioural characteristics of individual cows and calves (also see Fijn 2011:137). In fact, many women emphasised to me that while horses are considered the

animal of men in Mongolia, cattle are 'women's animals', and they take great pride in exhibiting knowledge and skills associated with them, demonstrating close, personal relations with particular individuals, as well as embodying visible signs of sadness when they are injured and sick. As can be seen from the above, Bayarmaa knows the name of each cow and its calf, and by assisting her mother Oyun comes to learn the names, behaviour, and family structures within the herd. By the same token, individual cows and calves become familiar with the women in the household, which comes to be manifested in the performance of milking itself, with Bayarmaa and Oyun milking effectively because of their close relationships with the animals and the animals' own acceptance of them as members of a co-domestic relationship.

This is something that connects to the earlier discussion concerning the habituation of cattle – and animals more generally - to handling when they are young, as well as the condition of tameness. Indeed, when calves are born they are typically cared for by children, who spend hours picking them up, holding them, caressing them, and offering them milk inside the ger. As Ingold writes: "[T]he initial establishment of a bond of taming requires that close physical contact be maintained between the animal and members of the household into which it is being incorporated, above all during the critical period of early infancy when it begins to identify itself in relation to those individuals in the immediate vicinity" (2000:126). In the process, close personal ties are developed between herders and their animals, with everyday handling serving as a mechanism through which familiarisation occurs and cattle are habituated to being handled by humans later in life. From this perspective, the condition of tameness should be seen in processual terms, as something that comes to be generated out of regular practices such as handling and milking over the course an individual animals' lifetime (Fijn 2011:129). Much as with horses described above, herders do not experience their animals as having undergone a fixed moment of 'domestication', but rather, as autonomous persons whose lives unfold alongside human beings and who must be regularly trained (or enskilled) in order to maintain close relations and familiarity.

Milking is also understood to be dependent on the particular behavioural and emotional state of the person milking, which has to be adjusted in accordance with the specific personalities and behaviour of the animals themselves. Thus, Bayarmaa emphasised that a calm and quiet person will always be able to extract more milk than a loud or extroverted person because the animal will 'feel more comfortable' and trust the individual. This is compounded by the fact that different cows and yaks are recognised as having their own individual behavioural characteristics, with some generally being more stressed or relaxed than others and thus demand appropriate adjustments on the part of the person performing the milking. This came to the fore as I tried to milk a particular cow while having a camera swung over my shoulder. As Bayarmaa explained, this particular cow was very sensitive to smell and she thus recommended that I remove my camera so that I can milk more effectively. Here herd animals are granted a degree of personhood that is fundamentally intertwined with the skills of milking, seen as capable of learning and communicating with humans in a variety of ways and involving multiple senses, including not only visual displays, physical contact, and vocalisations, but also smells. This captures the cultural specificity of practices such as milking and demonstrates how they are not based on explicit control or coercion by human beings, but intertwined with the agency and co-participation of the animals themselves.

Milking horses is another important activity during the summer months, specifically to make *airag*, or fermented mares milk. In Batukhan's household, mares usually give birth to foals in the spring months of April, May and June, with the milking season generally running between mid-June and early October. Like other herd animals, milking mares proceeds by first

collecting the young animals within the herd and using them to attract their lactating mothers. This began with Batukhan and Hurelbaatar riding out to gather the horses from their relevant pastures and driving them closer towards the encampment. Following this, Bayarmaa and Oyun approached the stallion's band in order to round up the foals and tie them to a specifically erected tethering line. As they did, Bayarmaa gave her daughter informal instructions concerning which foal and mare to collect first and in which order to position them along the line, specifically calling out the names of individual horses which she knows are more habituated to being handled than others and will make milking easier, as well as the female 'leaders' within the band who are said to help control the other mares. As Bayarmaa explained:

> Some of the mares liked to be milked more than others so I always start milking these first. It is important to locate the more senior mares because once their young have been tethered the rest of the herd calms down and we can milk much faster and safer. If two mares are fighting then it can be very dangerous; although the stallion controls the herd it is the mares who are the real leaders and they are often fighting. I am also always happy to see my favourite mares in the summer because I don't see them for many months. (Pointing) This is Möngö (Silver) and that is Saaral (Grey): they are both leaders in the herd and know me very well. As soon as their young are tethered then everything goes smoothly.

Here we can see how horses are prepared for milking in articulation with their own capacities to learn and remember, as well as the specific hierarchies within the horse herd. Indeed, Bayarmaa clearly recognises each mare as having their own particular personality and behavioural characteristics, some of whom are more habituated (or have 'learnt') to being milked and handled than others and which she herself must flexibly adjust to in order to milk safely and effectively. At the same time, Bayarmaa has learnt the specific relationships between individual mares, including the hierarchy of leaders and their influence upon the rest of the herd, something which she must harness in order to tether the foals in the 'correct' way and avoid potential conflicts between opposing mares.

Of course, by assisting her mother each and every summer, Oyun comes to learn these aspects of horse relations through her own practical enskilment: learning the names and personalities of different mares, recognising which foals belong to which mothers, as well as identifying the position of each horse within the herd. As with any skilled practice, much of this is generated in an informal and taken-for-granted way – by watching her mother handle the mares, helping her attach the foals to the tethering line, and emulating her movements and embodied gestures, all of which are refracted through the cultural expectation that she assists her mother in performing the gender-specific task of milking. On one occasion, Oyun began tethering a foal beside another individual and Bayarmaa instructed her to move it further down the line, explaining that the mothers of the foals had a tendency to fight. By offering instructions such as this, Bayarmaa indirectly teaches Oyun the social structure of the horses within the herd and the importance of recognising animal agency and co-learning, as well as how she herself 'should' interact with the horses and harness these in order to milk more effectively.

Once all of the foals had been tied to the tethering line, Bayarmaa and Oyun incited them to suckle by placing them under their mothers. After a few minutes, Oyun then removed the first foal and Bayarmaa continued to draw milk from the mare, the pair then repeating the process with each successive horse as they moved down the line. I calculated that during one season an average mare produced approximately one to two kilograms of milk, of which about half was left to the foals. As an eight-year-old daughter in a household, Oyun has already practiced milking for a number of years and thus milked some of the mares herself with a high degree of fluency. However, milking different animals requires species-specific skilled practice and, in the cases of horses, the person milking must monitor the location of the stallion who circles the

area in which 'his' mares are being milked, specifically ensuring that he does not become violent or aggravate the mares. As a result, Bayarmaa reminded her daughter to keep an eye on the stallion - something that came to be manifested in Oyun's own perceptual awareness and bodily enskilment, including watching the stallion's location, not facing him head-on, adopting appropriate postures when switching between mares, as well as heeding particular attention when milking his 'favourite' mares. Despite the fact that Oyun had only milked the mares during the past two summers (since she was six), Bayarmaa explained that the stallion had already grown accustomed - or 'learnt' - to be around her, although she was apprehensive about my own presence as the stallion had not learnt to be around me (as well as I around him). This is an apt example demonstrating how the skills of milking are generated in articulation with the agency, co-learning, and memory of horses themselves, who embody a shared history of their relationships with the herding household over time. Indeed, having worked with many of the same horses over a period of years, Bayarmaa has developed close personal relations with particular ('favourite') mares, just as certain horses have developed close relations with her (and increasingly Oyun). From this perspective, human-animal relations cannot be seen as something fixed but as an ongoing process of practical engagement, one that has to be maintained over time by both human beings and animals.

As the above examples have shown, herders' skills are fundamentally intertwined with the recognition of animal personhood and co-enskilment. Of course, given the nature of herding life people slaughter their herd animals for sustenance and survival, which at first glance might appear to problematise the recognition of animal personhood and the intimate relations between humans and their herds. However, much as with hunters in other parts of the world (Ingold 1994; Habeck 2006; Anderson 2000; Nadasdy 2007; Feit 1973), the slaughtering process reveals herders' experience of animal personhood most prominently, specifically as it comes to be manifested in the ritualised 'rules' and prohibitions associated with slaughtering and uses of animal parts. This was brought to the fore as I observed Batukhan and Hurelbaatar on a number of occasions slaughter herd animals during the course of my fieldwork. First of all, there exist a series of rules concerning which animals can be slaughtered and at what stage of their life. Young animals, for example, are never slaughtered for food, with herders generally selecting older animals and, ideally, ones that are showing signs of nearing the end of their natural lives. This is directly related to the recognition of animal personhood as it is only considered suitable to eat an animal once it has itself led a full life, as well as produced offspring. Indeed, many people I spoke with expressed their disgust at the idea that in other parts of the world people consume lamb or veal, which for them is tantamount to murder. As Batukhan put it: "An animal should be allowed to live its life and produce offspring just like a human being; we only select animals to be slaughtered if the animal is already old and has lived a long life". This is something that is similarly reflected in the fact that if a young animal dies of natural causes the meat is rarely eaten, specifically because the animal is not considered to have led a full life.

Once an animal has been selected for slaughter it is considered inappropriate to refer to that animal by name, which is deemed to show respect and avoid misfortune. After selection, the animal is typically taken 'out of sight', such as to the rear of the ger and away from the other members of the herd, specifically to avoid distressing the individual and the other animals. In Batukhan's household, the slaughtering procedure typically began with Hurelbaatar holding the animal on its back with legs stretched outwards, much as during the castration process. Batukhan then made a small incision with a knife near the sternum of the animal and pushed his hands and lower arm through the diaphragm, where he then squeezed or snapped the aorta

leading to the heart. This method is emphasised as being the most humane way of killing as the animal slowly loses consciousness rather than suffers violently or in pain. This is in marked contrast with the Kazakh herders of western Mongolia who are criticised for slaughtering their herd animals 'badly', that is, by slicing the throat. This is something similarly reflected in the fact that the slaughtering process is only ever carried out by men, revealing the moral ambiguity herders feel with regards to the killing of animals. As noted elsewhere (Humphrey 1978), Mongolians are known for their affection for their animals and their attitude toward killing is ambivalent. As Batukhan explained: "Killing animals is a bad thing to have to do, but when you live in the countryside you cannot avoid it. So, men do this as a way of taking the bad luck away from the household".



(Figure 19. Fresh meat drying in the Western (male) part of the ger, with bag of airag hanging beside – photo by the author)

The close personal relationships between herders and their animals was brought to the fore most explicitly when I tried throughout the early stages of my fieldwork to enquire how many herd animals Batukhan and other households had lost during the 2009-10 dzud. After questioning the first few families I became reluctant to continue as it was clear that people did not wish to answer such questions. This is something indicative of a broader apprehension concerning the death of herd animals, specifically as herders know that they are dependent on the lives (and deaths) of their herds animals and, as a result, speaking openly about death is tantamount to breaking the trust that determines this dependency.

The experience of animal personhood also has important implications with regards to the postsocialist transition. Indeed, most herders today maximise their herds throughout the year because many households have returned to subsistence production (see Chapter 2). Despite this tendency towards maximisation, however, few herders support the idea of selling their animals in large numbers to the market. Indeed, many herders commented that even if they could, they would not want to slaughter their animals en masse, supplying them to what they referred to as the 'impersonal market'. As Batukhan put it: "Even if we know that a bad winter is coming, we would rather lose our animals to the *dzud* and make the effort to try and save them than to have to kill them in such large numbers". This opposition to large-scale production was something also evident during the socialist period when attempts at collectivisation were problematised by herders' demands to slaughter their own animals, rather than send them to the more efficient (yet 'impersonal') market of the *negdel*. Here the logic of maximization and economic accumulation are problematised by the specific forms of human-animal relations and intimacy, which will be returned to in Chapter 2.

Herders also recognise the personhood of animals by ensuring that no part of the animal is wasted after being slaughtered, something which demands specific skills in terms of processing and using animal parts. Indeed, while the bones of an animal are discarded, every other part is used, including the meat, blood, organs, hair, wool, and hides. At the same time, many animal products are skilfully crafted into useful tools and objects that continue to have a use long after the animal has been slaughtered; cow hide, for example, is used to make leather straps and horse's bridles; horsehair is used to tie the ger together; bones are used as children's toys; and ox's horns are used as bottles to feed young animals (Fijn 2011:224). As Fijn remarks: "Adherence to skinning and butchering an animal appropriately, sharing the meat with other members of the group, and consuming the animal entirely without wasting any edible or usable parts are features of animist societies. All of these practices are in accordance with Mongolian customary traditions to ensure that the animal is treated with respect and that there will not be negative consequences resulting from inappropriate treatment of the animal in death" (2011:225).

The relationship between the skills of slaughtering and animal personhood is something that could also be seen in terms of my own ethnographer enskilment. Indeed, although I was generally excused for my lack of knowledge of Mongolian practices and ways of conducting oneself, all members of the household sought to make me aware of the 'correct' procedures when it came to slaughtering. Thus, Hurelbaatar and Batukhan reminded me to remain quiet during the slaughtering process and refrain from speaking the name of the animal. At the same time, Bayarmaa expressed that she would prefer I not film or take photographs of the killing process. It is significant to note in this regard that slaughtering herd animals was the only activity during my stay that Batukhan would *not* let me perform.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced the most prominent aspects of herding life, including how they come to be taught and learnt between the generations through the informal apprenticeships within herding households. Also in the chapter I described some of the most fundamental skills in Mongolian herding from the perspective of cross-species co-enskilment, problematising the normative western understanding of domestication and emphasising the mutual interdependence between human beings and their herds. Despite the fact that herders engage in a selective breeding process, castrate males on a seasonal basis, and kill herd animals for consumption, I have shown that they experience their herd animals as autonomous persons and as co-participants in the process of herding life. Human-animal relations are characterised by a recognition of animal agency and personhood, with herders recognising the behavioural particularities of individual animals and allowing herd animals to retain their inherent social structure. While animals are explicitly trained to become working members of the household, they are not physically coerced but trained – or enskilled – and allowed to live their lives as members of their own herds. As I have shown, enskilment emerges in relation to the agency and co-learning of herd animals themselves, with herders and their animals co-enskiling each other and maintaining the condition of tameness through the everyday practices of herding, riding, training, and milking.

2. Mobility, Postsocialist Change and the Experience of Time

Introduction

In this chapter I describe how herding life has intersected with the collapse of state socialism and the return to a subsistence economy, as well as some of the more recent transformations associated with the postsocialist transition such as the advent of marketisation and shifting relations between the mobile and sedentary sections of rural life. Here I use the hermeneutic framework developed in the introduction to elucidate how these changes have manifested at the level of skilled practice, as well as how they are experienced by herders in polydirectional ways. As noted in the introduction, each chapter within the dissertation prioritises one particular aspect of change as it is experienced by herders in the late postsocialist era and, in this chapter, it is the permeable divisions between the presocialist, socialist, and postsocialist contexts which take precedence.

The chapter itself is structured to continue following the cycle of the seasons over a single year, capturing the substantial seasonal variations in the Shishged and the seasonality of different skills, as well as prioritising the cultural specificity of herders' experience of time. In the process, I describe how these skills relate to other aspects of herding life such as the landscape through which households move and upon which productivity and survival depend, the forms of social organisation that mediate enskilment between people and the generations, as well as the mobile dwelling – or ger - that facilitates mobility. As herding life is dictated by

the need to move between seasonal pastures, temporality is experienced in more cyclical than linear terms (Fijn 2011; Ingold 2000; also see Evans-Pritchard 1939) as determined by the rhythm of the seasons, the recurrent needs of herd animals, and the continuities afforded by mobility - returning to the same areas of grazing land, travelling across the same mountain passes, and accessing the same water sources every year.

As I will show, this does not imply a 'static' experience of time because, intersecting with this are the broader political-economic changes associated with the socialist and postsocialist transitions, as well as the everyday changes such as the birth and death of herd animals, the seasonal transformation of the landscape, and the changing constitution of herding households at different times of the year. However, as herding life centres on the need to reaffirm continuity through movement (Humphrey 1997; Pedersen 2001), I show how these broader changes are experienced by herders in articulation with what we might call a herding temporality and signifies a mutual co-existence between 'diachronic' and 'synchronic' experiences of time (Fabian 1983:24). As I shall argue, this has become more significant since the collapse of state socialism as the metanarrative of socialist 'modernisation' has lost meaning and the postsocialist narratives of 'marketisation', 'development', and 'globalisation' are experienced in contradictory ways, resulting in a (re)prioritisation of herding temporality over other conceptions of time and a blurring of the divisions between the presocialist, socialist, and the postsocialist contexts. In the process, I show how a consideration of skilled practice serves to capture the experiential gap between the familiar teleological metanarrative of temporality - as a transition from 'tradition' to 'modernity', the past to the present, the socialist to the postsocialist - and a more phenomenological experience of co-existing temporalities, polydirectional and non-linear experiences, and multiple levels of continuity and change (Fabian 1983; also see Heidegger 1962). This is something that shall form a recurring theme of the broader dissertation as I apply the hermeneutic framework to other aspects of change in the subsequent chapters, further elucidating the polydirectional and variegated experiences of people in the postsocialist era.

"Tradition" and "Modernity" and the Teleology of Time

The first and most notable metanarrative that I identify is that change occurs as a linear process from 'tradition' to 'modernity', something which intersects with a broader presupposition of a teleological conceptualisation of time. Anthropology was founded upon the tradition-modernity dichotomy, an opposition which formed the very basis of the division of academic labour within the social sciences. By specialising in the study of so-called 'pre-modern', 'primitive', or 'non-western' peoples, anthropologists not only differentiated themselves from other disciplines such as sociology, but presupposed a division between the 'traditional' societies in which they worked and the 'modernity' of which they themselves were supposedly a part. This came to be reified in anthropological conceptualisations of change, as concepts were developed that remained firmly rooted within a temporal dichotomy - such as 'culture-contact', 'westernisation', 'modernisation', or 'globalisation' – and which presented change as a linear process of 'traditional people' (with 'traditional culture') being transformed ('homogenised') via their articulation with modernity.

Although today most anthropologists would reject the dualism between tradition and modernity, the fact is that it continues to underpin normative conceptualisations of change. Indeed, many anthropologists explicitly use the terms in direct opposition to one another, typically placing them in inverted commas to acknowledge their intellectual unease but which highlights their conceptual and binary persistence. At the same time, anthropologists implicitly

reproduce the dualism by linguistic subversion by employing other terms as a shorthand for 'the traditional' and 'the modern'. Indeed, where once anthropology was said to specialise in the study of the 'primitive', 'tribal', and 'native', today it is characterised as the study of 'the local' - a disciplinary self-definition that underpins the emphasis on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in a 'local' community ('in the field') and ethnography as a mode of writing (Fabian 1999; Pels 2010b). Of course, this attentiveness to 'local knowledge', 'local communities', and 'local peoples' is a key anthropological strength, but it also reveals the tendency of dichotomising the 'local' from the 'global' and thus reproducing a linear conceptualisation of change. There is also an important scaling effect in the study of the 'local', in which modernity is implicitly characterised as large-scale or global, while its assumed opposite, 'tradition', is seen as smaller-scale and local (Tsing 2005; Wade 2002): modernity thus comes to act as the 'context' for the local and traditional, while the local and traditional end up being equated with what came 'before' modernity arrived. As Wade (2002:25) puts it: "Modernity ends up being construed as something "out there" in the global world, which arrives on the local scene". In other words, by addressing the transformation of 'local' communities and their linkages with 'wider' regional and global processes, anthropologists tend to envision change as happening 'to' local communities, describing how they are 'integrated' or 'incorporated' 'from the 'outside' (i.e. reproducing the tradition-modernity dichotomy) (also see Tsing 2002).

Here there is an important temporal dimension as well, specifically as the narrative presents change as a transformation *from* local/traditional experiences *to* the global and modern. It is precisely for this reason why the most 'local' communities are implicitly assumed to be not only the least 'developed' in terms of economic development but also the most 'traditional'. Within this framework, modernity can only ever be thought of as existing 'after' tradition (Englund et al. 2000). As I shall below, I found that it was impossible to understand how people experienced the postsocialist transition as a shift from tradition to modernity or according to a linear conceptualisation of temporality. Indeed, despite the fact that people were encountering significant changes in social life this was complemented by corollary processes of cultural continuity and the rearticulation of what people explicitly identified as 'tradition', including many aspects of life which had their roots in the presocialist past and which had been to some extent suppressed during the socialist period. For example, since the postsocialist transition herding households had reverted to what was in some ways a presocialist herding economy, characterised by subsistence-level production, the re-diversification of animal herds, and the return to presocialist breeding techniques and herding strategies.

Coupled with this was the rearticulation of presocialist forms of social organisation specifically centred on the *khot-ail* – extended encampments of multiple ger usually consisting of grandparents, parents, and grandchildren – and which had replaced the socialist collectives. At the same time, following decades of using motorised transport provided by the negdels, many herders have reverted to using (presocialist) animal-drawn transportation when moving between pastures, something that has demanded the embodiment of older skills such as the use of ox-carts and knowledge of previous migration routes, which have allowed herders to rearticulate mobility in the face of collapsing state support, but which is experienced as a non-linear process of de-technologisation. Similarly, I show how increasing numbers of herders are practicing more sedentary animal herding by living all or part of the year in regional centres, specifically as a result of deskilment in relation to the collapse of state support. At the same time, I show how these herders have developed complementary skills such as alternate herding strategies and integrating their animals into the herds of 'full-time' family members, in turn capturing the reciprocity between enskilment and deskilment in articulation with the

postsocialist transition. Through these and other examples I demonstrate how a consideration of skilled practice allows one to prioritise the lived-experience of households against the teleological metanarratives of 'modernisation', 'development' and, conversely, 'postsocialist collapse' and the 'loss of tradition', emphasising instead their polydirectional experiences and the mutual co-existence between continuity and change in the re/production of herding life.

Life After the Negdels

By far the most significant change to have occurred for herding households was the disintegration of the negdels and the return to a subsistence economy. As we have seen, more than 99% of adults in rural Mongolia had become members of a negdel by 1959 and most of the country's herd animals had been collectivised (Pedersen 2011:18; Bawden 1968; Edstrom 1993). In the Shishged Depression, two negdels were established in 1956: The Happy Life Negdel (*Jargalant Am'dral Negdel*) in Ulaan Uul and the Golden Valley Negdel in Renchinlkhümbe[44]. Having been born in Ulaan Uul sum, Batukhan's parents - Dogsomjav and Narantuya - were integrated into the regional negdel at the ages of twenty-three and twenty-one respectively, and remained members until it was officially decollectivised in 1990. Through this, they became 'workers' tending state-owned animals and earned a salary in return[45], with virtually every aspect of their lives coming to be managed in line with the broader socialist state, including the specialisation of labour and the separation of their herd animals according to different species (also see Edstrom 1993; Brunn & Odgaard 1996). Like all herders, the household were pooled into a herding team (*suur*) alongside three others and made responsible for breeding and herding a single species of animal – in their case cattle – which was the primary specialisation in the Shishged (also see Pedersen 2011:19). By pooling labour and resources, the suur worked to provide meat and milk for the negdel according to centrally-planned quotas, with households living on the grasslands but orientating their mobility patterns in line with the dictates of the collective. Crucially, households were allowed to maintain a small number of private animals alongside those they herded for the negdel (Bawden 1986; Humphrey & Sneath 1999; Brunn & Narangoa 2006), which in Dogsomjav and Narantuya's cases included sheep and goats, as well as a few horses. As I shall show below, this is something which had important implications for maintaining enskilment between the generations and in relation to the traditional 'five snouts'.

At the same time, the negdels, along with the various state institutions within the sum, provided households such as Dogsomjav and Narantuya with virtually every social and economic need, including free education (after Batukhan was born), health and maternity care, veterinary care for the herds, animal shelters and additional fodder during the winter. They also provided motorised transport when moving between seasonal pastures, insurance schemes in case of herd losses, as well as a pension after they retired. In other words, the negdels affected every single aspect of people's lives (Pedersen 2011:20). As Brunn and Li (2006:14-15) remark, the negdels were:

> The most complex community ever built on the steppe…Health and educational standards vastly improved, veterinary service had advanced both animal and human health, and economic security was secured through stable salaries, motorised assistance when moving the camp, emergency fodder supplies for animals in hard winters, and collectivise restocking…the cultural centre offered theatre, music and dance performances by travelling troupes, public balls, dance lessons, and political meetings.

[44] In 1985 another *negdel* was established in Tsaagan Nuur specialising in reindeer herding (Pedersen 2011).
[45] Herders generally received eighty percent of their projected wages on a monthly basis, with the balance (plus bonuses) paid at the end of the year (Rossabi 2005:117).

Batukhan was born in 1968 and spent his entire youth growing up within the negdel, and it was within the state apparatus that he met and later married Bayarmaa. As a result of its omnipresence in everyday life, Batukhan's household experienced the disintegration of the negdel as a major social and economic collapse, with the support and assistance they had received for nearly twenty-five years virtually disappearing overnight. As Batukhan explained, he and his family were in favour of political democratisation but were wary of what the end of state socialism would mean, particularly in terms of no longer receiving medical and veterinary care, provision of emergency fodder, compensation in case of herd losses, as well as support when moving between pastures. Indeed, while the household supported the initial privatisation of the herds they, like many households, soon wondered whether private ownership actually compensated for the loss of state support. This uncertainty came to a fore when the negdel was officially decollectivised and all herd animals were allocated to negdel members, specifically according to family size and length of membership. While Dogsomjav and Batukhan received approximately fifty and twenty heads of cattle respectively – average numbers in Ulaan Uul – they received no technical equipment or mechanised transport, which were distributed unfairly in favour of the former negdel leaders and their families, something which created new divisions between households as seen in numerous parts of the country (Rossabi 2005; Brunn & Odgaard 1996; Fernandez-Gimenz 2001).



(Figure 20. Ulaan Uul in 2012 – photo by the author)

Immediately following decollectivisation Batukhan and Bayarmaa joined Dogsomjav and Narantuya to (re)form a single khot-ail, combining their animals and pooling their limited resources. For the next few years, their lives were characterised by a preoccupation with everyday survival as they attempted to build up their herds. As Batukhan explained, the households' standard of living deteriorated at this time as they reverted to a cashless economy based entirely on subsistence herding, struggling to acquire supplementary supplies from regional centres and forced to complement their livelihoods with alternate survival strategies such as barter. As Rossabi (2005:126) writes: "Privatisation and the simultaneous decline in state support severely heightened the everyday risks faced by herding households: veterinarians began charging for their services which problematised animal health, hospitals closed down and rural clinics ran short of supplies, while education suffered drastically from a lack of funding" (also see Marin 2010; Mearns 2004a). As a result, Batukhan and his household joined the millions of other herders questioning the viability of the so-called 'Age of the Market'

(*zah zeeliin üye*), as well as lamenting the disintegration of what once seemed immutable state institutions (also see Pedersen 2011:23). As Dogsomjav described it:

> During the socialist times life was good; everyone had jobs and the state provided support. For herding households, there were too many restrictions on herd structures and mobility, but we were given lots of assistance and benefits; in the negdel your life was secure. With democracy (*ardchilal*) and the market (*zah zeel*) everything has collapsed; people have no jobs, and herders are left to fend for themselves.

It is important to recognise that while herders experienced the disintegration of the negdels as a social and economic collapse, they simultaneously experienced it in more complicated terms as intertwined with other, corollary transformations, some of which have been highly valued by herders themselves. This includes the renewed freedom of movement and herd diversification, new opportunities afforded by marketisation, as well as the re-establishment of presocialist institutions such as the khot-ail. This has close parallels with Ferguson's discussion of de-industrialisation and how modernity is experienced 'in reverse' (1999:54), not only as a global disconnect but as a 'return to the land'. It also prominent in Tsing's (2015) account of how disintegration and precarious living are coupled with an element of renewed freedom. Of course, this is not to suggest that these transformations have been experienced in singularly positive terms, in fact, in many cases they have brought about additional problems and limitations, as well as new divisions between herding households. Instead, it is to emphasise the complex ways in which people experienced the collapse of the negdels and the postsocialist transition more generally, as well as limitations associated with the teleological metanarratives of change, including not only 'modernisation' and 'development' but also 'postsocialist collapse' and the 'loss of tradition'. In the sections below, I describe the most important examples of change in the context of herding households, in each case using the interpretative framework to reveal transformations in skilled practice and the co-existence between positive and negative transformations, new opportunities and limitations, as well as continuity and change.

Return of the Five Snouts

The first and most visible change since the collapse of the negdels has been the (re)diversification of animal herds and the increase in animal numbers. As noted above, herders were employed to breed and herd single species of animals during the collectivised period, specifically according to the dictates of the centralised state. In seeking to increase productivity, the state compartmentalised herd animals in different regions of Mongolia according to regional and ecological variations, as well as access to national and international markets (Bawden 1968; Rossabi 2005). Thus, while in the Shishged the majority of households specialised in breeding cattle, in central regions of Mongolia they generally specialised in sheep and goats, while in southern areas closer to the Gobi Desert they bred sheep, goats, and camels (Brunn & Narangoa 2006). This specialisation even occurred within individual provinces (aimags) and districts (sums), with certain negdels becoming known for producing particular products such as meat, milk, or wool.

As we have seen, Mongolian herders traditionally define themselves as the people of the 'five snouts' and, although the composition of animal herds has always varied between region, a fundamental aspect of household survival is to maintain a diverse range of animals (Jagchid & Hyer 1979; Bawden 1968). This is perceived to afford flexibility in the harsh and unpredictable landscape, as well as security and insurance in the face of herd losses (Miller & Sheehy 2008:104). As a result, as soon as the negdels collapsed the majority of herders sought to re-diversify their herds and increase animal numbers, taking those animals they had received

from decollectivisation and combining them with others they could acquire. In Ulaan Uul, the fact that households were generally distributed cattle meant that they sought sheep, goats, and horses, something typically facilitated through trade and family connections. In the case of Batukhan's household, they acquired a number of sheep and goats from family members in Bulgan province (aimag) by trading some of their cattle and combining the animals with the small number of privatised sheep and goats they had kept during the socialist period. Horses, however, were more difficult to acquire and the household struggled to increase their numbers for many years, which is still reflected in their relatively small herd today.

Of course, the re-diversification and increase of animal herds did not occur in a vacuum, but was fundamentally tied to and dependent on existing skills, specifically as the collapse of state support pushed production into the hands of individual households. Here an important aspect of this was the relative ability of different households to rearticulate specific skills such as presocialist breeding methods, as well as corollary skills associated with the traditional 'five snouts'. Indeed, prior to collectivisation herders developed breeding techniques through a cumulative enskilment process, via trial and error and peoples' lifelong experiences living with herd animals within pastoral households. As we have seen, the traditional method of breeding - the *arat*, or 'folk' method - is based on the overall condition (shinj) of a herd animal and the identification of particular social and behavioural qualities selected for further breeding (Fijn 2011). This method was severely restricted during the collectivised period as the state attempted to 'improve' and better manage animal herds. For example, the state introduced a number of exotic breeds into the negdels from the former Soviet Union, as well as so-called 'modern' veterinary practices such as artificial insemination (Rossabi 2005:116). In the Happy Life Negdel (Jargalant Am'dral Negdel) in Ulaan Uul, for example, veterinary technicians trained in the USSR were brought to advise herders how to cross indigenous cattle species with the new 'super-breeds' introduced from overseas, with the aim of generating higher yields of both milk and meat. As Batukhan explained, this greatly diminished (and devalued) the decision-making of herders themselves as they had to follow the policies of the negdel and the breeding methods advocated by the foreign 'experts':

> When we first joined the *negdel* there were only two or three veterinary technicians and we were allowed to manage the herds ourselves; we had lots of experience working with our own animals and knew how to produce healthy calves and where to let the animals graze. A few years later there were over fifty veterinary technicians in the *negdel* and they introduced cross-breeding with cattle from overseas: they wanted to produce more and more calves to send meat and milk across the country but this was not successful and the cattle became weaker over time. The new breeds could not survive the Mongolian winters without extra protection and additional fodder.

Despite seeing positive improvements in the form of vaccinations and veterinary care, herders in Ulaan Uul generally felt that the negdels did not benefit the condition of herd animals and were highly critical of both the introduced breeds and artificial insemination (also see Bawden 1968). These criticisms were apparently justified as research into animal numbers indicates that state policy did not in fact improve animal productivity or the condition of herd animals (Fijn 2011:30). This came to the fore following the collapse of the negdels as herders received their share of animals and attempted to build up their herds. Indeed, as both the introduced and cross-breeds could not survive without additional fodder - which was no longer supplied by the state - as well as being more unsuitable for the harsh winter conditions than indigenous breeds, many animals perished and herders struggled to increase their numbers (Marin 2010). As Batukhan explained: "The animals were too weak because they were only bred to produce lots of milk and meat – not to adapt to local conditions. They were not used to migrating long

distances or locating pastures on their own, and in some hard winters it was common to lose up to ten calves in one year".

It was in response to this that herders across Mongolia reverted to presocialist breeding methods and corollary herding practices, rejecting the introduced breeds and/or crossing them with indigenous animals in order to produce stronger and more adaptable young. This involved a rearticulation of the (presocialist) skills described in the previous chapter, including in-depth knowledge of herd structures, awareness and understanding of animal condition (shinj), relying on the animals' own herd structures and mating behaviour instead of artificial insemination, as well as the ability to identify both physical and behavioural characteristics considered 'good' for further breeding (Fijn 2011:31; Goldstein & Beall 1994). As Batukhan explained: "It was important to make the herds strong again after so many years of cross-breeding. We selected which animals had the best condition and castrated the weaker ones. We also had to train the animals again to make longer migrations without additional fodder and motorised transport; it took at least five years for the herds to become strong again". Coupled with this was the rearticulation of corollary skills necessary to re-diversify the 'five snouts', including herding and mobility practices, and accessing appropriate areas of pasture, which were essential in order to diversify and increase animal numbers in the face of collapsing state support. Of course, a fundamental aspect of this was the (re)co-enskilment of animals as well, who had themselves experienced a radical change following decollectivisation as they returned to making longer migrations and accessing more remote areas of grassland. As Batukhan put it: "Many of the animals were not used to the conditions in the Shishged mountains: many had never been to these areas before and had to learn new migration routes and how to dig under the snow and ice to access the grasses. We also had to teach animals to pull carts and other things which they did not do as often in the negdels".

Importantly, this rearticulation of presocialist skills was largely facilitated by the fact that the negdels had not brought about a radical transformation of herders' skills, specifically because of two interconnected factors. Firstly, by allowing herders to maintain a small number of herd animals in addition to those that they herded for the negdel, people's everyday skills associated with the traditional 'five snouts' had been largely maintained. In Batukhan's household, for example, he and Dogsomjav performed many of the same tasks associated with the herds as Dogsomjav and his own father had done prior to collectivisation, including driving the privately-owned sheep and goats to different areas of pasture, riding and training (their limited number of) horses, locating and accessing water sources, maintaining grassland condition, as well as overseeing the births and deaths of (privately owned) herds[46]. By the same token, Bayarmaa and Narantuya performed many of the same daily tasks they had done prior to collectivisation, including milking on a regular basis, preparing and storing food products, and tending to the younger animals within the herd. Connected to this was the fact that collectivisation had not significantly altered the residence patterns of many herding households, with people generally living and working in similar conditions as with the presocialist period – namely, out on the grasslands and in the ger, and typically within extended family encampments (Pedersen 2011:24). In the case of Batukhan's herding team, for example, Batukhan grew up with his parents and other family members despite the fact that the negdel actively sought to instil socialist work relations outside the khot-ail by separating households and introducing new ranks and occupations such as 'herder', 'cadre', and 'worker' (Humphrey & Sneath 1999). As Batukhan explained: "The negdel tried to make the herding

[46] While collectivised animals were rounded up and transported to slaughterhouses and processing plants.

teams include people from different families; they wanted to change the khot-ail and turn everyone into socialist workers. But in fact, most herders joined herding teams with their family members: our team included my parents and my cousins. So, the herding team was really the same as the khot-ail". This necessarily facilitated enskilment between the generations and maintained – at least to some extent - the informal apprenticeships within herding households, including the ritualised practices and social categories characteristic of herding life described above (Goldstein & Beal 1994). At the same time, by becoming 'workers' of the negdels households were actually encouraged to maintain the skills associated with animal herding, even if the form came to be situated within a new framework of socialist production. Indeed, following the failed attempt at forced collectivisation during the 1920s and 1930s, the state acknowledged herding practices and allowed for a greater degree of autonomy at the household level (Rossabi 2005:115). As Hearn writes in regards to land-use management, for example:

> Significant changes in pasture-land management practice were introduced under collectivisation, including investments in water supply, winter shelters, hay and fodder production, and transportation for making nomadic moves, and species-specialisation in livestock production at the herder camp level. While some of these changes partially displaced customary forms of collective action in herding, and tended to restrict seasonal nomadic moves within *bag* (then known as 'brigade') territories, they did not alter the basic seasonal rhythm of pasture-land use. In many respects, pasture-land management under collectivisation was marked by the dual control of formal regulatory institutions with informal coordination norms. Nominal control of decisions concerning who would graze where and when was transferred from individual household to managers of pastoral collectives and state farms, but in practice the outcomes varied little from customary tenure patterns (2004:139-140).

The state also encouraged the training of herders, such as through publishing and distributing guides to herding practices, such as that written by an important state official (Jamsrangyn Sambuu) which captured the political desire to promote/maintain traditional skills, even while they advocated 'modernisation' (Rossabi 2005:115; Bawden 1968). This could also be seen in the various prizes and awards granted to herders on the basis of individual 'productivity', such as medals for the 'Best Herder' who could raise the most animals. While this was designed to encourage industriousness and support of the socialist project, it implicitly acknowledged the value and importance of skills, and as the recipients were often heralded through national media this marked an important shift away from the earlier perception that herders were inherently 'backward'.

Of course, this is not to suggest that herders' skills remained static over time or were simply rearticulated without modification, for just as during the postsocialist era herding life was constantly transforming in articulation with new social and economic opportunities, particularly as the negdels fostered innovations in the form of technology, veterinary care, and mechanised transport. However, given that the day-to-day experience of life within the negdels remained centred on herding animals, these transformations did not significantly alter (presocialist) practices and actually complemented already-existing skills rather than replaced them. It is worth pointing out in this regard that, as Bawden (1968:398) notes, "Mongolian writers from the socialist period usually speak of the collectivisation of the *herders*, not of the herds, thus emphasising that what had in fact been attempted through collectivisation was more of a social revolution than a transformation of herding practices". In this regard, we might say that collectivisation actually provided the conditions which allowed herding skills to be maintained and thus rearticulated in the postsocialist context (also see Erdenebaatar 1995). Put in the language of skilled practice, the negdels reproduced the taskscapes of herding through which everyday skills came to be taught and learnt, even if they were refracted through a new discourse of socialist productivity and modernisation (Mearns 2004a:139-40).

Importantly, there was – and continues to be - an important degree of variability here, for while some households were relatively successful in rearticulating those presocialist skills following the collapse of the negdels - re-diversifying and increasing their animal numbers - others were less successful and struggled to a greater extent in the face of collapsing state support. Indeed, one of the characteristic features of the postsocialist transition has been an increased differentiation between herding households, which had been largely non-existent during the collectivised period when the state controlled animal numbers and provided salaries regardless of individual 'productivity' (Rossabi 2005). For example, while Batukhan's household have managed to increase their herd size from approximately 150 to 350 animals by 2012, other households of comparable size only increased their herds to approximately 100 or 120 animals, and typically keep a less diverse range of only the most 'productive' animals such as sheep and goats. While of course this differentiation is attributable to a range of interconnected factors, including some households having access to better pastures or different resources such as motorised transport through connections with former negdel leaders, a corollary factor has been the relative abilities of different households to rearticulate skills such as arat breeding and related herding strategies (Fernandez-Gimenz 2001:53). As Rossabi (2005:122) writes, following the collapse of the negdels "many herders lacked the necessary skills for herding, and became part of the one-third of herders who lived below the poverty line" (also see Brenner 2003). To give one example from my own fieldwork: Bayarmaa's older brother is a herder who was brought up in the Ulaan Uul negdel at the same time as Batukhan. After decollectivisation, he and his family struggled to increase their herd and often relied on support from Batukhan's household, including receiving animals to increase his stock. By the late 1990s, he was unable to support his family from animal herding alone and they moved to the regional centre to live with Bayarmaa's parents, who have a house and receive a small state pension. Today, her brother maintains a herd of just twenty sheep and goats on the outskirts of Ulaan Uul and is officially classified as unemployed. When I first met him everyone in the household informed me that he had always been 'lazy', and even during the collectivised period he neglected his animals and failed to meet his quotas. As Bayarmaa put it: "One of the bad things about the negdel was that even if lazy herders didn't meet their quotas, they were never criticised or punished. My brother never performed his work properly but still received his wages; but today he is suffering because now he does not have enough animals to survive".

This is an apt example demonstrating how different herders have experienced the postsocialist transition in polydirectional ways. Indeed, while Batukhan and his household generally saw the disintegration of the negdel as a social and economic collapse, they simultaneously experienced it as affording the opportunity to re-diversify and increase their animal herds, something that they highly value and which came to be manifested at the level of skilled practice, specifically in the form of rearticulating presocialist skills such as arat breeding methods and herding practices. Here Batukhan and his household have experienced this dimension of the postsocialist transition as a process of (re)enskilment - re-embodying presocialist skills that were supported through the negdel and applied to the new context of the postsocialist era.

For herders such as Batukhan, the post-negdel era has actually granted his household a freedom of choice with regards to herd composition that has not been experienced since before the socialist period, something that renders permeable the divisions between the presocialist, socialist, and postsocialist eras in the lived-experience of the household themselves. As Fijn writes in a similar vein: "Herders in Mongolia have reverted to traditional animal husbandry

and veterinary techniques, as they are free to make their own decisions about their herds, rejecting the failed cross-bred varieties for the hardier and better adapted Mongolian livestock" (2011:31). While the household certainly lament the loss of state support they simultaneously welcome the return to what they see as presocialist animal breeding. Here their experience of change is intrinsically polydirectional and more complicated than the normative teleologies of 'modernisation', 'postsocialist collapse', and 'loss of tradition' - specifically characterised by a co-existence between improvement and collapse, loss and gain, as well as intertwined with continuities in herding life. By contrast, many households such as Bayarmaa's brother have been less successful in rearticulating presocialist skills to re-diversify and increase their animal herds, and thus for whom the post-negdel context has been experienced as a process of deskilment – a *lack* of skills and an *inability* to practically cope in the face of collapsing state support. Here a recognition of this variability is important as it problematises the notion of a singular 'herder experience' of the postsocialist transition, as well as captures the practical foundations of the differentiation between households and the relationship between skills (or lack of them) and the capacity to cope (or not) with social change. Indeed, as we shall come to see below many herding households have been unable to support themselves since the postsocialist transition as a result of deskilment, forced to subsist through a combination of informal work and small-scale, sedentary animal herding. This is something that shall also form an important part of the subsequent chapters when considering how people seek alternate survival strategies outside the herding economy, specifically by attempting to transpose their skills into new contexts such as working as trans-frontier traders and migrating to Ulaanbaatar.

Herding in the Age of the Market

Connected to the re-diversification and increase of animal herds has been the shifting relationship between herding households and access to markets, as well as the contradictory ways in which herders have experienced 'marketisation' itself. Indeed, during the socialist period herding households were integrated into a subsidised and centrally planned economy, where the state invested heavily in technical support and infrastructure to facilitate access to both national and international markets. As Mongolia became a member of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) in 1962, there was a demand for animal products such as meat, milk, and wool through the Soviet Union and, via their formal employment with the negdels, herders received a regular and satisfactory income. Here the state oversaw all aspects of production including the transportation of collectivised animals to slaughterhouses and processing plants, as well as the marketing and distribution of animal products (Brunn & Odgaard 1996; Rossabi 2005).

With the collapse of state socialism, the centrally planned economy broke down and herders experienced a radical adjustment away from organised production[47]. Privatisation and the transition to a market economy left herders to organise the distribution and sale of their animals and animal-products themselves, something compounded by the fact that official government policy –influenced by western donors – advocated minimal state intervention, thus no longer guaranteeing purchases or offering assistance in the form of transportation. Households developed different strategies in relation to marketisation, including the (re)diversification and increase of animal herds as noted above. At the same time, large

[47] In 1980, total meat export amounted to 45,900 tonnes a year, with the USSR being Mongolia's principal market, while by 2003 that figure had been reduced to just 14,000 tonnes (Rossabi 2005).

numbers moved their encampments to the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar, which is the primary market available to herding households. While a minority of wealthier herders have established relationships with Ulaanbaatar-based companies to supply meat, milk, and wool for the urban market – generally founded upon socialist-era ties to former elites - the large majority of households today sell products informally through middlemen. Indeed, driving into Ulaanbaatar one passes hundreds of herders sitting on the side of the road beside piles of wool and cashmere, specifically waiting for informal traders to arrive and purchase their goods.



(Figure 21. Loading wool for sale in Ulaan Uul – photo by the author)

In more remote regions such as the Shishged households have limited access to markets and the majority maintain their herds for subsistence and small-scale market sales. Indeed, since marketisation there has been a widespread return to subsistence-based herding, with households generally only wishing to sell the minimum number of animals in case they may need them for food in the future. Estimates suggest that a household typically requires between 100 and 125 animals to survive and market their products; families with 75 animals or less have to slaughter animals for food and thus find it difficult to replenish their herds (Rossabi 2005). In 2012, only a tiny fraction of the herding population owned more than 1000 animals in Mongolia. On national average, approximately one third of herding households owned less than 100 animals, almost a third owned 100-200 and a further third owned 200-500 heads in 2012 (NSOM 2017:548). The majority of herders are limited to a self-sufficient herding style with limited or small-scale sales to market.

The primary strategy available to herders in remote regions is to complement their subsistence by selling supplementary products such as wool and cashmere, specifically because this do not require the slaughter of herd animals. In the case of Batukhan's household, he and his family sell both wool and cashmere once or twice a year to generate income with which to buy additional supplies and pay for medical care and schooling. However, when selling animal products herders in such remote regions are at a serious disadvantage, specifically as they are generally unable to transport products to regional centres or they must incur costs to have products transported. In Batukhan's household, he and his family generally sold wool and cashmere from their summer encampment as this is situated closest to the regional centre. Here they would arrange for family members to assist in delivering the products via motorised transport or, if not available, have a middleman come to the encampment directly. Many herders rely on such middlemen to purchase and transport their

goods, who are themselves aware of the disadvantages faced by herders and thus tend to offer relatively low prices. On the different occasions when middlemen arrived during my stay with Batukhan's household it was clear that they offered to pay a low amount; however, limited by poor access to transportation, roads, and communications infrastructure, as well as desperate to acquire income, the household were usually forced to accept. Connected to this, it is particularly difficult for herders in remote regions to acquire credit that could be used to invest in household production, such as to purchase motorised transport and better facilitate access to markets. Indeed, as Batukhan explained, access to credit is virtually impossible for remote herders as they are considered too high risk from the perspective of local banks and lenders, specifically because herd animals are their only collateral and are deemed vulnerable to losses through disease and weather.

This is an apt example capturing the contradictory ways in which herders have experienced marketisation. Indeed, while the official narrative characterises the collapse of state socialism as signifying Mongolia's transition to a 'modern' market economy, herders themselves have experienced this in specifically non-teleological terms – as a collapse of the economy and reduced access to markets. The irony for most herders is that the advent of marketisation has been characterised by a collapse of the markets and a return to (presocialist) subsistence animal herding. While the sale of wool and cashmere offers a new opportunity to generate income since privatisation, the collapse of infrastructure and support limits this to a supplementary practice for many. As Sneath remarks: "Far from being able to market and purchase more than in the past, many households are increasingly subsisting on their own produce and marketing only their surplus (if they have any), particularly cashmere and wool, which they can collect without losing livestock" (2006:153). As we shall see below, this is made more complicated by the fact that marketisation has simultaneously brought about an influx of new low-cost products and technologies, which many households are unable to afford because the sale of their own products has been restricted. This has implications for understanding people's experience of change, as the advent of marketisation is characterised by many as a process of 'de-modernisation'. This is the reason why many herders are today nostalgic for the socialist past, describing the country today as a state of 'anarchy' and having lost decades of 'development'. As Sneath writes aptly capturing the experience of modernisation thrown 'in reverse': "The most striking transition that rural Mongolia has experienced has been from a middle-income to a poor country, as if the process of development had been thrown into reverse" (2006: 53).

Mobility and Sedentarisation

Another example of polydirectional change has been the transformation of mobility amongst herding households and the shifting relationship between the mobile and sedentary sections of rural life. As we have seen, the customary land-use pattern in Mongolia is characterised by four seasonal movements per year between three or four distinct areas of pasture (Miller & Sheehy 2008). During the presocialist period many households undertook long migrations of between 200-300 kilometres between summer and winter sites, often crossing two or three different ecological zones (Fernandez-Gimenz 2001). In the Shishged Depression, herders made some of the longest migrations in Mongolia, generally following a north-south trajectory associated with the Gobi Desert (Pedersen 2011:25; Badamhatan 1986:27).

With collectivisation, the scale and frequency of mobility decreased significantly as the negdels determined the location of herders' encampments, oversaw the movements of herd animals, and dictated the rotation of pastures at different times of the year (Humphrey &

Sneath 1999; Sabloff 2001). In seeking to confine households to particular areas and in proximity to regional centres, the negdels reduced the distance between pastures and limited migrations to two or three movements per year. In the case of Batukhan's household, the negdel instructed their herding team where to graze and when to move between pastures, with negdel managers periodically visiting the household to monitor their location and record animal numbers. This was a radical transformation from the perspective of Dogsomjav and Narantuya who had previously maintained a four-season rotation system over approximately one hundred and fifty kilometres, something which came to be reduced to three movements over a distance of just forty kilometres.

With decollectivisation households were once again able to choose where to graze their herd animals and how to orientate their migrations between seasonal pastures, typically organised through congregations of khot-ail. Since the postsocialist transition there has been a broad process of decentralisation in rural Mongolia and increasing autonomy on the part of herders themselves[48] (Mearns 2004b). While the state registers herders within particular provinces (aimag), districts (sum), and areas (bag), as well as periodically records animal numbers (see below), households are far less restricted than during the socialist era to select their own pastures and how to orientate their movements, with many having returned to grazing their herds in particular areas where they had historical and filial ties to land and through membership with presocialist khot-ail. This is something that has been highly valued by herders as freedom of movement is perceived to be central to not only household survival and grassland sustainability, but the very identity of herders themselves. As Dogsomjav put it: "Before collectivisation we travelled long distances to the same areas where my family grazed their herds for generations. During the socialist time, we had to reduce our movements and were instructed where to graze; but after the negdel collapsed we were free to choose our pastures and returned to making four migrations per year. I am happy that Hurelbaatar and Oyun can return to the same grazing lands where my father and mother herded their animals". Here there is a recognised sense of continuity brought about by decollectivisation, with herders such as Dogsomjav valuing the return to what they see as customary (presocialist) land-use patterns, including the reaffirmation of historical and filial ties to particular areas outside the (strict) control of the centralised state.



(Figure 22. A ger erected beside a sedentary dwelling on the outskirts of Ulaan Uul – photo by the author)

[48] The state in Mongolia operates through various administrative levels, including provinces (*aimag*), districts (*sum*) and areas (*bag*), with administrative centres situated in all *aimag* and some *sum* centres. Herding households generally reside in *bag* areas which exist largely to organise them within each *sum*. For a discussion of political organisation in Mongolia see Enkhbat & Odgaard (1996) and, in the context of the Shishged, see Pedersen (2011).

It is important to recognise, however, the variegated ways in which herders have experienced the transformation of mobility, as well as how this has come to be manifested at the level of skilled practice. Indeed, while the majority of households have rearticulated ('traditional') mobility patterns by making multiple seasonal migrations per year, they have simultaneously reduced the scale of their movements as compared with the presocialist period. As people emphasised throughout my time in the Shishged, whereas households often migrated one and two hundred kilometres prior to collectivisation and crossed multiple ecological zones, today they usually confine their movements to much smaller areas within a single ecological zone (also see Fernandez-Gimenz 2001). Indeed, of all the households that I visited Batukhan's was one of only a handful that travelled more than sixty kilometres between summer and winter sites, while the majority instead rotated their herds in more localised areas and typically in relative proximity to regional centres (also see Mearns 2004a).

This can be understood from the perspective of skilled practice, specifically in terms of deskilment in articulation with the collapse of state support. Indeed, during the socialist period households were provided assistance when moving between pastures in the form of motorised transport, something which marked an important aspect of the state's attempt to modernise the herding economy through technological 'improvements' (Humphrey & Sneath 1999). In the case of Batukhan's household, whenever the time came for the herding team to migrate a truck would be driven to the encampment to transport all of the herd animals and the household's belongings, which inevitably made mobility easier, safer, and more efficient. This was particularly important when travelling to the winter pastures which, as Dogsomjav explained, have always been the most difficult to reach: "Before the negdel we had to work hard to protect the animals while moving in winter; you could easily lose animals in a bad storm or they could be attacked from wolves. With motorised transport, it was much easier because the truck carried all our animals and we only had to dismantle the ger". This captures the polydirectional ways in which herders perceived and remember the collectivised period, for while the negdels were responsible for reducing mobility and fracturing historical ties to land, they were simultaneously valued as institutions which provided improvements in the form of infrastructure and services, something which no doubt facilitated the broader justification of the socialist project in the eyes of herders themselves (Rossabi 2005:118).

With the dissolution of the negdels herders once again had to undertake all migrations themselves; however, without the once familiar support provided by the state the large majority were less-inclined – and in many cases less able - to make large-scale migrations (Sneath 2006; Mearns 2004a). Indeed, as people had become accustomed to moving shorter distances and having access to motorised transport, the large majority found it difficult or impossible to undertake long migrations without assistance. As Dogsomjav explained: "After the negdels collapsed moving between pastures became more difficult than ever before; many people had grown up with the negdels providing support to them and had no experience travelling long distances; they were not prepared to protect their herds in snow storms or against wolves; it was not like before and people did not want to travel far away". Connected to this was the collapse of insurance schemes formerly provided by the state which offered compensation in case of herd losses, typically in the form of monetary payment and/or replacement of herd animals (Rossabi 2005). With privatisation, the loss of herd animals has meant a direct loss to the individual household and thus a threat to everyday survival and, as a result, herders seek to minimise losses by undertaking less difficult and dangerous movements. This has been exacerbated by the increased frequency and severity of winter storms over the

last twenty years which have caused large numbers of households to lose many or even all of their animals.

Also connected to this has been the shifting relationship between herding households and regional centres, specifically as people have been forced to orientate their migration patterns in closer proximity to regional centres. Indeed, since the collapse of state support herders have had to undertake not only movement between pastures but all other movements themselves, including accessing essential services such as medical and veterinary care, acquiring supplementary supplies, as well as transporting people to and from encampments at different times of the year. As Batukhan explained, this is the primary reason why his household have decreased their movements since the postsocialist transition, specifically in order to access the regional centre for supplies and support. Indeed, there are a range of supplies that households require which they themselves cannot produce, including supplementary food items such as flour, tea, rice, and oil, personal items such as clothing, as well as additional items such as batteries or, as in increasing numbers of households, fuel and new technologies, something that shall be returned to in Chapter 3. At the same time, Batukhan's household have to organise for Oyun to attend boarding school by transporting her back and forth multiple times a year, a service that was formerly provided by the negdel in the form of a collective motor pool. As Batukhan explained: "Since the collapse of the negdel we have to do everything on our own: move our herd animals, collect supplies from the sum, and arrange transportation for Oyun. Our old winter pastures were deep in the mountains and it took us four days to reach the sum; now we can reach the centre from all our pastures in one or two days. This is also important if there is a dzud because without the negdel we have to rely on our family members for help".

Of course, despite the fact that mobility has been reduced there is an important degree of variability between individual households. Thus, while some undertake short migrations of just a few kilometres between summer and winter sites, others orientate their movements over longer distances and in closer proximity to their presocialist grazing lands. Here an important aspect of this has been the relative ability (or inability) of herders to rearticulate specific skills associated with animal-drawn transportation, which has re-emerged as the primary form of transport following decollectivisation. As Sneath writes: "In the collective period herders were often moved on the longest legs of their annual migration by collective truck, which greatly eased the difficulty of these distant movements. The dissolution of the collective motor pools and the increase in fuel costs have made seasonal movement much more difficult for most pastoral families, who have increasingly had to rely on animal transportation. This is one of the reasons for a general decline in the amount of pastoral movement" (2006:152). Animal-drawn transportation was a characteristic feature of mobile strategies throughout the presocialist period, with the majority of households using ox-carts to transport their deconstructed gers and personal belongings (Jagchid & Hyer 1979). With collectivisation, this was replaced by the use of motorised transport and, while some households continued owning ox-carts, many became the collectivised property of the negdels (also see Goldstein & Beall 1994). In the Shishged, for example, Dogsomjav explained that the Ulaan Uul negdel collected up to 90% of all carts in the region, although with the introduction of motorised transport many of these sat unused in the sum centre. Following the collapse of the negdel, herders sought to acquire old carts to (re)articulate mobility, the large majority trading animals or harnessing family ties to locate carts. In the case of Batukhan's household, Dogsomjav acquired two relatively good condition carts directly from the negdel, specifically drawing upon personal ties with one former manager and friend. Of course, not all people were

able to acquire carts and this resulted in important differences between households in terms of their relative access to animal transportation as a source of mobility.



(Figure 23. Herders and rural residents in the sum centre – photo by the author)

Connected to this was the fact that some households were more experienced than others in using animal transportation to travel longer distances, as well as training oxen and yaks to pull carts, something which requires specific skills and cross-species co-enskilment. Having himself relied on animal-drawn transportation throughout his life, Dogsomjav was familiar with both using carts and training cattle and yaks; as a result, it took only a short time for the household to use the cart to move relatively long distances again between their seasonal pastures. As he explained: "When I was young we only used carts to move and I learnt how to train oxen and yaks with my father. During the socialist period, we did not use animal-transportation for many years so after the negdel collapsed we had to find a cart and train the animals how to pull them. Training oxen and yaks is difficult and you need experience: you have to select the right animal, castrate it, and then train it to accept the harness over its body".

Here an important aspect of this is not simply the ability to use ox-carts to move, but how far one can move when migrating. Indeed, travelling by animal transport requires specific skills such as driving the cart through deep snow and across mountain passes, which demands knowledge of suitable migration routes which are able to support travelling by ox-cart (Pedersen 2011:19). As Dogsomjav explained: "Travelling with a cart cannot be done anywhere; you have to select the right route where you know the height of the mountains and the level of snow in the winter time. Travelling with the truck and travelling with an ox-cart are completely different". Importantly, other households were unfamiliar with, or had less experience using, animal transportation, and had less knowledge of appropriate migration routes. This was the case, in particular, with regards to younger generation herders who had grown up working within the negdel and had become reliant on motorised transport. As Batukhan explained, he himself had little experience using animal transportation as he had grown up in the negdel: "I did not have much experience myself but my father always used animals to pull carts so he could teach me. I had to learn how to use an older ox or yak who has already learnt to pull a cart while training a younger animal; but many people did not have trained animals so it was difficult. They were also not familiar with which routes to take using ox-carts and could not travel as far, especially during the winter. I learnt this from my father".

Connected to the transformation of mobility has been the shifting relationship between the mobile and sedentary sections of rural life. Since the collapse of the negdels increasing

numbers of herders have begun practicing more sedentary animal herding, living in or close to regional centres for all or part of the year and grazing their herds on the outskirts of the centres (Sneath 2006). Typically, these households have relatively small and less diverse animal herds as compared with 'full-time' herders, usually to supplement their everyday subsistence in the form of milk and meat, as well as to sell small quantities of animal products (wool, cashmere). As a result, they are often forced to complement their livelihoods by undertaking informal work[49] in regional centres, which limits their capacity for large-scale mobility (also see Fernandez-Gimenz 2001). Coupled with this, large numbers of non-herder sum residents have turned to animal herding since the collapse of the negdels as they became unemployed following decollectivisation. As Sneath remarks: "It must be remembered that the negdels were not only herding institutions but rural institutions more generally, providing employment for thousands of sum residents ranging from doctors, teachers, and technicians, to drivers, office-workers and bureaucrats. All of this came to an abrupt end when the negdels were decollectivised and workers became unemployed, leading to fundamental changes in the composition of rural communities as many sum residents turned to animal herding as an alternate survival strategy" (2006:151)[50]. To take one example from the Shishged: the district centre of Ulaan Uul had approximately 1000 residents in 2012. During the socialist period, the negdel employed at least one adult member of each household, usually more. With decollectivisation, more than 90% of residents became unemployed and the large majority have since either turned to herding (including sedentary forms) or, more commonly, a combination of animal herding and informal work (Pedersen 2011:12). In 2012, 70% of Ulaan Uul's population were registered as herders and only ten percent worked in non-herding occupations, while the remainder were officially unemployed[51]. Importantly, many of these 'new herders' differ from more established herders in that they continue to remain fundamentally tied to regional centres, something that affects the type of herding that they practice. Much as with the more sedentary households described above, they typically graze their animals on the outskirts of regional centres only, which has important implications for maintaining grassland sustainability and the conceptualisation of animal herding itself.



(Figure 24. A family erect their ger on the summer pastures beside their sedentary wooden house – photo by the author)

[49] 'Informal' here means any source of income that does not involve formal employment, either public or private.
[50] 'The number of registered herders has more than trebled since reforms began, from 135,420 in 1989 (less than 18 percent of the national workforce) to 407,030 in 2001, almost 50 percent of the working population' (Sneath in Brunn & Li 2006:151).
[51] Khövsgöl Statistical Yearbook 2010.

Indeed, the shifting relationship between the mobile and sedentary sections of rural life can be seen as a characteristic example of sedentarisation, where increasing numbers of (new and old) herders are adopting sedentary lifestyles as they are unable to maintain mobility and support their livelihoods away from regional centres. This is representative of a broader shift in Inner Asia where over the past 50 years there has been a change towards more sedentary lifestyles and increase in population of regional centres (Humphrey & Sneath 1999: 216). Of course, sedentarisation is a complex phenomenon that can be the result of multiple factors, including following ecological disaster, a forced process at the hands of national governments or conservation policy (Bedunah & Schmidt 2004; Chatty & Colchester 2002; Cooke 2005), as well as a political-economic shift as people are integrated into market (or socialist) economies (Ellen 1994; Humphrey 1992). Here the normative understanding is that sedentarisation is a teleological process, with mobile and sedentary lifestyles typically depicted as binary opposites and with herders characterised as moving from mobility to sedentarisation as if following an irreversible trajectory. Certainly, this is the case in many parts of the world, where sedentarisation is a linear and irreversible process, one that may result in social problems associated with peripheralisation and underdevelopment (Barnard 1992). It is important to recognise, however, the polydirectional ways in which people experience sedentarisation, particularly in the context of Mongolia where the relationship between the mobile and sedentary sections of rural life has always been circumvented, with people and goods moving frequently between encampments and regional centres. As Humphrey and Sneath write:

> The rural community includes both settled and mobile sections, and these two lifestyles are inextricably interconnected. Products and personnel (esp. children) move between the settlements and the mobile pastoral encampments; meat and animal products come into the district centre, and a variety of manufactured products flow in the opposite direction, the most important of which are generally flour, tea, salt, cloth, candles, tobacco, alcohol, and sugar. Most of the people in the district centre have close kin (siblings, children or parents) engaged in mobile pastoralism, whom they meet regularly. This creates a social matrix that includes both mobile and settled life and most of the village residents are involved in pastoralism in some way (1999:159).

For many new and old herders, the relationship between the mobile and sedentary sections of rural life is not experienced as a fixed opposition or as undergoing a unilinear process of change. Instead, it is experienced in terms of everyday practices and livelihood strategies, many of which cut across the divide between mobility and sedentarisation. This is something that came to the fore as I was out herding one morning during the summer months with Batukhan and Hurelbaatar. After leaving the sheep and goats to graze Batukhan announced that we would travel to a nearby encampment about 5 kilometres away, specifically belonging to his cousin, Bat. As he explained, Bat had only just arrived in the area from the regional centre, describing him as a 'new herder'[52] (*shinee malchid*) who lived in Ulaan Uul for most of the year and brought his animals onto the grasslands during the summer months. As we approached the encampment, we were greeted outside by Bat's wife and their three children, all of whom were busy unpacking their belongings after arriving a few days earlier. The first thing that I noticed was that the encampment differed considerably from Batukhan's, specifically comprising a smaller-sized ger, a far smaller number and less diverse range of herd animals - approximately 20 sheep and goats - and with no wooden corrals. After sitting down to tea, Bat arrived a few minutes later on the back of a motorcycle carrying a variety boxes and plastic bags filled with household belongings. Having not seen each other for many months Bat exchanged greetings with Batukhan while explaining how busy he had been carrying items

[52] The term 'new herder' (*shinee malchid*) is used to refer specifically to those people previously with state (non-herding) employment, who turned to animal herding following the collapse of state socialism as a survival strategy.

from his house to the summer encampment. Having been born into a herding household in the mid 1950s Bat found employment in the regional centre as an office-worker for the collective. Following the collapse of the negdel he became unemployed and, although given a small number of herd animals, this was not enough to support his household: "After the negdel collapsed there was nothing to do. No jobs. No opportunities. All we could do was to go back to the pastures. But I am a 'new herder' and do not have many animals; I cannot make long migrations and have to graze my animals on the outskirts of the centre. I only keep a small herd for meat and milk but I work as a trader in Mörön and have to travel frequently".

Despite the fact that herders such as Bat spend the majority of their time living in regional centres, it would be misleading to describe them as fully 'sedentarised'. Indeed, like many herders he owns both a wooden house in Ulaan Uul and a ger, which he stores in the regional centre for nine months of the year. At the start of summer, the household take out their ger and erect it at their summer encampment only five or six kilometres from the regional centre, driving their animals onto the grasslands and living 'as herders' for two or three months. Having a smaller sized ger allows Bat and his household to flexibly move from the settlement to the grasslands more easily. At the same time, by erecting their encampment in close proximity to the centre they are able to use motorised transport to carry supplies and shuttle family members back and forth. Indeed, during the three months that they spent on the grasslands Bat and his household travelled regularly to and from the regional centre, picking up supplies whenever necessary and visiting friends and family. Here the normative understanding of sedentarisation fails to capture the lived-experience of households such as Bat's, who live 'in-between' the settlement and the grasslands and move at different times of the year. From the perspective of skilled practice, Bat is neither a 'sedentary' or a 'mobile' herder but someone adjusting his skills in relation to the postsocialist transition, incorporating both his ger and his permanent dwelling within his livelihood strategies. This ability to incorporate permanent dwellings into such strategies is comparable to urban Evenki households in Siberia who extend their residence across both mobile and sedentary dwellings over the course of different seasons (Anderson 2006:24). In this regard, despite an increasing number of herders spending their time in regional centres, this is not to suggest a uniform pattern of sedentarisation. On the contrary, fixed dwellings can be seen as actually facilitating herding practices alongside sedentarisation, enabling people to move from one location to another depending on the season and economic situation. As Humphrey & Sneath write: "It is not enough to know that people move or do not move, or that they move, say, between two houses twice a year…We also need to understand *how* people live in their settlements and camps. A sedentary lifestyle can be perceived in the degree of use of fixed structures, such as winter sheds, fenced pastures or wells, or the presence of static activities" (1999:190).

The shifting relationship between the mobile and sedentary sections of rural life is precisely that which has provoked discussion concerning the 'viability' of herding in the postsocialist context, particularly in terms of grassland sustainability and overgrazing (also see Fernandez-Gimenz 1993). Indeed, the sedentarisation of herders and the shifting composition of the herding population is seen by many environmental organisations, as well as the Mongolian state, as a deviation from 'traditional' herding and thus a threat to grassland sustainability. Here the assumption is that if herders are reducing their mobility and/or becoming sedentarised then it is doubtful that they are able to graze their animals in a sustainable way, which in some cases has prompted calls for the privatisation of the pastures. Certainly, the change in scale and frequency of mobility does have implications with regards to grassland sustainability (Humphrey & Sneath 1999), and evidence suggests that overgrazing has become

more severe since the collapse of the negdels. New herders may differ from old herders in their access to productive resources, in turn influencing mobility and resource use. New herders, if they are not part of an established local community and have little history of engaging in collective activities with other local herders, may have less incentive to adopt or abide by local norms of pasture use. As Fernandez-Gimenz (2001:53) describes it: "New herders may lack ecological knowledge and skills, leading to inappropriate pasture use and a lack of understanding of the ecological rationale for pasture use norms".

It is important to recognise, however, that sedentary animal herding does not automatically imply rangeland degradation, or that so-called 'traditional' herding has been replaced with a 'non-traditional' form (Addison et al. 2012). Indeed, this is a view based on the mistaken assumption that herding is a fixed practice coterminous with a distinct body of 'traditional environmental knowledge'. This can be seen in the ways in which herders harness already-existing networks of support as part of their 'sedentary' herding strategies, specifically in order to maintain the health and productivity of their animals and rangeland condition. Indeed, like the majority of 'sedentary' herders Bat integrates his animals into that of Batukhan's during the winter months, specifically to enable Bat's animals to be grazed away from the sum centre when both animals and grasslands are at their weakest. As Bat explained: "I am a new herder but I know that my animals cannot always graze too close to the sum. It is not good for the grasslands and it is not good for the herd animals. In the late autumn, I 'place' (*süregt tavih*) my animals with Batukhan and he takes them with him on his long migration to the winter pastures. Then when he returns I graze the animals again on the outskirts of Ulaan Uul". This is a widespread practice across Mongolia which should be seen as a practical response to sedentarisation, further rendering permeable the division between the mobile and sedentary sections of rural life. As Sneath describes it: "A common coping strategy is for such households from the centre to pasture their livestock relatively near to the settlement during the summer months, and then have some or all of their livestock herded by relatives for the rest of the year" (2006:151).

This can also be seen in the specific herding strategies of sedentary herders while living in regional centres. Indeed, rather than herding their animals long distances across the steppe, herders such as Bat move their animals more frequently up and down the hills that circle the regional centre, specifically relying on changes in elevation to access a more diverse range of pasture. This is a long-established technique in Mongolian herding and one that has practical relevance for sedentary herders in the postsocialist context. Connected to this, herders such as Bat oversee the management of the pastures surrounding Ulaan Uul by joining together with other households who work together and share access to resources such as motorised transport. For example, Bat takes turns with a number of his neighbours who also have small animal herds in monitoring the location of the animals and moving them to appropriate areas of grassland at different times during the day. This is something made easier by the fact that such households typically share access to motorcycles so that they can access and monitor the herds easier and more frequently during the day (see Chapter 3).

Of course, this is not to suggest that all 'new herders' have the same capacity to generate alternate herding strategies. Indeed, evidence suggests that since the collapse of the negdels there have been increasing conflicts between 'new' and 'old' herders, with many established households resenting the newcomers and fearing that they will add to the additional burden placed on the grasslands (also see Rossabi 2005:122). There is also an important degree of variability between 'new herders' themselves. Thus, while twenty years after the postsocialist transition some continue to maintain small herds and live most of the year in regional centres,

others have become quite successful and built up large herds. In fact, while some 'old' herders are now less mobile than at the start of the postsocialist transition, some 'new herders' have actually turned to full-scale multi-season herding. Not only does this capture the polydirectional transformations associated with the postsocialist transition, but it also problematises the unilinear assumption that mobility and sedentarisation are fixed. The fact that some 'new herders' are still referred to as 'new' by people such as Batukhan, despite many being successful, captures the widespread attitude that 'the transition' is still ongoing (and perhaps never-ending). This is something that shall be returned to in Chapter 3 when considering the advent of new technologies such as motorised transport, and where conflicts over grazing rights and access to water sources have contributed to the increasing difficulties faced by herding households. At the same time, the example demonstrates the potential of herders to flexibly respond to their changing situation and creatively develop alternate skills to minimise the limitations associated with sedentarisation and wider postsocialist change. As noted in the Introduction, skill is not simply a matter of learning and embodying particular techniques or conforming to pre-existing rules but a flexible capacity generated in the course of people's practical engagement with the constituents of their surroundings. When these surroundings change - such as when people 'return' to the grasslands or 'become sedentarised' – new skills are learnt, old skills are lost or forgotten, and pre-existing skills are transformed and adapted in articulation with such change. As Fernandez-Gimenz remarks:

> Certainly, livestock production under pastoral systems on the steppes of Inner Asia is increasing in complexity as the production system is forced to respond to new paradigms. Because of the necessity to accommodate economic development and market economics to survive as pastoral herders, herders must be innovative in the use of management and production strategies. Here innovation is specifically the rearticulation of skill in relation to new contexts of production and consumption, with herders already possess(ing) a set of skills needed to survive in the modern world since those same skills and understanding are required on a daily basis in nomadic pastoralism (1993:42).

As people emphasised throughout my time in the Shishged, while herders have indeed reduced their movements and the composition of herder communities has changed, this does not suggest an automatic 'loss' of skills and degradation of pasture (also see Akiyama & Kawamura 2007). Indeed, herders have always responded to change, including during the presocialist and socialist periods. Much as with Bat's development of new herding strategies, 'new' kinds of herding should not be seen as a 'deviation' from 'traditional' methods, but rather, as skilled responses to new social and economic conditions associated with the postsocialist context.

The Autumn Encampment

At the end of summer, the grasslands in the Shishged Depression change from a vibrant green to subtler hues of brown, marking the first signs of the transition to Autumn. During this time, the forests surrounding the Shishged transform as the nights become colder and frost begins to settle. Every year between September and October, Batukhan's household leave their summer encampment and travel the relatively short distance of twenty kilometres to their autumn pastures, where they remain for just one or two months before moving on to their winter encampment. Much like during the spring season, the autumn encampment is a more transitory location in-between the primary summer and winter sites, where the household move to prepare themselves and their herd animals before the long and arduous winter.

The autumn encampment is situated at a higher elevation than the summer pastures deeper within a valley at the start of the *Khordil Sar'dag* mountains, an area which offers protection against the lower temperatures and rising winds. Herding households generally like the

autumn season because the weather tends to be more stable without the severe storms characteristic of both the winter and spring months. There are also far fewer flies and biting insects and the temperatures are suitably mild for both human beings and herd animals. By this time of year, the young animals within the herds are strong enough to feed themselves and the household do not have to tend to any overly weak individuals. For the women in the household there is much less milking and preparation of milk products to be done, with everyday tasks centred on storing food in preparation for winter. By far the most important activity is the slaughter of herd animals and the drying of meat. Households do not generally slaughter animals during the winter and typically only consume dried meat until the start of spring. Batukhan specifically selected animals for slaughter that were either near the end of their natural lives or who were considered less likely to survive the winter. While the innards of the slaughtered animals are consumed immediately, the rest of the meat is hung and dried by Bayarmaa and Narantuya.



(Figure 25. Batukhan and Bayarmaa's ger at the Autumn encampment – photo by the author)

During the day, Batukhan and Hurelbaatar spent a few hours repairing the shelters at the autumn encampment, including felling fresh trees to construct new corrals if necessary. Also during this time, they prepare the animals for the upcoming winter by progressively herding them to higher and more exposed areas of pasture. As Batukhan explained, this is important in order to 'harden' the animals and ready them for the lower temperatures. In response, the animals adapt physiologically and start to grow their winter coats, just as the household themselves start to wear thicker autumn deels (also see Fijn 2011).

The Khot-Ail

By the beginning of the autumn season temperatures were already dropping across the Shishged. Snow had begun to fall and a thick layer of ice covered much of the ground, slowing down the practice of everyday tasks and altering the rhythm of daily life. The start of Autumn also marked that it would soon be time to migrate, something that breaks up the congregation of households in the area as each makes their way to their respective winter encampments. Across Mongolia, households erect their gers in close proximity to one another and disperse at different times of the year, interlocking in a rotating system of seasonal movement. In preparation for this, Batukhan and a number of his neighbours organised an informal meeting at the ger of a nearby household. This was attended by twelve herders in total, all of whom share social or kinship ties with Batukhan and erect their dwellings in close proximity to one

another during the summer and autumn seasons, then break away at the start of winter. Although the gathering itself was an informal and social affair, this being the last time the attendees will see each other until the following spring, there are important divisions between age and status. These come to be manifested in the structural composition of the ger, with Batukhan, as one of the oldest and most experienced herders present, was implored to occupy the northern khoimor and receive the hospitality of his hosts in the form of food and drink. The meeting, however, also has a purpose beyond that of convivial social relations. Indeed, embedded within the flow of hospitality and alcohol consumption is a discussion of rangeland management, something that is brought to the fore as Batukhan delivers an impromptu speech concerning the importance of 'properly' grazing one's herd animals:

> The situation in the countryside is now very difficult. The last winter was harsh for all herders and the government has not been quick to respond. This makes it even more important than ever that herders work together to keep the herd animals healthy and the grasslands in good condition. Although the socialist period has now passed, we should remember how hard we all worked together in the collective and how people cared for each other and helped other households in times of need. This is now more important than ever.

As Humphrey & Sneath (1999:69) point out, there have always existed institutions for managing herding in Mongolia. In the presocialist period, these included a combination of khot-ail, as well as large institutions such as Buddhist monasteries, estates managed by ruling princes, and noble patrimonies. In the case of the larger institutions, rangeland and herd animals were owned at the institutional level, with households herding animals owned by the institutions and serving as monastery serfs (*shabinar*) or prince's serfs (*khamjilaga*) while at the same time tending to their own private herds (ibid). These large institutions, combined with the small-scale khot-ail, served to manage the use of rangeland, instituting relatively fixed regulations concerning the movement of herd animals across the landscape and in seasonal rotations.



(Figure 26. Multiple ger forming a khot-ail – photo by the author)

During the socialist period the large-scale institutions were abolished and effectively replaced with the negdels. As we have seen, these fundamentally transformed every aspect of rural life, while at the same time served to facilitate many of the skills and practices associated with herding. Much as with the presocialist institutions, herders employed by the negdels herded animals owned by the collective and, in the majority of cases, also kept smaller herds for private use. As Humphrey & Sneath remark, "it is worth pointing out that the socialist productive institutions (negdels) also operated as corporations, and that members again

worked for them along with keeping their own private animals" (1999:70). In this regard, the negdels served to manage the use of rangeland and herd animals, effectively taking over the role of their presocialist predecessors. As Hearn writes:

> Significant changes in pasture-land management practice were introduced under collectivisation, including investments in water supply, winter shelters, hay and fodder production, and transportation for making nomadic moves, and species-specialisation in livestock production at the herder camp level. While some of these changes partially displaced customary forms of collective action in herding, and tended to restrict seasonal nomadic moves within *bag* (then known as 'brigade') territories, they did not alter the basic seasonal rhythm of pasture-land use. In many respects, pasture-land management under collectivisation was marked by the dual control of formal regulatory institutions with informal coordination norms. Nominal control of decisions concerning who would graze where and when was transferred from individual household to managers of pastoral collectives and state farms, but in practice the outcomes varied little from customary tenure patterns (2004:139-140).

Immediately following the socialist period, the negdels collapsed and, along with them, the institutional management of rangeland. As Humphrey and Sneath (1999:70) write, "the early 1990s saw the break-up of most of the socialist institutions, which were either disbanded or divided into a number of companies. More recently, many of these have collapsed, so around two-thirds of the livestock in the country are kept by private family-based herding". Today, this has increased further, particularly in more remote parts of the country where over 90% of herd animals are now privately owned.

Since the collapse of the negdels and the privatisation of the herds, many have speculated that Mongolia will, or already is, falling prey to the so-called 'tragedy of the commons'. This is the purported dilemma in which multiple individuals, said to be acting independently and according to their own self-interest, will ultimately deplete a shared resource; thus, as the number of livestock grazing the pastures increases, competition is said to develop among herders for the increasingly scarce pasture. In the case of the fishing industry, where the 'tragedy of the commons' has been largely defined, this competition has resulted in large-scale investments in equipment, enabling fishermen to more quickly and accurately locate and capture fish, resulting in the depletion of stocks and heightened competition between fishermen (Agrawal 2001). The parallel response among herders is said to be that they maximise their herds as rapidly as possible and position their livestock so as to appropriate for themselves the greatest possible benefits from the pastures. Recognising this, Hardin famously remarked: "The rational herdsman concludes that the only sensible course for him to pursue is to add another animal to his herd…but this is the conclusion reached by each and every rational herdsman sharing the commons. Therein is the tragedy. Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit - in a world which is limited" (2003:124).

To some extent, certain aspects of the 'tragedy of the commons' have been noted in Mongolia. As we have seen, herders have sought to maximize their herds across the country, with the number of herd animals reaching 30 million for the first time in the year 2000. At the same time, competition for rangeland has increased, with some herders complaining that areas designated as 'reserved' (to be used only during certain seasons – see below) are being occupied and grazed by new herders arriving from distant regional centres, as well as from Ulaanbaatar. In response, some policy makers have advocated the full privatisation of Mongolia's rangelands, arguing, much along the lines of Hardin's thesis, that this is the only means of ensuring sustainable management.

Now although these examples point to aspects of the 'tragedy of the commons', it is imperative to understand the specificities associated with Mongolian rangeland management.

As we have seen, notions such as economic maximisation are problematised in herding life by considerations such as herder's aversion to slaughtering herd animals en masse and supplying them to the 'impersonal market'. At the same time, maximisation does not necessarily imply universal self-interest, for herders also regularly give away and/or trade herd animals according to networks of social obligation, something that suggests a more complex picture of conceptualisations of 'wealth', 'property', and 'self-interest', something we shall return to below and in Chapter 5. Most important, however, is the fact that the privatisation of the herds has not resulted in an unregulated 'free for all' of pasture use. Indeed, since the collapse of the negdels the khot-ail has re-emerged as the primary unit of social organisation overseeing the use and management of rangeland. Today, a khot-ail typically includes between two and seven gers, consisting of households that generally share kinship ties, though often incorporating others with social-regional ties (Sneath 1998:1147).

Now much attention has been devoted to the re-emergence of the khot-ail since decollectivisation, the institution described as filling the vacuum left behind since the demise of the socialist state. Certainly, this is true to some extent, for as I came to learn by attending the informal meeting above and other similar events, the khot-ail oversees rangeland management, delineates use-rights to pasture, and facilitates the sharing of support and technology. Herders within a khot-ail openly discuss which areas of pasture upon which they 'should' graze their herds and emphasise what kinds of assistance they might provide should other members require. At the same time, however, it is important to note that the khot-ail is not a reproduction of its presocialist form, nor does it operate as a system of management in the sense of a formalised institution. Instead, pasture management emerges from within the practice of herding itself, with different areas of pasture 'defined' in a relatively loose way. The question that emerges, then, is how does rangeland come to be managed? In order to understand this, as well as the implications for the 'tragedy of the commons', it is useful to approach the khot-ail from the perspective of skilled practice, not as a formalised 'institution' but as an informal constellation of individual herders who learn and adjust their skills in relation to the changing social and economic conditions in which they find themselves. In the process, rangeland comes to be 'managed' via the informal apprenticeships that emerge from within these relationships, with more experienced herders guiding the 'proper' use of rangeland and less experienced herders learning via their own enskilment. In this regard, rather than being a rearticulation of its pre-socialist form, the khot-ail must be seen as a *contemporary* response to the late postsocialist context. As Humphrey and Sneath remark: "It would be wrong to assume that there is some 'default position', some generic Inner Asian society, to which people have recently returned. What we have to analyse is a new range of institutions. These are taking form *in relation to the current economic situation and yet also bear some legacy from previous eras*" (1999:69 my emphasis).

The Khot-ail as an Institution of Enskilment

There are a variety of formal state institutions in rural Mongolia. Formally, the sum administration is responsible for pasture management, collecting livestock taxes, counting animals, and the distribution of property rights (at least for winter encampments, which are considered the most important in countering extreme weather and herd losses). Without wishing to underrepresent the role of the sum administration, during my fieldwork I gained the impression that herders generally negotiated the use of pastures informally amongst themselves, usually based on existing kinship relations, presocialist claims to particular areas of land, and articulated through the more informal institution of the khot-ail. I found that the

actual authority of local administration varied from region to region. In some cases, herders told me that they interacted intermittently with the sum administration, usually during the collection of livestock taxes or when counting animal numbers. In other cases, many criticised the administration for being corrupt. While I personally did not collect evidence of this, it is something which was common during the early years following the end of state socialism.

Of course, formal state institutions do play an important role in herding areas of the Shishged. When it came to matters of overgrazing, for example, the sum administration hosted lectures in district centres to 'educate' households on the condition of the grasslands and made suggestions about which areas of pasture should be retained for winter grazing. This advice was to some extent incorporated into people's narratives of sustainability and their decisions about pasture management, which has important implications for enskilment as a multi-level process operating through both local and state knowledge. Twice a year, the local administration organised to count the number of herd animals (and herders) in the Shishged, though this is less than during the socialist period when they were counted more frequently (Pedersen 2011:128). It should also be remembered that much as during the socialist period, today's sum administration includes people with long-standing kinship ties to the wider population, with many having their own herd animals and others being members of particular khot-ails (Upton 2004). These relationships to some extent render informal the formality of the administration, and it was not uncommon to meet a state administrator visiting his/her family members out of the grasslands, drinking tea, and discussing pasture management as part of a khot-ail.

The primary interaction between Batukhan's household and the sum administration was through the payment of livestock taxes, which were paid annually at the start of the summer season, as well as during the counting of livestock numbers. These instances were also interconnected with the institution of the khot-ail, as regional members discussed the upcoming collection of taxes, the counting of animal numbers, and the administrations attitude to pasture management during their many informal exchanges throughout the year. Thus, while I would not want to present the role of the sum administration as negligible, I suggest it important to emphasise the fluid relationship between the formal and the informal in the state administration itself. Indeed, while the functioning of Mongolia's state system would warrant a separate investigation (see Sneath 2003), it is notable for the present discussion that most interactions with the administration were channelled through the informal institution of the khot-ail and, as I show below, it is there that we see the everyday experiences, exchanges, and hierarchies of practice informing pasture management.

After herding the sheep and goats out to pasture one morning, Batukhan told me that we would pay a visit to Sukh, a long-term member of his regional khot-ail. It is a common practice amongst herders, particularly those within the same khot-ail, to visit one another to exchange news, meet extended family, obtain supplies, engage in small-scale trade, or simply drink tea, and it is within these informal exchanges that the structure of the khot-ail comes to be enforced. On our way to Sukh's ger we passed an area of pasture that was noticeably greener and of far better quality than the others I had seen and, asking Batukhan about this, he explained that this was an area reserved for winter foraging and not to be used by anyone during the other seasons. As we have seen, Mongolian herders adhere to two basic norms of pasture use. First, they set aside areas for use in the harsh, non-growing seasons such as winter, where grazing one's livestock is strongly discouraged. Second, in case of climatic disasters such as a drought or winter storms, herders allow outsiders from disaster-struck locales areas to use their own pastures, including reserves, with the expectation they would

receive the same privilege if the circumstances were reversed. Having already spent time travelling with Batukhan to different areas of pasture I was aware of this informal rule and was thus surprised to see a number of animals grazing in the supposedly 'reserved' pasture. After approaching Sukh's ger and exchanging introductions, both him and Batukhan looked at the different herds in the area and I was surprised to see that both said nothing about the animal herds. Confused, I brought up the issue a few moments later, asking Sukh if it was not a problem that the herd were grazing the winter pastures. Without looking outside (and clearly aware of their presence), Batukhan's neighbour explained: "Yes, those are the animals of a new herder. The household just moved here in the summer from *Bulgan* (another district). They know that it is a winter pasture, they can see from the grass. But one of them is a family member of mine so it is difficult; *we should visit them later*". Here, in characterising the owners of the wandering livestock as 'new herders', Sukh is collating them with the more recent population of herders who have turned to animal herding since decollectivisation. Much as with Bat described above, such individuals are at the forefront of social change in herding regions of Mongolia, affecting herding strategies and patterns of land-use. As I came to learn through spending more time with Sukh, these changes have themselves come to be fused with the re-emergence of the khot-ail, and it is here that we see the relationship between skills and social change.

This came to the fore as I travelled with Batukhan and Sukh to visit the owner of the wandering livestock, named Bold. To reach him the three of us rode into the sum centre of *Alag-Erden*, dismounting our horses outside the family's wooden house. Like many herders, Bold spends the majority of his time in the sum, leaving his animals to graze on the outskirts and, in autumn and winter, integrating them into the herd of his family members. He welcomed us inside and immediately served tea, the four of us sitting around a small wooden table in the centre of the room. Sukh led the discussion by speaking about informal affairs, enquiring of Bold how his family were and when it was next travelling to Ulaanbaatar for trade. After around fifteen minutes, Sukh brought up the issue of the wandering livestock, though in a rather circuitous way: "It is now autumn and we must all watch the condition of the grasslands. Since the last dzud the pastures have been very weak, and there was not enough rain in the summer". This provoked an immediate and almost apologetic response from Bold: "Yes, yes, I know it is very important. I am very busy in the centre but will have my nephew check on the animals more often". At this point Batukhan interjected with a clear display of authority: "You are new to the area. It will be of great benefit to you to work with the khot-ail. And your wife and Sukh's wife are cousins so we must all look after each other". "Yes, yes. And I will send my wife to visit you all soon. This is a good area for herding and we are slowly building up our herds. We would like to come back to this area next season". And that the three of us stood up and left the house.

As can be seen from this example, the khot-ail functions less as a formal 'institution' and more as a flexible constellation of individual herding households, with the management of rangeland embedded within the context of everyday social relationships and obligations across kinship ties. This is something I came to witness throughout my time in Mongolia as herders raised issues of pasture management when visiting each other to drink tea, attending informal gatherings, as well as when riding across the steppe to collect supplies. Of course, this informality does not render the khot-ail any less significant; on the contrary, I would argue that it is precisely through this flexible informality that rangeland comes to 'managed', with the authority of the khot-ail embedded within the perceived skills and expertise of certain key

figures (such as Batukhan) and the social ties between members (such as between Sukh and Bold), which gives the 'new' institution saliency in the postsocialist context.

Here it is useful to characterise the khot-ail as a particular community of practice (Chaiklin & Lave 1996), a relatively small-scale, coherent group of individuals whose informal apprenticeships shape specific skills of practice and perception. Indeed, herders participate in informal apprenticeships whereby less experienced herders come to 'learn' the management of rangeland from their more experienced counterparts. In the case of Sukh, the more experienced herder, Sukh, visited the less experienced 'new herder' and to some extent incorporated him within the community of practice, by informally visiting him, drinking tea, and implicitly raising the issue of rangeland management. In the process, Sukh (and more widely Batukhan) are ensuring the 'proper' use of rangeland by integrating the new herder into the regional khot-ail. Here it is significant to note that the opposite would not occur; that is, that the 'new herder' would not visit the experienced herder, which reveals a hierarchy of practice and perceived skill. Indeed, there is a hierarchy of skill within the community of practice, one that is not explicitly articulated but implicitly acknowledged on the basis of perceived skilled-practice (also see Harris 2007).

This could also be seen in the informal meeting noted above. Indeed, it was the more experienced herders such as Batukhan who 'led' the discussion at the gathering, with the hierarchy of skill manifested in their ability to speak authoritatively in regards to the 'proper' use of rangeland and embodying their expertise by performed knowledge and action. Here Batukhan's allusion to the 'time of the negdels' is particularly crucial, specifically as it positions those herders who worked for the collective (such as himself) as 'more experienced' than the newcomers. At the same time, this hierarchy of expertise is physically mapped onto the domestic space of the ger, with Batukhan implored to occupy the more respected northern khoimor, a physical manifestation of his perceived experience and skill. Here rangeland comes to be 'managed' as with any taskscape, with the more experienced herder 'sign posting' (Ingold 2000:126) how rangeland 'should' be managed and allowing others to learn and follow suit. Of course, this is not only undertaken through discursive articulations of visits and meetings, but in more practical terms as well, with experienced herders undertaking such management physically on the ground by 'properly' grazing their own animals and 'leading by example'. This is something that has important implications with regards to the 'tragedy of the commons'. Indeed, as we have seen, Hardin's thesis reproduces a problematic assumption that all human beings necessarily act according to their own independent and 'rational' self-interest. Indeed, he does not seem to believe that trust, cooperation, and common goals are sufficiently robust in human communities to lead to self-regulation in access to common resources. As Morris (2001:122) outs it: "This view assumes that internalised norms emerging from members of communities cannot be effective, and that only externally enforced, and coercive controls can be effective". As my characterisation of the khot-ail demonstrates, however, small-scale management of resources is indeed possible (also see Rappaport 1968; Vayda & Rappaport 1968), where the norms of resource use - how one 'should' graze one's animals - come to be instilled without state or other institutional enforcement, but from within the context of social relations, intersecting with what I have characterised as the perceived hierarchy of skill. It is perhaps for this reason why Hardin's model has since been rejected by many pastoral specialists (Sneath 2000:131).

At the same time, since khot-ail generally comprise individuals who share kinship ties, the norms of resource use intersect with strong Mongolian forms of social obligation, something we saw in the example of Sukh visiting the new herder. Indeed, by explicitly emphasising the

kinship relations that they share (between their wives), Sukh is able to strengthen the integration of the 'new herder' into the khot-ail and instil in him a sense of obligation surrounding pasture management on the basis of kinship. As Morris writes:

> Research over the past 30 years has shown that tragedies of the commons are real, but not inevitable. The resources must be valuable to the users and frequently used by them, they must have good knowledge of the resource and constraints to its use, and the flow of the resource must be relatively predictable. If users depend on the resource for a major portion of their livelihood, they will more likely be interested in making rules of access that include sanctioning for violations. They must be interested in the sustainability of the resource well into the future so that current costs are not the only consideration. For all this to happen there must be trust between users based on common values and shared access to the resource (2001:128)

A consideration of skilled practice introduces a fundamental element of agency and dialogue in understanding the khot-ail, which has important implications with regards to social change in the postsocialist context. Indeed, as can be seen from the above, it is out of the social relationships that comprise the community of practice that decollectivisation and the privatisation of the herds have come to be experienced: Sukh's recommendation to the new herder is articulated in relation to the changing social and environmental situation, the presence of 'new herders', and the transformation of the seasons in relation to climate change. If the 'new herder' comes to effectuate the recommendation by moving his animals off the 'reserved' pasture (and presumably avoiding this in the future), he can be seen as responding to such change at the level of his own skilled-practice – adjusting his skills and the way in which he grazes his own herd animals. As Ingold puts it: "What each generation contributes to the next are not templates or schemata for the organisation of experience, but rather the specific conditions of development under which successors, growing up in a social environment, acquire their own embodied skills and dispositions" (2000:127). It is precisely for this reason why the khot-ail cannot be understood merely as a replication of its pre-socialist form: instead, it is a new social institution through which the next generation of herders, such as newer herders, acquire their own skilled practice in relation to the changing social and economic conditions of the postsocialist context. Of course, this is not to suggest that all herders necessarily come to embody the norms of how one 'should' manage pasture rangeland. Indeed, as we have already seen, increasing numbers of herders are complaining that 'new herders' are claiming access to land irrespective of regional khot-ails and this is creating new conflicts between households. This is something that might well increase as herders become further entangled in marketisation, internal migration, and new restrictions on the landscape. At the same time, it is arguable that the khot-ail will continue to function alongside such conflicts as institutions of rangeland management, specifically because it is not a 'traditional' institution but a flexible one enabling herders to cope with the postsocialist transition.

Moving Between Encampments

It was late in the autumn season and the temperatures were beginning to fall sharply across the Shishged Depression. Snow had already begun to fall and a thick layer of ice covered much of the ground, slowing down the rhythm of daily life and making the execution of everyday tasks more difficult. Oyun had returned to boarding school in the regional centre and Bayarmaa and Narantuya spent most of their days preparing the final milk products in preparation for winter. The household had recently incorporated the animals belonging to Bat and another family member into their own herd, and Batukhan and Hurelbaatar spent increasing amounts of time herding the animals to ensure that they could access sufficient grasses underneath the thickening ice and snow.

As the seasons begin to change, Batukhan and his household implicitly know when it is time to move between encampments. Herders do not move by choice or based on personal preference but for the needs of herd animals, specifically in relation to the transforming seasons and the varying affordances of the landscape. As we have seen, mobility is the basis for everyday survival and depends on a balance between summer and winter pastures. All herders set aside areas for use in the harsh, non-growing winter season, where grazing one's animals at other times of the year is strongly discouraged (Miller & Sheehy 2008). Even for households that undertake relatively short migrations, movement between summer and winter pastures is considered vital, specifically so that the animals are given shelter against the increasing northern winds and so that they can access sufficient grasses during the difficult non-growing season.

A few days before leaving the autumn encampment Batukhan organised to visit a local shaman (*boo*) in the area, which the household did every year prior to the winter migration. As Batukhan explained, this was essential in order to ascertain an appropriate/auspicious day when to move and ensure that 'proper' relations were maintained between the household and the nonhuman agencies within the landscape: "This is the most difficult time of the year; the herds are fat and strong but it is still easy to lose animals; when moving in the winter there are storms and wolves looking for food. We have no motorised transport and the distance to the winter pastures is the longest that we travel. I visit the shaman to ask for support from the *ongods* (sprit-masters) and to make sure that we move on a 'good' day". The Shishged has long been a centre of shamanism in Mongolia, particularly amongst the Darhad (Pedersen 2011; Dulam & Even 1994; Buyandelgeriyn 2007). As we have seen, even with the long-term influence of the Buddhist church, shamanism and Buddhism have coexisted side-by-side (Pedersen 2011; Hangartner 2011), which will be the subject of Chapter 4. Although all religion was severely restricted during the socialist period, with shamans persecuted and forced to (temporarily) abandon the practice, the postsocialist transition has once again made it possible to practice religion openly and today there are numerous active shamans in the region (Pedersen 2011), including a number of younger shamans-in-training. Herders visit shamans for a variety of reasons, the large majority of which centre on practical concerns related to everyday survival, such as locating missing herd animals, seeking advice whether to migrate to the city, or whether a family should invest in sending a child to university. Many herders also visit shamans to seek protection before undertaking migrations, as well as to help decide on which particular day is considered auspicious to move.

For herding households, nonhuman agencies are understood to comprise the invisible sphere invoked by the shaman, and it is with these that s/he communicates in order to resolve the problems of a household, seeking to obtain prosperity and protection (Buyandelgeriyn 2007; Pedersen 2007). While it is not my intention to offer a full interpretation of Darhad shamanism (see Pedersen 2011), I emphasise the ways in which shamans and shamanic rituals are inextricably tied to the skills of herder mobility. Indeed, for ordinary households such as Batukhan's, shamans can be seen as 'tools' through which to help facilitate safe migration between encampments, specifically by acting as an intermediary between the household and the nonhuman agencies thought to have the potential to influence weather conditions, fortune, and the well-being of herd animals. Much as with Bayarmaa offering tea to the spirit-owner of the encampment or milk-products during castration, visiting a shaman is a practical way in which herders seek to engage 'properly' with nonhuman agencies (also see Empson 2011; Humphrey 2007), something which, as I show below, is fundamentally tied to the postsocialist transition.

I travelled with Batukhan and the household to visit Gombodorj, a fifty-five-year-old shaman who tends a small herd of animals and lives with his wife. The dwelling was erected on the edge of the Shishged taiga, which is a rather atypical location as herders generally prefer to remain on the open steppe. This can be explained from the perspective of the history of shamanism in the region as the long-term presence of the country's biggest ecclesiastical Buddhist estate, the Darhad Ih' Shav "had the effect of pushing the Shishged shamans and their spirits (*ongods*) toward and into the forest" (Pedersen 2011:13). Indeed, as people regularly commented, most Darhad shamanic spirits are today found in the taiga, while the region's steppes is dominated by Buddhist nonhuman agencies such as mountain spirits (*gazryn ezed*) (ibid). As Gombodorj himself remarked: "I can never be too far away from the forest. Whenever I move my ongods are always pulling me back". Shamans may perform collective or individual rituals by communicating with their ongods, which are spirits of deceased humans (generally shamans) and who serve as helper-spirits of the shaman. Ongods are generally inherited from the shaman's own ancestors and, during a shaman's lifetime, s/he may incorporate new ongods into his/her corpus of helper-spirits (Humphrey 2007). The ritual that Gombodorj performed was of the individual kind, involving Batukhan and his household, Gombodorj, and the shaman's assistant (who is also his wife).



(Figure 27. Gombodorj's ger, situated on the edge of the taiga – photo by the author)

The ritual began close to midnight as the assistant carefully removed the shamanic costume out of its specifically designated place in the corner of Gombodorj's ger. After placing it over his body, Gombodorj took hold of his shamanic drum and began striking it in a repetitive manner, gradually working himself into a trance. After fifteen minutes of continuous beating, Gombodorj began to spin violently and vocalised a series of grunting sounds, eventually collapsing onto the floor and with his assistant helping him back up[53]. At this point, Gombodorj is understood to be in communication with his ongods and Batukhan is expected to offer vodka and cigarettes while asking questions. He immediately told Gombodorj that he is concerned about the upcoming migration, particularly given the fact that the household had lost many animals during the previous winter. As a result, he wanted to ensure that everything would run smoothly and to ask when would be an appropriate day to undertake the move. At one point,

[53] It is important to note that different shamans perform rituals in different ways. While a number performed similar rituals to that described here, others contacted their *ongods* in more informal ways such as while simply sitting down in a chair or lying in a bed. One particular young shaman that I visited would contact her *ongods* by covering her eyes with her head band.

he referenced the collapse of state support and the increasing difficulty of generating additional income, specifically to pay for Oyun's schooling. Sipping the vodka and keeping a lit cigarette dangling from his lips, Gombodorj kept his eyes shut and told Batukhan that they should travel within the next two days as otherwise the weather would turn against them. He also advised Batukhan to pay particular attention when crossing a specific mountain pass, warning him to watch his herd closely and make offerings to the spirit-owners of the mountain along the way. As he spoke, Gombodorj mentioned the difficulties faced by all herders in the postsocialist era, including the desperate measures some people were taking such as committing suicide and digging for gold: "More and more people are heading into the taiga to dig up the earth (gold mining). This will only bring bad fortune from the Masters of the Land and Water[54]. It is up to the government to provide assistance for people but they are greedy and corrupt, so people are lost and without hope". As the ritual came to an end, Batukhan thanked Gombodorj for his advice and everyone in the household made their way out of the ger. On the way home, I overheard Batukhan asking Bayarmaa whether they had any bottles of vodka left to pour as an offering to the spirit-owners of the mountain as Gombodorj had suggested. After hearing that they did not, Batukhan instructed Hurelbaatar to pick up a bottle from a nearby encampment the following morning before the household left for the winter encampment.



(Figure 28. The shaman, Gombodorj, with the author – photo by Batukhan)

As can be seen from this account there is a close relationship between shamanism, skilled practice, and herder mobility, with undertaking a safe migration seen as inextricably tied to the nonhuman agencies mediated through the ritualised performance of the shaman. Indeed, from Batukhan's perspective, it is considered imperative to not only select an appropriate date when to move but also to ensure that 'proper' relations are maintained between the household and

[54] *Lus* and *Savdag* refer to the Masters of water and land respectively. They are perceived to be nonhuman agencies worshipped and respected through offerings. Rules exist concerning *Lus* and *Savdag*, which are often of an ecological kind: for example, not to pollute water. *Lus and Savdag* are thought to take revenge on human beings who do not respect them, causing environmental problems or even illness among humans. This is something that captures their ontological status in the eyes of ordinary Mongolians and helps explain the reason for their propitiation (Humphrey 1995). Also see Chapter 4.

the nonhuman agencies within the landscape. Here Gombodorj can be seen as a central feature of Batukhan's own herding strategies. At the same time, it is instructive to recognise how the ontology of Darhad shamanism is not experienced as a 'traditional' aspect of herding life but as fundamentally intertwined with the new anxieties associated with the postsocialist context. This could be seen not only in the reasons why people choose to visit shamans, such as whether or not to migrate to the city, but in the specifically postsocialist frames of reference given by both Batukhan and the shaman himself. Thus, Gombodorj commented on the difficulties faced by contemporary herders since the postsocialist transition, including the recent surge in informal gold mining and the perceived corruption of government officials.

The reference to mining is particularly important: in recent years, informal mining has become a major talking point in the Shishged region, as across Mongolia. Informal miners, or 'Ninjas' as they are locally known, are persons or small groups illegally tapping contracted and uncontracted mines, specifically to cope with the adverse effects of economic restructuring, job losses, inflation, and declining real incomes (World Bank 2009). In 2002, there were approximately 10,000 ninjas in Mongolia; in 2006, the number was said to be 30000 (1.13% of the total population) and in 2007, 100,000, a group eight times as large as the sum of the total labour force of all mining companies. The rise of informal mining is intricately tied to the rise of formalised mining (see High 2017). Ordinary Mongolians are very much aware of the mining boom currently taking place in their country, with daily newspapers reporting the current state of the large-scale mining deals between the government and international mining companies, and with people eagerly anticipating that they will receive some of the benefits in the form of cash payments. At the same time, however, given the problems associated with the shift from socialism to postsocialism, as well as the fact that many ordinary Mongolians remain apprehensive about the likelihood of them benefiting from the national mining industry, it is not surprising that increasing numbers of ninjas are travelling to and tapping increasing numbers of mines. This is not only affecting livelihood strategies and the movement of households across the country, but also the narratives and justifications people deploy to articulate their experiences of life in the postsocialist context (see High 2017; Fraser *forthcoming*). Here references to the spirit-owners and the Masters of the Land and Water serve as symbolic repertoires through which to simultaneously express and appease the anxieties faced by herders in the postsocialist era, such as to mining (Pedersen 2011:31; Buyandelgeriyn 2007; also see Geschiere et al. 2008; Mueggler 2008)[55]. This not only captures the ways in which shamanism is an irreducible part of how people experience the postsocialist transition, but also its ongoing relevance as a source of practical and existential security.

On the Move

Movement between seasonal encampments is a communal activity and typically involves multiple households within a khot-ail, who generally assist one another in packing up an encampment and preparing the herd animals. On the day of the move, Batukhan's household were joined by family members from another khot-ail as they worked together to dismantle the ger, packed up the dwelling's components and the numerous objects inside. Typically, different parts of the deconstruction process are undertaken by different members of the household; thus, while the men dismantled the ger and took down the canvas covering,

[55] Despite being visible during my fieldwork, informal mining was not a major focus of my research. This was due primarily to the choices of my interlocutors, who themselves were not directly engaged in it. I did carry out fieldwork at an informal gold mine along the border between the Shishged and the Tuvan Autonomous Republic, however, due to word constraints I have decided to keep this material for a separate publication. See Fraser (*forthcoming*).

Bayarmaa and Narantuya packed up the inner contents of the dwelling and arranged all foodstuffs. Batukhan has two large, wooden carts that are used to carry the household's belongings when moving between encampments, both of which are pulled by trained oxen. As mobility is a regular and seasonal activity, the household tend to position their belongings on the back of the carts in a relatively set order, specifically ensuring the maximisation of space. Indeed, the ability to deconstruct one's ger and pack up one's belongings is a fundamental skill, specifically as herders must be able to carry everything themselves when moving - including all furniture items, carpets, flooring materials, bedding, felt, saddles, tools, weapons, kitchen equipment, food stuffs, animal products and, for those households that can afford them, televisions, solar panels, and radios. In this regard, herders must not only be able to move themselves across the landscape but their need for movement determines the kinds and quantity of possessions they can own (also see Hanson 2004), something that, as we shall see Chapter 3, has important implications for the advent of a market economy and the new consumerism among herding households.



(Figure 29. On the move to the winter encampment – photo by the author)

On the morning of the move, the animals within the herd appeared to know that they were moving and exhibited specific modes of behaviour, including remaining in the vicinity of the encampment. As Bayarmaa remarked: "All of the animals know on which day we will migrate. They see us making preparations and recognise the carts. The older animals have moved many times and the young animals learn by following the older ones". Once everything was packed, Batukhan mounted his horse and incited the oxen to move; this is the time when training the animals most explicitly comes to the fore, and Batukhan specifically selected a calm individual to be the leading ox, followed by the rest of the oxen with the other loaded cart. Bayarmaa sat on the back of the cart holding Sukh in her arms, while Narantuya sat behind. Dogsomjav and Hurelbaatar rode on horseback and both Batukhan and I were on horseback riding at the front of the caravan.

When moving between pastures herd animals generally follow the lead of the household and the younger animals stay close to and learn from the older animals within the herd. During migration, the animals generally stick together in their own herds, with the sheep and goats in one group with their lambs and kids, the stallion and the mares in another, the geldings, and finally the cattle and their calves. Adult herd animals know the routine of moving between encampments and come to learn the same migration routes year after year. Indeed, much as with the human members of the household many older animals have migrated between the

same summer and winter pastures in a cyclical process throughout their lives, something that renders migration a truly a cross-species event. As with herding, different animals require different kinds of attention while being driven between encampments; horses are generally left alone and trot ahead of the group, while sheep and goats need to be monitored to protect them against predators and to ensure that they remain close within the herd. Occasionally, Batukhan or Hurelbaatar rode alongside the oxen to spur them along, vocalising commands and ensuring that they kept an appropriate pace.

It was early in the morning when the household departed and we travelled for the entire day, the journey crossing over part of Khordil Sar'dag range and into a remote but more protected area of the Shishged mountains. Along the way we passed a number of snow-drenched valleys with rocky crags protruding from beneath, forcing Batukhan to constantly make his way from the front to the back of the herd to ensure that the household and the herds passed safely through. Undertaking the winter migration is a difficult and dangerous process; herd animals must be watched closely, weather conditions can change causing serious problems, and all of the household's belongings are at risk from damage. Halfway through the journey we encountered a severe snowstorm, blanketing our vision and making it impossible to see the route ahead. As Batukhan explained, during times like this it is best to rely on the oxen at the front of the herd as they are said to 'know the route well'. During the journey, we also passed a number of ovoo - or ritual cairns typically consisting of a pile of stones indicating a pass between two valleys or erected at the summit of a sacred mountain. As we passed, everyone in the household stopped, circled the cairn three times, and gave an offering - either a stone, branch or, as recommended by the shaman, a small amount of vodka. Ovoos are understood to be the residences of nonhuman agencies such as spirit-owners of the mountain and, by making an offering, the household give thanks and propitiate for good fortune along the way (Humphrey 2007:135; also see Chapter 4).

After travelling for most of the day, the winter encampment revealed itself by the small, wooden corrals erected to protect herd animals during the winter and which are left standing following migration. Upon seeing these corrals, the herd animals sped up over the last few kilometres, with the ox-cart rolling across the snow and my own horse galloping on its own accord. Upon arriving at the site, the first thing the household did was tend to the herd animals, with Batukhan and Hurelbaatar pushing the horses to a suitable area and then positioning the sheep and goats a short distance from the encampment. While Batukhan and Hurelbaatar set about unloading the carts, Bayarmaa and Narantuya located a canister containing milk and threw streams of the liquid in the four cardinal directions, specifically as an offering to the nonhuman agencies associated with the new site.

Setting Up the Ger

The skill of moving between encampments is inextricably tied to the ger - the transportable, seasonally adaptable tent that was developed hundreds of years ago as a practical response to living in, and moving across, the Inner Asian steppe (Hanson 2004). Today, around half of all Mongolians continue to live in a ger, including all mobile herders, a large proportion of rural dwellers in sum centres and, as we shall see in Chapter 6, the majority of quasi-urban residents on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar. The structure of the ger is composed of essentially four parts: the floor, walls, door, and roof. More than during the deconstruction process, the setting up of a ger is a structured and ritualised event, one that follows a set order and demands specific skilled practice.

After removing all of the items from the ox-cart Batukhan laid the flooring of the ger first, which consists of long wooden panels, following which Hurelbaatar and I placed the larger furniture items such as beds and the central stove upon it. As these items do not fit through the door once the ger has been constructed, they are placed in the open ('un-walled') dwelling beforehand, with the ger erected 'around' the larger items of furniture. Next, Hurelbaatar and I prepared the walls, or *qana*, which are accordion-like lattices that can be compacted during transportation or stretched out to form a curved frame. The qana are made of wooden parts tied together with animal hide. Each qana unit measures five to six feet high and seven to eight feet long (Hanson 2004). The number of qana thus determines the circumference of the ger, with that of an ordinary dwelling comprising four qana units, while that of a wealthier household might comprise between six and eight. For a novice such as myself, it was difficult to fit the qana together as each unit must not only be placed in line with the flooring, but they must be slotted inside one another in such a way that the shape of the ger holds firm. As Hurelbaatar had erected the dwelling countless times before he worked quickly in stretching the units and tying them together.



(Figure 30. The ger entrance facing south, with kitchen area to the side – photo by the author)

Once erected, the door of the ger is fitted into place. This is made of wood and, importantly, is always erected facing south, something that is not only designed to avoid the strong northern winds but because this is considered the direction of good fortune. In fact, this spatial orientation of the ger is so fundamental in Mongolian life that the Mongol words for 'ahead', 'behind', 'left', and 'right' correspond to those for 'south', 'north', 'east', and 'west' respectively (Sneath 2000:217-8). On one occasion, I asked Batukhan what would happen if a herder ever set up his *ger* with the door facing in the wrong direction, and his response was telling: "(Laughing) It would never happen! I think everyone would think that the person is stupid".

Batukhan next entered the door and stood inside the centre of the roofless ger, holding up the two wooden posts, or *bhaganaa*, which support the centre of the roof. Standing beside him, Hurelbaatar and I held up the wooden wheel, or *osni*, which is placed on top of the two posts, and which in turn forms the opening of the roof. This opening, or *tonoo,* is approximately 1.5 metres in diameter and, as we have seen in the Introduction, allows smoke to escape and fresh air and light to enter the dwelling. Once in place, all members of the household work together to insert the numerous long poles that make up the roof, positioning one end into the holes that circle the osni and tying the other end to the qana walls. These poles, which are seen as representing the ideal number of children in a herding household (many), are numerous and

this is perhaps the most time-consuming part of the construction process, with the final result resembling another, larger wheel, which forms the ceiling of the ger (Hanson 2004).



(Figure 31. The internal structure of the ger – photo by the author)

In order for the ger and those who dwell within it to remain protected from the sun, wind, and cold, it is covered with layers of felt and/or canvas[56]. Felt is first wrapped around the outside walls, including the roof and the flap that covers the smoke hole when it is not in use. One layer of felt is generally sufficient in the summer but since it is winter Batukhan and Hurelbaatar added three layers to the outside of the dwelling. Following this, a layer of canvas is positioned on top of the felt, specifically to protect the underlying material and ensure that it will last for as long as possible. In warmer weather, the portion of the wall covering low to the ground, called the *qayaa*, can be rolled up or removed to allow air to flow through the ger, however since it is winter the canvas is tied down firmly with horsehair ropes.

With the ger constructed, all members of the household entered the dwelling and began placing the remaining furniture items and other objects in their 'correct' positions. As we have seen, the positioning of objects inside a ger follows a highly formalised structure, specifically according to the spatial organisation of the dwelling and corollary conceptualisations of gender and status (Sneath 2000; Humphrey 1978). Both higher-status people and objects are placed in the northern and most respected part of the ger, known as the *khoimor*, while more junior people and objects occupy the southern part closer towards the door (Sneath 2000: 217; also see Hamayon 2003). As Sneath describes (2000:217), "It is the male members of a household who generally occupy the eastern (*zuun*) side of the ger, something reflected in the kind of objects stored there, including saddles, bridles, herding equipment, guns, and other items typically used by men only. In a similar vein, women spend the majority of their time in the western (*baruun*) side of the ger and which includes the kitchen area and those things typically

[56] In recent years increasing numbers of households only use canvas. For a discussion of felt production see Fijn (2011) and Portisch (2009, 2010).

used by women only, such as storage cupboards, cooking and eating utensils, as well as the majority of foodstuffs". This division even extends to the storage of specific articles of food, with freshly slaughtered meat, for example, kept on the masculine side (while it bleeds), and all 'white foods' (tsaagan idee) kept on the opposite side (Jagchid & Hyer 1979). For herders themselves, these conceptual divisions are taken-for-granted aspects of setting up the ger 'properly' and in the 'correct' way, just as it would be 'impossible' for someone to erect the dwelling with the door facing south. Thus, Hurelbaatar positioned the brightly coloured chests that all herders keep to store their most important belongings, including blankets, clothing, religious statues, mirrors, and photographs of family members, in the northern part of the ger, beside which he positioned the household's beds and, in the centre of the dwelling, a number of carpets. In the meantime, Batukhan put away those objects typically used by men in the Western ('masculine') side of the ger, while Bayarmaa put all cooking utensils and foodstuffs in the Eastern ('feminine') side.



(Figure 32. The northern khoimor inside the ger – photo by the author)

The Winter Encampment

Batukhan's household arrive at their winter encampment every year in October and stay until the spring thaw in March, when they move on to their spring encampment about twenty kilometres away. The encampment is located at the end of a deep valley of Ulaan Uul sum, about one hundred and twenty kilometres west of the regional centre. The ger is erected in a sheltered area close to a small river, at the foot of a large mountain, and with vast tracts of taiga forest surrounding the valley. The grasslands in this area are not overgrazed and throughout the summer the household allow their reserved pasture to grow and provide an important source of nourishment for the herds during the winter. The landscape is blanketed in thick snow, with strong winds gusting from the north, rivers lying completely frozen, and temperatures ranging from - 40º C to -15º C.

The winter encampment is the most established of Batukhan's four seasonal encampments, featuring 'permanent' wooden corrals, shelters, and storage huts left standing after the family have moved. The corrals and shelters are essential to house the animals during the evening – as well as if the conditions become particularly difficult such as during a dzud. These corrals must be particularly sturdy as they need to withstand the harsh wind and snow, as well as remain erected for multiple seasons. The storage huts are also important as they contain additional fodder for the herds, typically including hay which is cut and stored during the summer, which is again essential in dzud conditions. As throughout the year, the animals within the herd graze in different areas of pasture during the day and either return - or are driven back - to the encampment in the afternoon, although an important aspect of winter

herding is that Batukhan and Hurelbaatar must ensure that the animals can access the grasses underneath the snow and ice. In winter, it is also necessary to move the animals more frequently between pastures as the grasslands afford more limited possibilities for grazing. As the ground lies frozen, Batukhan and Hurelbaatar must occasionally assist the herd animals to access the grass, using wooden poles to scratch at the earth.

Winter is by far considered the most difficult time of the year and generally both the household and their herd animals move around as little as possible. The execution of everyday tasks such as collecting water and chopping firewood demands a great amount of effort: indeed, at no other point during the year is the relationship between skill and survival so prominent that at the winter encampment, with households working tirelessly to ensure that they and their herd animals survive. This is explicitly emphasised by herders themselves, who regularly comment on the difficulty of surviving the winter months and the importance of 'working hard' in order to support the herds, and also explains the large numbers of households who avoid winter migrations and move into regional centres. Although all members of the household try to stay indoors as much as possible, it is essential to go out and perform various tasks. Batukhan and Hurelbaatar spend a few hours each day pushing the herd animals from one area of pasture to another, while Bayarmaa and Narantuya generally remain inside preparing meals and occasionally going outside to check on the animals.



(Figure 33. Searching for grass at the winter encampment – photo by the author)

Life at the winter encampment is difficult and I myself found it physically very demanding. Indeed, it was only after spending a full winter with Batukhan's household that I truly understood why more sedentary herders such as Bat choose to integrate their animals into the herds of full-time family members and live in regional centres, specifically because of a lack of essential survival skills. Everyone in the household generally slept early as soon as it became dark and the animals were in their shelters for the night. Much like the herd animals, the household entered a state of semi-hibernation during the winter, waiting for the seasons to change, the snow and ice to melt, the first shoots of new growth to appear, and for the cycle of life to return.

Moving to Stay the Same

It is commonly observed in ethnographic accounts of non-industrial societies that people lack a concept of time that would correspond to the idea of Western (clock) time (Thompson 1967; Godelier 1980). This is related to the fact that in many non-industrial societies there is no division between 'work' as a formalised category of labour and 'life' or the performance of

everyday tasks. As Evans-Pritchard (1939) famously remarked of the Nuer, time is inseparable from the everyday round of activities that they perform and has no existence apart from the daily practices of life itself (also see Bourdieu 1977). Thus, for the pastoral Nuer, "the daily timepiece is the cattle clock, the round of pastoral tasks, and the time of day and the passage of time through a day are to a Nuer primarily the succession of these tasks and their relation to one another" (1940:101-2). In other words, it is the needs of cattle that translates what Evans-Pritchard calls the 'oecological rhythm' into the social rhythm of Nuer social life.

While I would not suggest that herding households in Mongolia do not have an experience of clock time (they certainly do), it is also the case that herders experience time as inseparable from the performance of everyday tasks and, in particular, the needs of herd animals in relation to the transforming seasons. As we have seen, the setting up of a ger and the corollary placement of objects in their 'correct' positions is a highly formalised and ritualised process, one that comes to be reproduced every time a household migrates between encampments. From the perspective of herding households, the purpose of this – and of movement more generally - is to transpose one's existence from one part of the landscape to another, effectively reproducing life 'as if' one had never moved (Pedersen 2007:317) - setting up the ger in a new location, allowing the herd animals to graze, sustain themselves, and so that one can again obtain milk, meat, and other products in return. As Humphrey describes it, "mobility is perceived as a spatial liminality, into and out of the otherness of 'travelling that is not travelling' – paradoxically an otherness which serves to reassert the nomadic way of life – thereby negating movement in the everyday world" (1995:142-3).

This is something that has fundamental implications for understanding herder's experience of time and the mutual co-existence between continuity and change. As we have seen, herding life unfolds as a series of tasks and activities, the majority of which are regular and quotidian. Days in herding encampments begin at the same time each morning as the woman of the household lights the fire and ends at the same time after the herd animals have returned to the encampment. In a similar vein, the herding year follows a cyclical pattern in which events are repeated, with spring being the time to assist animals in giving birth, summer being the time for milking and attending the Naadam festival, autumn being the time for slaughtering, and winter the time to conserve energy and remain warm inside the ger (also see Fijn 2011:199).

Herding households move between seasonal encampments at the same time every year, deconstructing and setting up their ger according to the rhythm of the seasons and the recurrent needs of herd animals. Batukhan's household have been moving between the same encampments since the early 1990s and access some areas of pasture where Dogsomjav grazed his animals before collectivisation. As a result, the household inevitably come to know the locations in which they erect their dwelling and migrate intimately, something which affords an inevitable sense of continuity. When arriving at a new area the household implicitly know where the ger will be placed, which areas of pasture are suitable for which animals, where to collect water and trees for firewood, as well as the location of specific sacred sites and agencies. In the process, herders inevitably come to experience time in more cyclical than linear terms, specifically as determined by the rhythm of the seasons, the births and deaths of herd animals, and the continuities afforded by movement - returning to the same areas of grazing land, travelling across the same mountain passes, and accessing the same water sources every year. By setting up the ger with the door facing south, erecting each component of the dwelling in the same order, and positioning furniture items in their 'correct' places, households attempt to transpose their lives from one part of the landscape to another, reproducing their existence in the new locale and reaffirming continuity through movement.

As Pedersen writes: "(Herders) are in one sense moving and yet they are in another sense not moving at all, for the whole point about nomadic migration is for the world to repeat itself: one moves to be the same" (2007:317). Importantly, this is something that comes to be imparted between the generations through enskilment, specifically as younger herders take part in seasonal migrations, move with herd animals themselves, understand their needs, and learn when to castrate, milk, water, or slaughter the herds at appropriate times of the year. In the process, it is the needs of herd animals and the cycle of the seasons that become the priorities of daily life, accentuating what we might call herding temporality over other experiences of time.

This has become more explicit since the collapse of state socialism and the return to a subsistence economy. Indeed, while during the socialist period herders were integrated into the state project of socialist modernisation, including the corollary teleological metanarratives of time associated with it - meeting quotas, production targets, and following Five-Year Plans - since the postsocialist transition this narrative has lost meaning (Hojer & Pedersen 2008). Coupled with this, the new postsocialist projects of 'marketisation', 'development', and 'globalisation' – which espouse their own temporal metanarratives - 'moving forward', 'becoming more modern', and 'growing more connected' - are experienced by the large majority of herders in contradictory ways. As we have seen, herding life is today characterised by a polydirectional experience of change, whereby marketisation and privatisation are intertwined with specifically non-linear processes such as the return to a subsistence economy, the rearticulation of presocialist breeding methods and herding strategies, and the use of 'traditional' animal-drawn transportation in the face of collapsing ('modern') motorised transport. From this perspective, for herders such as Batukhan the postsocialist transition has actually demanded a re-prioritisation of herding temporality by pushing everyday survival into the hands of individual households – where everyday life is centred on the practical concerns of moving the herds between pastures, ensuring that they survive the long winters, and acquiring sufficient meat and milk. Here there has been a return to what Ingold calls a task-orientation temporality (2000:324), where 'work' and 'time' are intrinsic to the conduct of life itself.

Of course, this is not to suggest that herders experience time only in terms of this temporality, or that 'cyclical' time does not simultaneously include aspects of linearity. Indeed, all human beings experience time in both cyclical and linear terms, and it was a major fault of earlier anthropology to construe the cyclical time experienced by so-called 'traditional' peoples as an endlessly recurring sameness in opposition to 'Western linear time' (Adam 1994:519). Certainly, in Batukhan's household time was not experienced in 'static' terms, for the composition of the family changed at various times during the year, the regional khot-ail disbanded in autumn, Oyun went to live in the regional centre at the start of the school season, and the composition of the herds changed through the birth and death of animals. Even more explicit were the new transformations associated with life in the late postsocialist context, such as the impact of climate change and new conflicts over resources (Addison & Brown 2014), which fractured people's cyclical experiences of the landscape and availability of particular resources. Indeed, herders such as Batukhan experience a range of co-existing temporalities that cut across one another, including both synchronic and diachronic experiences of time. At the same time, however, it is also the case that different experiences of time are accentuated for different people depending on one's practical involvement with the constituents of one's environment. Thus, despite the fact that young herders such as Hurelbaatar have grown up in the postsocialist era and are embedded within the 'new' teleological narratives of

'modernisation', 'marketisation', and 'globalisation', his 'primary' experience (at least while living in the countryside) is that of herding temporality, specifically as he lives on the grasslands with his family and herd animals, undertakes seasonal migrations, and intends to remain working as a herder and acquire his own herd.

This captures the mutual existence between continuity and change described throughout this chapter, as well as how a focus on skills allows one to prioritise the lived-experience of herders against the unilinear teleologies that often define the postsocialist transition. Indeed, just as early anthropology misconstrued the cyclical experience of so-called 'traditional' peoples to mean a 'timeless' experience of temporality (Fabian 1983), so the proponents of the new market economy presuppose a linear trajectory from 'traditional' to 'modern', 'socialist' to 'postsocialist' which does not capture people's full range of co-existing experiences. By focusing on everyday skills and learning, including the transformation of these skills and the conflicts and schisms they represent, we instead see a more complicated picture of co-existing temporalities, polydirectional experiences of time, and a mutual coexistence between continuity and change in the re/production of herding life in the late postsocialist era.

Conclusion

It has been my aim in this chapter to describe how herding life has intersected with the collapse of state socialism and the return to a subsistence economy, as well as some of the corollary changes associated with the postsocialist transition, such as the advent of marketisation and the shifting relationship between the mobile and sedentary sections of rural life. Here I implemented the interpretative framework developed in the introduction to demonstrate how these changes have manifested at the level of skilled practice, as well as how they are experienced by herders in polydirectional ways, specifically as intertwined with continuities in herding life. Following the first chapter, the chapter was structured to continue following the cycle of the seasons over a single year, capturing the substantial seasonal variations in the Shishged and the seasonality of different skills, as well as prioritising the cultural specificity of herders' experience of time. I showed that this does not imply a 'static' experience of time because, intersecting with this are the broader political-economic changes associated with the socialist and postsocialist transitions, as well as the everyday changes in herding life. However, as herding life centres on the need to reaffirm continuity through movement, I showed how these broader changes are experienced by herders in articulation with what we might call a herding temporality and signifies a mutual co-existence between 'diachronic' and 'synchronic' experiences of time and a blurring of the divisions between the presocialist, socialist, and the postsocialist contexts. This is something that shall be explored further in the next chapter, as I apply the interpretative framework to other aspects of change and further elucidate the polydirectional and variegated experiences of people within the late postsocialist era.

3. Motorcycles, Solar Panels and Mobile Phones: New Technologies in Rural Mongolia

Introduction

In this chapter I describe the availability and use of new technologies in rural Mongolia, specifically through the prism of the three most notable technological changes I encountered, namely motorcycles, solar panels, and mobile phones. These are fast becoming ubiquitous features amongst herding households, being incorporated into everyday herding practices, helping generate alternate livelihood strategies and, despite being relatively unexplored in ethnographic terms, resulting in significant changes in social life. The chapter takes the form of an ethnographic account of my time spent living with Batukhan's youngest brother, Davanjaam, and his household who, like many herders since the postsocialist transition, live for part of the year on the grasslands and spend the remaining time in the regional centre of Mörön, forced to subsist through a combination of herding and informal work. The chapter begins with an introduction to Davanjaam's household and the recent availability of new technologies in Mongolia and in the Shishged Depression specifically, followed by an outline of the broader place of technology within the teleological metanarrative of change. While technology has long been seen as a driver of so-called modernisation and development (Ingold 2000; Tsing 2000; Pfaffenberger 2005; Schiffer 1999), I argue against any linear account and emphasise the polydirectional ways in which people experience technological change. This is

followed by ethnographic material of how Davanjaam and his household harness motorcycles, solar panels, and mobile phones to facilitate survival in the late postsocialist context, exploring how they are incorporated into herding strategies and their broader impact upon daily life. Approached from the perspective of skilled practice I demonstrate how these are not experienced in linear terms – as a transition from 'tradition' to 'modernity', as a singular improvement, or as replacing pre-existing technologies in a uniform way. Instead they are experienced in polydirectional ways and from within the context of the late postsocialist period - as simultaneously providing benefits and disadvantages, producing losses and gains, and resulting in both improvements and limitations for herding and rural households.

New Technologies in Rural Mongolia

Towards the end of the summer in 2012 I left Batukhan's encampment and moved to that of his youngest brother, Davanjaam, who lives with his wife, Endelger, and their two sons, five-year-old, Bulgur, and sixteen-year-old, Fenger. Like many herders, Davanjaam and his family lost a significant number of animals during the previous winter dzud and, unable to support themselves from herding alone, complemented their livelihoods by undertaking informal work in Mörön. Connected to this, the household erected their ger in close proximity to the regional centre throughout much of the year, no longer undertaking long migrations and grazing their herd of forty-five animals on the outskirts of Mörön during the spring, summer, and autumn seasons, while in winter they moved into the centre to live in a sedentary dwelling and gave their animals to Batukhan who temporarily incorporated them into his own herd.

As we have seen, Mongolian herders have long been intertwined with life in regional centres, including 'full-time' herders such as Batukhan. However, while some households maintain a sufficient number of animals to support their everyday subsistence – producing their own meat, 'white foods', and other animal products – and visit regional centres intermittently to acquire supplementary supplies and access services, others such as Davanjaam are entirely dependent on regional centres for their everyday survival. Without a sufficient number of animals to replenish their herds Davanjaam and his family produce only a limited amount of 'white foods' and rarely slaughter more than a couple of animals per year. They acquire the large proportion of their food and everyday supplies from the regional centre, something that determines the position of their encampment and their livelihood strategies. As I will show below, Davanjaam's household have become dependent on working in the centre to generate supplementary income, specifically to afford the food and supplies that he and his family can no longer produce, as well as the fuel and mechanical components associated with technological changes that have become essential parts of their lives. Here Davanjaam and his household are representative of the broader shift in rural Mongolia where increasing numbers of herders have incorporated sum and bag centres into their repertoires of everyday survival (also see Brunn and Li 2006:162). As Davanjaam explained:

> We used to have many animals and travelled *otor* (mobile herding) between pastures; but after the dzud this became impossible and now we only stay close to Mörön. I had to find work to earn extra money and we keep our animals close to the centre; but in winter the grasslands are too weak so we give our herd to Batukhan. I would like to have more animals again and travel to my old winter pastures, but at the moment it is impossible. Our herd is too small and I have to work to buy almost everything we need; it has become difficult. Sometimes I work for Endelger's father, other times repairing motorcycles in Mörön, or just any job I can find. Nowadays, more and more herders are having to live like this; people have to earn money so they do anything – they dig for gold, make trade in Ulaanbaatar, or work in the sum. Now that I have a motorcycle I can work and still look after my herd; but it is getting more difficult because fuel prices are going up and each year I need more and more money.

With their lives more integrated with the regional centre Davanjaam's encampment is noticeably different to that of herders such as Batukhan, featuring a smaller-sized ger - which

is both cheaper to buy and easier to transport - as well as having a greater supply of products and commodities. Indeed, Davanjaam's encampment is typical of the large majority of households that have reduced the scale of their movements in recent years, featuring items and supplies that would otherwise be difficult to transport long distances, such as large sacks of rice and flour, numerous canisters of cooking oil, as well as a bicycle belonging to Davanjaam's youngest son. Despite having a relatively small number of animals the fact that Davanjaam remains close to the regional centre and has a motorcycle means that his family can travel regularly to the centre, incorporating it into their everyday strategies and more easily transporting items to and from the encampment. Their encampment also features a variety of new technologies including a solar panel, a television, a mobile phone, and a small refrigerator. Although these are increasingly present in households in even the most remote parts of the country, they are particularly popular with those that have reduced the scale of their movements and earn additional income through informal work, specifically because of the advantages they afford and the technical restrictions associated with their use. As Endelger explained:

> With the motorcycle, it is easy for us to travel to the sum and transport supplies; we spend a lot of time there because my sister has a house and we visit her every few days. Sometimes we take her 'white foods' or give her wool and cashmere to sell in the market, and other times her husband helps Davanjaam to find work. Fenger and Bulgur also use the motorcycle because they go to school in the centre and have many friends there; without the motorcycle, it would be difficult for them to go to school and help with the animals at the same time. With the mobile phone, we can also contact our friends and family if we need help or tell them to deliver supplies to the encampment. If we were to move further away from the centre then there would be no mobile reception and we would have to be more self-reliant; we would also need more fuel for the motorcycle so it is impossible for us to travel too far away.

The interconnectivity between Davanjaam's household and the regional centre came to the fore only a few hours after my arrival at the encampment, as Davanjaam proposed that we travel to Mörön to visit the local market and pick up some supplies, as well as meet with a friend to organise some informal work. As we prepared to leave Davanjaam readied his small, Chinese-made motorcycle and instructed me to sit on the back, while Endelger called her sister using their mobile phone to inform her of our visit and handed me half a dozen plastic bags filled with recently sheared wool. Like many households the family transported goods every time they travelled to the centre, either carrying items to support their kin relations or to try and sell animal products in the local market: "We will give this wool to Endelger's sister and she will try and sell it for us in the market. We also need to buy some flour and rice, and Endelger's sister has some medicine for our animals". As we made our way to the centre I commented to Davanjaam that this was in fact my first time travelling on a motorcycle in Mongolia, for whenever Batukhan and I had had visited sum or bag centres before we always travelled on horseback. As Davanjaam replied: "Travelling by motorcycle is much easier than by horse; in the summer, it only takes 15 minutes (to reach Mörön) while with the horse it takes 30 minutes. I also had a horse stolen last year from the centre and after the dzud I only have a few horses left and need to keep them here for herding".

As the administrative capital of Khövsgöl province Mörön is a relatively well-connected centre, featuring an airport, a long-distance bus station, a hospital, several boarding schools, and one of the largest outdoor markets in the north of the country. With a population of 36,000[57], the town comprises a large, centralised square built during the socialist period, connected to a few paved roads, a larger number of dirt tracks, and surrounded by a sprawl of wooden houses and ger-districts. As is typical of regional centres motorcycles and horses are

[57] Mongolian Statistical Yearbook 2011. Ulaanbaatar. Mongolia; NSOM 2017)

the predominant modes of transport, while herd animals graze just on the outskirts of town. Situated in the centre are also various private businesses established since the 1990s, including restaurants, shops, petrol stations, and mechanical repair centres where Davanjaam occasionally finds work.

Upon our arrival Davanjaam led us directly to the market in the centre of town, which covers a vast area and comprises a few hundred stalls selling an array of products and commodities. Making our way through we passed retailers selling clothing, material, fresh meat, vegetables, flour, oil, bread, packaged foods, as well as a range of herding equipment, including horse harnesses, saddles, furniture for gers, and tools for milking. Walking further we passed stalls selling a plethora of new low-cost products which have become ubiquitous items in rural households, including canisters to store hot water, plastic buckets, containers and Tupperware, as well as personal items such as toothbrushes, mirrors, soaps, shampoos, and toiletries. As Davanjaam made a number of small purchases I commented that nearly all of the items appeared to be Chinese-made, something which signified an important shift in Mongolia's relationship to the international commodity market. As Davanjaam explained: "Today everything is 'Made in China'. When I was young everything was from the USSR, but now it is all Chinese. [Laughing] Many Mongolians do not like the Chinese, but in fact every ger has a small piece of China inside them!"

During the socialist period state subsidies ensured that regional centres such as Mörön had a regular supply of commodities, and although the range was limited sum residents rarely experienced a shortage of food or supplies (Rossabi 2005; Brunn and Li 2006). With the collapse of state socialism, however, regional centres suffered dramatically from the disintegration of the centralised commodity market, forcing people to turn to herding or rely on kin relations to acquire even the most basic necessities (Sneath 1998; Upton 2010). Since the postsocialist transition and, particularly over the last decade, regional centres have experienced a revitalisation in terms of products and commodities, especially larger centres such as Mörön which have direct access to the capital city via road and air transport[58]. Indeed, with the liberalisation of trade and the control of inflation, goods now make their way regularly from Ulaanbaatar, the large majority transported by informal traders and originating in China's border cities (Lacaze 2010; Bille 2012), something that shall be returned to in Chapter 5. Although many people struggle to afford basic necessities regional centres are better supplied than at any other point in recent Mongolian history, featuring a diversity of goods seen by many as a symbol of the collapse of socialism itself. As Davanjaam put it: "In the socialist times everyone bought the same things: bread, flour, tea. My friend lived in Ulaanbaatar and would sometimes bring me *Wrigley's* (chewing gum); this was very exotic when I was young! But now we have many things from overseas; soup from Germany, tea from Russia, and electronics from China. The problem now is that things are expensive and people struggle to make money. So you can see all the things but you cannot buy them! [Laughing] This is the 'Age of the Market!'".

[58] There are important differences between large regional centres (*sum*) such as Mörön and smaller *bag* centres such as Ulaan Uul in terms of the availability of products and commodities. While Mörön has a wide selection of products sold from the market and a number of private shops, *bag* centres typically only have one or two small shops whose primary purpose is to supply food products, alcohol, medicine, and toiletries. Although occasionally these have some new technologies such as televisions, they do not sell larger items such as solar panels and refrigerators.



(Figure 34. New technologies for sale in Mörön market – photo by the author)

Eventually Davanjaam and I arrived at an area specialising in electronics, with dozens of retailers selling an assortment of televisions, radios, mobile phones, DVD players, as well as small household appliances such as rice cookers, electric hot plates, and water kettles. Looking over them I recognised the logos of China's biggest electronic companies, including *Huawei* and *Zhuhai*, which have flooded the Mongolian market in recent years and connected the country to the international commodity chains of China's southeastern provinces. A smaller number of retailers also sold larger electronics such as refrigerators, freezers, washing machines, and solar panels, items that I admitted to Davanjaam I was surprised to see. As he explained: "These have only been available in the last ten years but are very popular. In the sum people like to have refrigerators and washing machines because they save time; (Pointing at one model) Endelger's sister has this one inside her house. And in the countryside more and more herders have solar panels so they can watch television and charge their mobile phones. I bought my solar panel last year and have 2 mobile phones and a small television; I would like to buy a bigger television next year".

Arriving at one stall Davanjaam introduced me to Batbaayar, a former high-school friend now operating a stall selling mobile phones. Like many retailers he maintains a small herd on the outskirts of Mörön and complements his livelihood with trading. While Davanjaam looked over his assortment I enquired of Batbaayar who the majority of his customers were and how they went about paying for things during times of economic uncertainty. As he explained, electronics are the most popular thing to buy today, with most people having a mobile phone and more and more herders having solar panels. "Of course, many people cannot afford to buy larger electronics, but they save money or borrow from family members. Some herders get their family to take out loans from the bank and some retailers offer lease-agreements so that people can pay over a few months".

Before leaving the market Davanjaam discussed with Batbaayar the possibility of spending a few days working at his stall to earn some additional income before the end of summer. As the pair had worked together before Batbaayar agreed for Davanjaam to return the following week while he travelled to Ulaanbaatar to collect additional stock. However, as he was unable to pay Davanjaam a significant amount, Batbaayar proposed that he select a new mobile phone to complement his wage. Looking over the phones Davanjaam excitedly located a particular

model and brand: "This is good! I like Samsung because they are strong; many Chinese phones are too weak but in the countryside, you need something strong. This is a good herder's phone".

'Globalisation' and the Teleology of Technological Change

Notions of technological change have long been tied to the teleological metanarrative of modernisation, from the hierarchisation of societies according to levels of technological 'development' to the widespread propensity to replace existing technologies with supposedly 'superior' models regularly over time. Indeed, technology and modernisation are so perceived to be so intertwined that it is almost impossible to envision technological change without recourse to some teleological category, with the transition between technologies and the adoption of new technologies presupposed to follow a unilinear process of 'innovation', 'progress' and 'improvement'. As Carroll Pursell puts it: "[T]he notion is that a kind of invisible hand guides technology ever onward and upward, using individuals and organizations as vessels for its purposes but guided by a sort of divine plan for bringing the greatest good to the greatest number. Technological improvement is said to be the best evidence for progress so far" (1994:39). It is for this reason why changes in technology are often characterised as if unfolding as a series of successive 'revolutions': thus, the commonplace narrative depicts the 'age of machinery' giving rise to the 'age of automation', followed by 'the atomic age', 'the space age', and finally, 'the electronic' and 'information ages' of the contemporary era.

This is something that has long since dominated anthropological assumptions as well, forming part of what Bryan Pfaffenberger calls the Standard View of Technology: "the notion of a unilinear progression from simple tools to complex machines" (1992:507). Influenced by evolutionary theory and linear conceptualisations of time in archaeology, anthropologists have traditionally approached technological change in developmental terms, with some technologies implicitly deemed more 'complex' than others and with competition between technologies depicted as a neo-Darwinian struggle: "Western indigenous theories", Schiffer writes (2001:216), "with their emphasis on 'progress' and 'revolution', tend to assume that the outcome of technological change is inevitably a rout: old-fashioned, 'inferior' technologies will be swiftly replaced by 'new and better' ones in a linear process". This continues to be a part of the broader doxa of anthropological thinking, and even for those who adopt an anti-evolutionary stance, notions of technological change are implicitly understood in teleological terms. Indeed, although the majority of anthropologists are deeply suspicious of the idea that there is any inherently progressive tendency in the history of human culture "they are inclined to make an exception of technology, and are quite content to talk about peoples with 'simple' and with 'complex' technologies" (Ingold 2000:366).

The assumption that technological change occurs in a teleological way has come to take an even greater level of significance in the contemporary era characterised by so-called globalisation, specifically as new technologies now circulate around the world to an unprecedented extent. Indeed, as people in even the most remote communities now have access to, and use, mobile phones, televisions, washing machines, and motorised transport, the assumption that technology is the driving force of social change is more persistent than ever, seen as the outward manifestation of globalisation itself, entering into local communities and effectuating change by integrating people ever tighter into the grip of the global economy. Appadurai's (1999) concept of the 'technoscape' is just one example of this, emphasising the 'speed' and 'flow' of new technologies across national boundaries and presupposing a linear transition towards ever-greater 'global incorporation' (also see Tsing 2000: 327-8). Implicit in

this is a technological determinism that assumes that every community that adopts a mobile phone or television will inevitably use it in the same way, as well as developing the same social and economic relations associated with it (also see Pfaffenberger 1992). Often synonymous with what Tsing (2002) refers to as the discourse of globalisation, such an approach prioritises its focus on the diffusion or exchange of customs, media, technology, finance, and ideas through specific points of departure and arrival, global processes which are said to create, impose, and necessitate change as people become increasingly interlinked and mutually dependent. Within this narrative, anthropologists turn their attention to the escalating pace and intensity of change, developing concepts designed to capture these seemingly new transnational processes such as 'flow', 'flexible capitalism', 'time-space compression', 'flexible accumulation', 'global scapes', and others (Mosse 2005; Harvey 2007; Appadurai 1999; Cunningham and Heyman2004). Appadurai's (1999; 1988) work stands as a characteristic example of this, assuming an increasingly borderless global economy of overlapping 'scapes' and representing for him a new model of fluid global relations in opposition to earlier centre-periphery models. Here change is said to operate through a complex aggregate of scapes and flows, demanding of the anthropologist that s/he study the transnational dimensions of transformations across disparate boundaries[59].

Now while it is certainly important to describe the global flow of people, information, technology, and commodities it is arguable that the discourse of globalisation presupposes a basic teleology that, while not entailing a simple goal of inevitable 'westernisation', still constructs a linear narrative (also see Appadurai 1999). Here the assumption is that if herders in a remote corner of Northern Mongolia are having access to and using new technologies then their lives have not simply changed but done so in a very specific way - by being integrated into the global market economy - which may have afforded new opportunities and improvements – but which is also to result in corollary processes of cultural homogenisation, standardised use of such technologies, and possible loss of traditional ways of living. Indeed, this is the teleological metanarrative that underpins the doxa of technological change characteristic of the contemporary era, where modernisation and cultural decline are seen as dialectically interrelated.

Of course, many anthropologists resist a clear division between the local and the global as if localities were neat, bounded places that simply suffered the impact of external, global forces. Thus, anthropologists explore how 'local', usually non-Western people, adapt objects, ideas, and symbols from global circuits of production, consumption, and knowledge, indigenising, resignifying, appropriating, and hybridising them and perhaps generating 'multiple' or 'alternative' modernities (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992; Englund et al. 2000; Inda & Rosaldo 2001; Miller 1995). From this subtler perspective, ethnographies attempt to show the way both homogenisation and differentiation occur at the same time, and how continuity and change are experienced (Robbins et al. 2007; Sahlins 1999; Wilk 1995). It is worth noting, however, a kind of mutual reinforcement of the spatial and the temporal here. In other words, modernity is still not only seen as 'after' tradition, but it is simultaneously 'beyond' locality and acts as the 'wider context' for processes of change. Here the narrative of globalisation reproduces the same teleological metanarrative of modernisation by presuming a unilinear transition from a specifically western 'global' to a non-western 'local' in contexts of change. However, as Tsing (2000; 2002) and others (Beverley 1999: 127) point out there is no 'outside'

[59]To this end, Appadurai (1999) proposes a framework for exploring change in the context of globalisation which has become increasingly popular, centred on the relationships between what he calls the five dimensions of global cultural flow; namely, Ethnoscapes, Technoscapes, Mediascapes, Financescapes, and Ideoscapes.

of globalisation from which to construct an opposition to it - no 'tradition,' no 'third world,' no 'local culture' etc. Instead, as Beverley (1999:127) puts it: "tradition (and modernity) are ways of reading or construing processes of change, rather than things that exist 'out there'" I argue that globalisation fails to capture the political and economic conditions behind the flux and flow of technological change such as in Mongolia, and which are to a large extent what determine the everyday experience of them. As Tsing (1999: 330) puts it, by characterising all change in terms of globalisation:

> We lose sight of the coalitions of claimants as well as their partial and shifting claims. We lose touch with the material and institutional components through which powerful and central sites are constructed, from which convincing claims about units and scales can be made. We describe the landscape imagined within these claims rather than the culture of politics of scale making.

As a corrective to this we require careful analyses of change that do not mistake the ideological metaphors of globalisation for concrete social processes, and emphasise instead the multiplicity of experiences – both linear and non-linear, positive and negative - brought about by the global flows of, for example, technology. "A focus on circulation", Tsing reminds us, "shows us the movement of people, things, ideas, or institutions around the world, but it does not show us how this movement depends on defining tracks and grounds or scales and units of agency" (2000:337). In other words, while we might encounter new technologies in Mörön market and while the use of motorcycles, solar panels, and mobile phones certainly represent 'change', we nevertheless require consideration of the everyday context in which they are harnessed and put to use, as well as the variegated ways in which they are experienced by people themselves. As Schaniel (1988) has shown in the context of the New Zealand Maori, for example, the adoption of a new technology does not imply the adoption of the same system of logic that produced the technology; thus, while the Maori adopted iron artifacts from international trade ('globalisation'), they did so in culturally specific terms by adapting them to suit practical needs and coming to experience them on their own terms: "(T)he process of adopting and adapting introduced technology…does not imply that introduced technology does not lead to change, but the change is not pre-ordained by the technology adapted…The process of technological adaptation is one where the introduced technology is adopted to the social processes of the adoption society, and not vice-versa" (ibid:496-98).

As I show below, while the liberalisation of trade has indeed connected the Shishged to international commodity markets of China in new ways, the concept of globalisation is limited in its ability to articulate the complex non-linear and non-integrative experiences of the people with whom I lived and worked. Indeed, while markets in the Shishged are extremely well-supplied many people face the paradox of not being able to afford available items, often forced to borrow money from friends and family members, take out loans, or purchase goods through lease-agreements with market traders. In other words, while the concept of globalisation usefully describes the global interdependence of the Shishged with other parts of the world, there remains an important gap between this and the everyday lived-experience of people themselves. This is of particular relevance to the context of rural Mongolia where, as we have seen, herders have not experienced the postsocialist transition as a linear unfolding of events, but rather, as a series of fractures and disjunctures, with the advent of a market economy, the opening of new commodity markets, and the availability of new technologies complemented by other, contradictory processes such as the collapse of state support, the return to a subsistence economy, and the re-prioritisation of herding temporality. As Schiffer writes: "We must fashion a framework of concepts and principles free from implicit ideologies of 'progress' and technological 'revolution'. which can be applied to empirical cases" (2001:231).

As I show while increasing numbers of herders are using new technologies, facilitating improvements and representing important processes of change, these are not experienced in universal terms as a transition from 'tradition' to 'modernity', as replacing pre-existing technologies in a unilinear way, as a singular 'improvement', or as articulated by the theoretical tropes of 'globalisation', 'marketisation', or 'neoliberal reform'. Instead, they are experienced in polydirectional ways and from within the context of the postsocialist transition – as simultaneously providing advantages and disadvantages, producing losses and gains, and resulting in enskilment and deskilment, and refracted through the limitations associated with living in a rural society and the return to a subsistence economy. The availability of motorised transport, for example, is problematised by the rising cost of fuel and the need to purchase and acquire spare parts, which forces people to switch regularly between motorised and animal-drawn transportation. Similarly, while mobile phones have become ubiquitous features of herding life their use remains constrained by the remote conditions in rural Mongolia, with mobile coverage remaining sporadic away from regional centres and rarely available in the vicinity of herding encampments. This reveals the need to consider the everyday context in which new technologies are harnessed and put to use, as well as the variegated and non-linear ways in which technological change is experienced by people themselves.

Riding Across the Grasslands: Motorcycles in Herding Life

Since the postsocialist transition the availability of motorcycles has grown significantly in Mongolia, particularly in rural areas where they are used in even the most remote parts of the country. It is commonplace to see people riding motorcycles across the steppe, in and out of regional centres, between herding encampments, and when moving animals from one pasture to another. I even encountered people riding motorcycles in a remote area of the taiga at site of informal gold mining (see Fraser *forthcoming*). Given that the route involved crossing difficult terrain of high mountains, dense forest, and with no roads or paths, the riders had to get off and push their motorcycles much of the way. This generated much discussion amongst my companions, all of whom were on horseback, who described the idea of motorcycles in the taiga as 'crazy'. As one of the riders responded, it simply made practical sense as a motorcycle can carry more weight than a horse and thus allowed him to transport more items to sell and trade at the mining site.



(Figure 35. A motorcycle beside a ger – photo by the author)

Although motorcycles were available in Mongolia during the socialist period, specifically Soviet-made models that continue to be bought and sold today, their use was generally confined to urban and regional centres. In the Shishged Depression the majority of motorcycles were those that were used by the managers of the negdels when travelling between regional centres and herder encampments to monitor the movements of households and herd animals. Of course, this was an important part of the state's attempt to modernise the herding economy through technological 'improvements' (Humphrey & Sneath 1999; Upton 2008). However, given that the managers resided in regional centres and, with all motorised transport officially being the property of the state (the negdel), motorcycles were not owned by individual households or used in everyday practices as today.

The first motorcycle that Davanjaam and his family bought was a *Ural*: a large, heavy Soviet-made model manufactured in the 1960s, which they acquired in 2010 but which by late 2011 stood more or less idle outside the family ger. In 2011 Davanjaam purchased a second motorcycle, a smaller, light-weight model with a loud, high-pitched engine and brazened with the logo of a Chinese brand. This model was typical of the large majority of new motorcycles in Mongolia, being relatively affordable, easy to repair and locate spare parts for, as well as operating with a significantly lower consumption of fuel[60]. A typical second-hand motorcycle in Ulaanbaatar costs 950,000MNT, or £280. Prices are slightly cheaper in rural centres such as Ulaan Uul. The average monthly income in 2011 for people with official employment was 150,000 tugrik (£44), while for informal workers no official data exists. Like many herders, Batukhan's household monthly income was irregular, ranging from 50,000MNT (£14) to 80,000MNT (£23), while some wealthier herders earned up to 100,000MNT (£30). Of course, the increasing availability of motorcycles does not imply that all herders own one or that people can unproblematically afford the fuel and mechanical components associated with their use. Indeed, it is commonplace to see motorcycles standing idle outside peoples' dwellings for extended periods of time, specifically because of a lack of fuel or inability to pay for, or effectuate, mechanical repairs. At the same time, however, nearly every household has access to a motorcycle through kin relations or friends, allowing the technology to be integrated into people's livelihood strategies and resulting in significant changes in everyday social life.

In an environment where distances can be hundreds of kilometres apart having a motorcycle has immediate consequences for rural households, providing a rapid form of transport when travelling between encampments, areas of pasture, and regional centres. As people emphasised to me motorcycles reduce travel time, diminish space between people, and improve the timing of everyday tasks, all of which have important implications for survival during the late postsocialist era. This has important implications during the postsocialist era because many herders do not regularly sell animals or animal-products to market and all rely on social networks to acquire goods and regional centres to access services (Humphrey & Sneath 1999; Rossabi 2005; Sabloff 2001), something which motorcycles have come to play a prominent role in. This came to the fore throughout my time with Davanjaam's household as he and his family all used the motorcycle to travel to and from the regional centre frequently and at various points during a typical week, picking up and delivering supplies, visiting the market, transporting family members, carrying out informal work, as well as accessing services such as medical care. Of course, such journeys could (and were) also undertaken on horseback and, as I shall show below, the large majority of people alternate regularly between using their motorcycles and their horses, specifically in relation to the perceived benefits and limitations

[60] Typical Chinese brands include *Mustang* and *Shinerary*.

associated with each. As Davanjaam explained: “Before we had a motorcycle we only ever visited the regional centre four or five times a year; we would purchase supplies and then carry everything back by ox-cart. But after we bought the Ural we started visiting more often, maybe three or four times a month, and now with the new motorcycle we are always travelling back and forth”.

Significantly, when herders visit people in regional centres the latter also typically receive animal products in return. Indeed, as many sum-residents have themselves become dependent on herding kin relations since the postsocialist transition, motorcycles have become an important link in the distribution of products from encampments to regional centres, the new technology helping to fill the gap left behind since the collapse of state support. For example, I travelled with Davanjaam and Fenger regularly to collect supplies from Endelger’s sister, who resides permanently in Ulaan Uul. Every time we visited we would carry items from the encampment to her, such as those that she herself could not acquire such as wool (to be sold), white foods and freshly slaughtered meat (for consumption).

Here I found that even those herders that did not own motorcycles, such as Batukhan, regularly arranged to borrow motorcycles at specific points during the year, for example to transport products to family members - where they would be consumed, traded or sold - or to shuttle family members to hospitals, schools, and even to vote in elections. As we have already seen, the mobile-sedentary division has always been circumvented in Mongolia, with people and goods moving frequently between encampments and regional centres (Humphrey & Sneath 1999:159). This has increased through the use of motorcycles which serve as an increasingly important medium to maintain the connections between the mobile and sedentary sections of rural life. Particularly towards the end of the summer numerous motorcycles could be seen criss-crossing the grasslands around regional centres, transporting children for the start of the school year. Here motorcycles were explicitly recognised as having re-facilitated movements that were formerly provided by the collectives, such as transporting children to school, selling herding products, or accessing markets.

This could also be seen in the context of changing patterns of mobility between herders’ encampments. While people who share kin relations, or constitute a khot-ail, have always moved between encampments, this has increased with the use of motorcycles in the postsocialist context, generating more frequent movements and affording people new avenues of support. In all of the households that I visited people emphasised that motorcycles had allowed them to incorporate hitherto ‘out of reach’ neighbours into their everyday strategies, creating new connections of support. Throughout my time with Davanjaam’s household we used the motorcycle to visit and assist neighbouring households by picking up and delivering supplies, as well as transporting people at different times of the year. As Davanjaam explained: “Fenger helps my brother a lot because he has a big herd and his children are still young. It is much quicker to travel by motorcycle than by horse; with the horse, it takes one hour to reach my brother’s ger, but with the motorcycle it only takes twenty minutes. Dorj also bought a motorcycle earlier this year and now he visits us much more often; sometimes when Davanjaam is working in the sum he visits and helps us with the herd. He will come by and help move the animals or sometimes bring us meat so that we do not have to buy so much in the sum”. On one occasion, I travelled with Davanjaam to visit a friend on an area of steppe just outside Ulaan Uul, using the motorcycle to transport some fresh milk. Along the way, Davanjaam explained that he would previously have only visited this man a few times a year but, since having a motorcycle, he now visited at least once every two months: “We were good friends when I was young but then stopped seeing each other so often. He also lost many

animals in 2010 and stopped making long migrations. But now we both have motorcycles and see each other a lot: if ever I bring him some supplies he gives me things in return, sometimes vodka or cheap fuel".

In Northern Mongolia motorcycles are also increasingly used by hunters to access hunting grounds that would previously have been considered out of reach. I travelled on numerous occasions via motorcycle to areas where people claimed that they did not used to hunt, which is important in the context of the postsocialist transition as wild game has become an increasingly important source of food (Pedersen 2011) and for supplementing income through the sale of animal pelts. This is something that Kemp (1971) has also described amongst Inuit hunters on Baffin Island, who increased their hunting radius following the introduction of snowmobiles. Similarly, here the motorcycle has transformed people's relationship with the environment itself, diminishing distance and incorporating hitherto out of reach locations into survival-related strategies. This has become more important in recent years as new restrictions have been placed on hunting due to environmental conservation, allowing people to travel to more distant and remote locations to hunt in secret away from the eyes of the state administration (see Chapter 4).

Motorcycles, Snowmobiles and the Technological 'Revolution'

The advent of motorised transport in Northern and Inner Asia has been a neglected field of study, the only notable exception being that of the snowmobile in Arctic communities in the 1960s and 1970s (Pelto 1987; Kemp 1971), as well as more recently in other regions of the circumpolar North (Beach 1981; Helander-Renvall 2007; Stammler 2004). It is useful, in this regard, to compare the role of snowmobiles with that of motorcycles and speculate on the potential future of motorised transport in Mongolia. Indeed, snowmobiles have had a tremendous influence on the livelihoods of peoples across the circumpolar North, particularly hunters and reindeer herders for whom they have affected their patterns of movement, sedentarisation, and subsistence. In fact, the snowmobile has had such a profound impact that the term 'snowmobile revolution' (Pelto 1987; Stammler 2009) has been used to characterise the technological transformation of the region.



(Figure 36. Herders with their motorcycles – photo by the author)

By far the most significant effect of snowmobiles has been on people's mobility, reducing the scale of their movements and increasing sedentarisation. In Fennoscandia, for example, reindeer herders adopted increasingly sedentary forms of lifestyle after acquiring

snowmobiles, settling in fixed centres and using motorised transport to commute to and from their herds (Pelto 1987; Ingold 1986). This has also been reported amongst indigenous hunters and reindeer herders in the Canadian Arctic (Kemp 1971), Alaska (Feldman 2009), Greenland (Nooter 1980), as well as increasingly in the Russian North (Stammler 2004). Kemp (1971) and Pelto (1987) have even hypothesised that the advent of motorised transport might eventually lead to the 'end' of mobile reindeer herding altogether, characterising it as a definitive and irreversible technological change. As we shall see below, this has already occurred in some cases and is an apt example of what I term deskilment. As Stammler writes: "Experts agree that the changes generated by the snowmobile revolution cannot be undone, and a return to previous subsistence practices is no longer possible" (2009:313).

On the one hand, the availability of motorcycles in Mongolia appears to have had comparable effects to the circumpolar North. Increasing numbers of herders have reduced the scale of their movements, no longer undertake large-scale migrations, and erect their ger in close proximity to regional centres at a distance specifically appropriate to motorcycle travel. I encountered this throughout Khövsgöl province, with people setting up their dwellings on the outskirts of sum and bag centres, no longer undertaking long migrations, and relying on motorcycles to acquire products and access services. As Davanjaam explained: "Ten years ago we used to make long migrations; we had twenty oxen and moved four times a year. After I bought the Ural we only moved three times a year and started staying closer to the sum; and after we lost our oxen in 2010 we only moved once a year from the summer encampment to Mörön. Now that we have the new motorcycle we stay here most of the time and travel to pick up supplies and find work. If we were to go further away, then we would need more fuel and that is not possible".

As noted above, sedentarisation can be the result of multiple factors, though the normative understanding is that it is a teleological process, with mobile and sedentary lifestyles depicted as binary opposites and with herders characterised as if following an irreversible linear trajectory. It is important to recognise, however, that while motorcycles have played a role in sedentarisation in Mongolia, they have simultaneously facilitated new forms of movement. It is important to recognise, however, that while motorcycles may have played a role in increasing 'sedentarisation', they have facilitated new forms of movement at the same time. Indeed, while many households remain close to regional centres throughout much of the year, having access to a motorcycle means they can make more regular and frequent journeys instead, something which problematises the notion of a unilinear technological change. In all households where motorcycles were owned, I found that people actually moved more frequently than before, as well as in new ways. Since for many it only takes 30 minutes to reach a bag or sum centre, they travelled regularly and on some occasions even returned multiple times a day.

This was something I myself had to get used to after moving to Davanjaam's encampment - for while in Batukhan's household any kind of journey felt to be something 'significant' as we first had to prepare and saddle the horses and usually travelled some distance to a sum or bag centre - in Davanjaam's household the motorcycle made travel more sporadic and informal, something one did casually and even multiple times a day. On numerous occasions, Davanjaam or Fenger would jump on the motorcycle without uttering a word to any family member and simply speed off in the distance, then returning an hour later carrying some oil or flour they had purchased in the market or picked up from a neighbouring encampment. At other times, Davanjaam and I travelled to Mörön to purchase supplies and, immediately after dropping them back at the encampment, we travelled to Ulaan Uul to carry out informal work at a mechanical repair centre. On other occasions, Davanjaam and his family travelled to Mörön to

attend government meetings advising households on preparations for the upcoming winter. This flexibility came to the fore most radically one morning as Fenger woke up clenching his stomach in pain: within minutes, Davanjaam put him on the back of the motorcycle and rushed him to the hospital in Mörön, where he was diagnosed with appendicitis.



(Figure 37. A decorated motorcycle during Naadam festival in Ulaan Uul – photo by the author)

While motorcycles affect the structure and timing of daily tasks, they are not experienced as signifying a 'loss of tradition'. Indeed, the notion of a technological 'revolution' suggests a transition from one fixed state (mobility) to another (sedentarisation), and disregards the potential for a coexistence between the two. It also implies a transition from so-called 'traditional' to 'modern; forms of movement and lifestyle that have little saliency for people themselves. As people emphasised, herding life was far more mechanised (and 'modern') during the socialist period, when the state provided motorised transportation to facilitate collectivised herding. The adoption of private motorcycles is thus more complicated: following decades of using motorised transport provided by the collectives, many herders have reverted to using (presocialist) animal-drawn transportation when moving between seasonal pastures, which has demanded the embodiment of older ('traditional') skills such as the use of ox-carts and knowledge of pre-socialist migration routes. This has allowed herders to rearticulate mobility in the face of collapsing state support but has been experienced through the prism of de-technologisation. Yet this has occurred in articulation with the introduction of motorcycles used for shorter and more frequent movements such as to regional centres, inculcating new skills such as riding, mechanical repair, and knowledge of new routes. From peoples own perspectives, motorcycles are not inimical to so-called 'traditional' practices such as herding, but rather, affords alternate possibilities for herding within the postsocialist context.

Now the advent of motorised transport has not only affected mobility but has come to be incorporated into the very practices of herding itself. In all of the households that I visited people used their motorcycles to herd their animals from one area of pasture to another, to check on the location and well-being of their herds throughout the day, as well as to reach their animals quickly in cases of emergencies or changeable weather conditions. In Davanjaam's encampment, for example, both he and Fenger used their motorcycle on a daily basis to travel to and from their herd, drive their animals between pastures, as well as to check on their location at various points during the day. This is something that Davanjaam himself emphasised when describing to me their herding practices: "In the summer we move the animals quite often; we do not have a big area of land to graze and must share with other

households. Because of this, we use the motorcycles a lot for herding; they are much faster than horses and you can reach your animals more quickly. This saves you time and is important if you have any problems". As Fenger similarly explained: "Nowadays people use their motorcycles than when I was younger; they ride to their animals and move them to and from the ger. I like horse riding but motorcycles are very useful; they are faster and take less time to prepare. If you have a good motorcycle it can be even better than a fine horse". Seen from this perspective, the incorporation of can be seen as inculcating new forms of enskilment facilitating improvised adjustments to herding. Here the motorcycle has become a taken-for-granted object in people's livelihood strategies; it has become integrated or, we might say, 'entangled' (Hodder 2011) into the practices of herding, even while it alters such practices at the same time.

The use of motorised transport to herd animals is another dimension of the 'snowmobile revolution thesis. Snowmobiles have resulted in a reduction and, in many cases, eradication, of animal-based herding. Amongst the Sámi, for example, snowmobiles led to the replacement of using reindeer as transport resulting in deskilment and a permanent technological change. With a snowmobile, a herd of sixty-five reindeer can be herded by a single person, which saves time, energy, and manpower (Pelto 1987). Similarly, snowmobiles are highly valued when lichens are scarce and reindeer must be driven further in search of food, as well as to transport supplementary feed such as hay. As Ingold has shown, this has not only affected herding practices amongst the Sámi but social and economic life more generally (1980:29). As snowmobiles are expensive it was wealthier herders (with greater numbers of animals) who were the first to acquire them, which drove smaller herders out of competition and forced them to join larger herding conglomerates or face unemployment (ibid). The result was a concentration of large herding operations and a concretisation of class divisions. Even those who lacked motorised transport borrowed snowmobiles from richer neighbours rather than relying on manual energy, which reaffirmed their perceived superiority in the eyes of the wider population (Pelto 1987). The increased 'efficiency' brought about by snowmobiles also produced a higher rate of reindeer slaughter, which further integrated the Sámi into the national economy through the supply of meat and transformed people's relationship to their animals (Ingold 1980; Beach 1981; Stammler 2009), whose primary meaning came to be a commodified resource (Helander-Renvall 2007). This is why many Sámi subsequently came to regret the introduction of the snowmobile, perceiving it to have changed the experience and practice of herding and of human-animal relations. As Stammler writes: "Sámi reindeer herders regret this development (motorised transport) and remember, for example, how their relations with reindeer were more intimate before these technological innovations" (2009:313). In recent years, reindeer herders in the Russian North have also begun using snowmobiles, emphasising their benefits in much the same terms as described above. While this has not led to the eradication of reindeer transport among all communities, the technology is increasing significantly in use and, as a result, is having important effects on social life. As Stammler (ibid) notes, this is particularly the case for herders in the West-Siberian tundra, where the snowmobile has become the most important vehicle for the supply of staple food during the spring and autumn seasons, as well as for socialising, visit family members, and negotiating contracts.

On the one hand the advent of motorised transport appears to be following the same trajectory in Mongolia, with motorcycles increasingly incorporated into herding practices. Indeed, motorcycles are highly valued as they enable herders to travel to and from their herds quicker and more easily, reducing the timing of everyday tasks and granting more flexibility

throughout the day. This is something that I myself came to experience while assisting the household move their sheep and goats to and from the ger. While in those households with no motorcycles I had carried out this task on horseback, which involved first preparing and saddling the horse, then riding towards the herd, rearing the animals and, after returning to the ger, re-tying the horse and watering it if necessary, with the motorcycle the entire process was simplified and took much less time. Although I was initially apprehensive about using the motorcycle too often, specifically as I had never ridden before, I quickly came to appreciate its benefits, speeding up the herding process and granting one more free time during the day. Of course, the benefits of motorised transport are particularly important when encountering emergencies, problems, or changeable weather conditions, and when it is essential to reach one's herd as quickly as possible. As Davanjaam explained there have been many times when he has needed to reach the herd quickly and was lucky to have a motorcycle at hand. A few years ago, some of his sheep were attacked by wolves and he used the motorcycle to reach them and scare away the wolves before too many were killed. During my stay with the household some of their sheep also fell into a river, and we managed to use the motorcycle to reach them in time. While this is not to suggest that motorised transport could never lead to long-lasting changes such as amongst the Sámi, it is important to recognise the complementary effects associated with technological change. While the use of motorcycles may result in a transformation or loss of certain skills, enskilment and deskilment always occur in articulation, making it is essential to consider the diverse experiences of people and how they use the technology themselves.

Motorcycles are particularly popular amongst the increasing number of semi-sedentarised herders who live the majority of the year in regional centres, for whom they afford new livelihood strategies and intersect with patterns of economic differentiation between different households. Many of these were formerly employed by the collectives and lived in regional centres throughout the socialist period. However, with decollectivisation they turned to herding as a necessary survival strategy, usually combining this with complementary sources of income such as trading. As we have seen, the majority graze their animals on the outskirts of regional centres rather than 'out' on the pastures, while in winter they organise for 'full-time' kin relations to incorporate their animals into their own herds. For them, motorcycles play an important role: on the one hand, they enable people to travel regularly to their animals grazing on the outskirts of town while they reside in fixed dwellings, with motorcycles shared amongst kin relations to rotate various herds. On many occasions people would arrive to borrow a particular person's motorcycle to 'check on the herds', which would typically include checking on the animals of the motorcycle owner as well. Secondly, motorcycles enable them to drive their animals to the encampments of full-time family members at seasonal changes, such as during the latter's winter migrations. Here motorcycles have inculcated skills generating new forms of "sedentarised" animal herding, as well as afforded new strategies and lifestyles for people living within regional centres 'in-between' mobility and sedentarisation. They have also intersected with patterns of economic differentiation: thus, while poorer semi-sedentarised herders who do not own motorcycles only maintain small herds, live all the year in regional centres, and rely on others to borrow motorcycles and move their animals in winter, others have become quite successful and built up large herds, owning multiple motorcycles and even 4x4 jeeps. Some have become long-distance herders who live in regional centres part of the year but spend the remaining time out on the grasslands practicing full-scale seasonal mobile herding. While this suggests the concretisation of economic differentiation partly expressed

through motorcycle ownership, in this case it does not assume an antithesis to the practice of 'traditional' animal herding.

Although the use of motorcycles is relatively recent in Mongolia, it should come as no surprise that they are already characterised as replacing 'traditional' herding on horseback. Indeed, I found a widespread assumption that the advent of motorised transport is changing 'traditional' herding in Mongolia. I spoke with a wide variety of people both in and out of Mongolia who expressed this view, including government officials, representatives of environmental and development organisations, employees of mining companies, tourists, academics, as well as urban Mongols. In fact, more than any other new technology motorcycles were seen as the ultimate threat to the 'traditional way of life'. As one person put it: 'It is really sad to see motorcycles being used more and more by herders because one day they will completely replace horse riding. People will still be able to ride horses, but they will not be used for herding and the tradition will be lost. In the West people used to use horses and carriages and now they drive cars; it is always sad to see modern technology replacing traditional practices'. Such a view is closely intertwined with the doxa of modernisation and teleological assumption that technological change operates as a series of 'improvements'. Much as with the advent of snowmobiles, motorcycles are perceived to have practical benefits and thus will 'inevitably' replace horses at some point in time, something that will presumably also affect rural society, the environment, as well as human-animal relations[61].

Despite their increasing use it is important to recognise that motorcycles are not currently resulting in the replacement of animal-based herding, but rather, complementing it in specific ways. Indeed, motorcycles and horses are used interchangeably in herding practices in relation to the corollary benefits and limitations associated with each. Davanjaam, for example, emphasised the practical benefits of using both their motorcycle and their horses depending on the task being carried out; thus, horses were deemed more suitable in the morning when driving the sheep and goats out to pasture as this allowed the animals to be moved slowly so that they could graze along the way. By contrast, the motorcycle was more useful when the herd needed to be checked on during the day or when they were driven back in the afternoon. This is not to suggest that motorcycles do not affect the experience and practice of herding; indeed, as Davanjaam himself remarked, having a motorcycle has actually increased the number of short visits he and Fenger make to their herd. Of course, an important aspect of this switching is the practical limitations associated with motorised transport in the postsocialist era, specifically the lack and/or cost of fuel and mechanical components. Indeed, it would make little sense to use one's motorcycle all the time considering the high cost of fuel and the more economical value of travelling on horseback.

This interchangeability could also be seen in the context of human-animal relations. In all of the households that I visited people used both their motorcycles and their horses depending on the species being herded, and even individual animals themselves. This came to the fore a few weeks into my stay with Davanjaam's household as I assisted Fenger to rear the sheep and goats back towards the ger. Along the way, Fenger made a brief stop at a nearby encampment belonging to Altan, a neighbouring herder and member of Davanjaam's khot-ail: "Altan is working in the sum for a few days and only has his wife and parents at home. They have a big herd and I help them to move their animals when Altan is away". As Fenger and I were already

[61] As a friend working for an international development organisation put it: "You only have to compare the Mongolian case with China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region where motorcycles have been used for an even longer period of time. There less and less herders use horses because they can afford the fuel for motorcycles more easily. This is what will happen in Mongolia as herders become wealthier".

travelling by motorcycle I was surprised that he first headed back to the ger to replace the motorcycle with one of the horses. As he explained, Altan's father-in-law is an old man and could only herd the sheep and goats; but the household also had twenty horses and these can be difficult to move with the motorcycle: "If you approach a horse on a motorcycle they will often run away or challenge you. You have to teach your horses how to respond to motorcycles and this takes time". Here Fenger explained the need to 'switch' between motorcycles and horses in terms of the notions of animal enskilment and personhood described in Chapter 1, emphasising that because Altan did not himself own a motorcycle his horses were less accustomed, and had not yet 'learnt' how, to be herded by motorised transport. This again problematises the notion of a unilinear technological change, for Fenger flexibly alternates between the motorcycle and his horses, recognising the suitability of each for different species and individual animals that have learnt (or not) to respond to motorised transport. In fact, once when I questioned a young herder about whether he preferred motorcycles or horses while herding he answered that it was simply impossible to decide, as it would depend on the animal being herded. Here herders have not adopted motorcycles as a perceived replacement for 'traditional' horse riding but to complement horse riding in specific ways.

This has further implications for the relationship between skill and technological change. While Pelto and Ingold correctly emphasise the structural transformations and deskilment associated with motorised transport, the reference to a technological 'revolution' glosses over the generation of new skills and transposition of existing skills into new contexts, such as using snowmobiles and motorcycles for herding. In Mongolia, it is clear herders embody tremendous skill using their motorcycles to a level comparable to that of horse riding, such as quickly yet safely riding across the landscape, avoiding hazards such as pot-holes, learning and internalising new and efficient travel routes, locating animals and herding them, and adjusting to the specific reactions of different species. This makes it imperative to step outside the dichotomy that envisions horse riding skills as somehow 'traditional' while motorcycle riding is 'modern'. The incorporation of motorcycles into herding practices cannot be seen simply as a negative loss of tradition, but as facilitating new forms of herding dependent on new skills.

Interestingly, many of the skills associated with motorcycles have their origins in horse riding and the two are considered comparable, such as balance, agility, and practical knowledge of the landscape. This could be seen in the way herders taught younger people how to ride motorcycles and horses. Children in rural Mongolia typically learn to ride horses at a young age, usually between 4-5. The common practice is for the father, uncle, or older brother of a family to teach the child via practice – placing him/her on his saddle in front of him, giving the child the reins (while supporting with their own hands), and riding. Here the "teaching method" is an informal learning via 'showing', whereby the child accumulates embodied knowledge through active participation and experiencing their own mistakes. I found that the teaching of horse-riding has come to be associated with the same skills and social relations with motorcycle-riding, and the two are often taught simultaneously: it is the same father, uncle, or brother that will teach a child to ride a motorcycle at the same age and in precisely the same fashion - the adult placing the child on the seat in front, giving him/her the handles of the motorcycle (while supporting), and accelerating. Here learning to ride a motorcycle is rendered intelligible from the comparable experience of horse-riding, with the skills of balance, direction, and overcoming fear transposed from one domain to the other. As we have already seen (Chapter 1), herders explicitly emphasise the experiential similarities between motorcycle and horse riding, specifically in terms of the shared indivisibility between rider and 'vehicle' (or horse) while moving across the landscape. Both horses and motorcycles share the

common experience of moving through the landscape, rendering the texture of a comparable sensory and social space in which the child learns. In Ingold's terms, teaching to ride a motorcycle shares the same 'taskscape' (1993a:158) as that of horse riding, including the same instructions, non-verbal gestures, and general feel of the learning exercise. The novice rider watches, feels, and listens to the movement of the expert in the same way, seeking - through repeated trials – to bring his/her own bodily movements into line with those of their teacher. From this perspective, what the outsider sees as a 'foreign', 'modern' technology is rendered locally intelligible through pre-existing relations between people and between people and objects – another addition to the 'total field of relationships' between persons and their environment (Ingold 2000:34).

This is particularly important for younger-generation herders for whom motorcycles and the skills of riding have become an intrinsic part of their self-identity in the postsocialist era. Many youths like to discuss their knowledge of motorcycles and show-off their riding skills, just as they do with horses. I spent many times with Hurelbaatar visiting neighbouring encampments where the discussions, particularly amongst the younger boys, inevitably revolved around motorcycles, including specific brands, the horsepower of different engines, and people's mechanical skills. We visited a friend in Mörön who had recently bought a new motorcycle and all of his friends arrived to take turns and show off their skills. At other times, we sat for hours pulling apart engines and effectuating repairs. Here knowledge of motorcycles and the ability to ride and repair them is an important aspect of the social experience of rural youth. These boys could also ride horses to a very high standard and were comfortable alternating between the two. Appreciation of this is critical in order to understand life for rural youth in postsocialist Mongolia, as motorcycles provide avenues for the expression of new interests, tastes, and desires, and suggest we consider the personal preferences and experiences of people alongside their wider economic impact.

The transposition of skills between motorcycles and horses could also be seen in how they were used in relation to different parts of the landscape. For example, people emphasised the importance of switching between motorcycles and horses depending on the condition of the grasslands and season. In all of the households that I visited people emphasised the importance of 'switching' between motorcycles and horses depending on the condition of the grasslands, the season, as well as the particular area that one was travelling through. For example, one day I assisted Davanjaam and Fenger to rear the herd out to a particular area of pasture. As we had been using the household's motorcycle only the day before, I was surprised to see the pair saddling the horses before leaving. As Davanjaam explained, as the sheep and goats had been grazing one area of pasture for a few weeks, it was time to move them to a different area and this demanded that we cross two areas of grassland reserved for winter foraging: 'Today we must cross the reserved grasslands; motorcycles can be bad for the grasslands because they press the grasses flat and make it harder for animals to graze. It is nearly autumn now and we have to take care of these pastures'.

On another occasion, Davanjaam held an informal meeting with two herders from his khot-ail and, while discussing the condition of the grasslands, one of the neighbours suggested that everyone start minimising their use of motorcycles: because there had been much more rain over the summer and the grasslands were very soft. Here Davanjaam and his neighbours recognise the impact of motorcycles on the landscape and emphasise the need to minimise their use depending on the season and pasture condition, which again problematises the notion of a singular technological change and brings to the fore the re-enskilment of herders in relation to motorised transport. Indeed, the use of motorcycles is characterised by many

herders as being important for rangeland management, specifically as they offset the effects of overgrazing by enabling the herds to be taken further away from regional centres during the winter months when grasslands are at their weakest (also see Humphrey & Sneath 1999). As Davanjaam explained, prior to him having a motorcycle the grasslands surrounding the regional centre were 'much worse' because of the herd animals that remained throughout the winter. I also observed Davanjaam and Fenger adjust their riding trajectories between the ger and the herd depending on whether they were using the motorcycle or their horses. While on horseback they would travel more or less directly to their grazing herds, on the motorcycle they travelled in a more circuitous way, heading in one direction and then turning towards the animals at a later stage. This adjustment increased progressively as the autumn continued and the condition of the grasslands became greater cause for concern. In this regard, the advent of motorcycles has generated new skills associated with grassland sustainability, as well as the memorisation of new pathways to travel across the landscape. Motorcycles are not only experienced as bringing about benefits to herding strategies, but also generating new problems in terms of grassland sustainability, demanding the embodiment of new skills such as knowing how to traverse the grasslands without causing excessive damage.

This relationship between motorised transport and changing experiences of the landscape has similarly been noted in the context of the Sámi in Northern Finland (Helander-Renvall (2007: 31). Indeed, while herders used to experience snow quality solely in terms of its ability to enable or restrict reindeer access to pastures, this has been complicated by the advent of snowmobiles. Thus, what the Sámi consider the 'best' snow for reindeer is generally the 'worst' for snowmobiles: while reindeer require soft, loose snow that can be dug to access lichen, snowmobiles require hard, compacted snow, or ideally ice crust to facilitate movement. Much as with motorcycles described above, the Sámi experience the change in motorised transport in polydirectional terms, as simultaneously creating new possibilities for herding but generating problems and limitations at the same time. While in Mongolia people flexibly respond by alternating between their motorcycles and horses, the Sámi have responded by adjusting their travel routes and seasonal migrations in relation to the use of snowmobiles. As Helander-Renvall (2007: 31) argues, rather than approaching motorised transport as a unilinear technological change, we would do well to see the snowmobile as a new tool for "learning more about traditional ecological knowledge and becoming a new part of Sámi cultural practices" (also see Beach 1981). This has also been described by Stammler in the context of the Nenets reindeer herders in the Russian North, where snowmobiles are recognised as simultaneously providing benefits and disadvantages (2009:206). Much as in Mongolia, snowmobiles inculcate new skills articulated through the improvisational adjustment of existing practices.

It is important to recognise that people's changing experiences of the landscape also result in new moral evaluations concerning 'good' and 'bad' forms of transport. Indeed, the use of motorcycles is the subject of much debate among herders in Mongolia. This came to the fore one afternoon as Batukhan visited Davanjaam's ger and I explained to him all of the differences I had been observing between his herding practices and those of his younger brother. As Batukhan remarked: "It is not good to use motorcycles too much when herding, especially in the autumn months when the grasslands have been grazed. Nowadays you see too many motorcycle, cars, and jeeps. It is not good for the grasslands!". Listening to our conversation, Fenger commented that motorcycles also make life easier for people by replacing the difficulties associated with long-distance migrations and animal-drawn transportation. Although not manifesting as an explicit conflict, the exchange was interesting as it revealed different perceptions of motorised transport and its relationship to herding strategies. This

again problematises the notion of a singular experience of technological change, for while Batukhan uses the advent of motorised transport to rearticulate an emphasis on 'traditional' pastoral strategies, equating this specifically with animal-drawn transportation, for Fenger, the motorcycle is a useful addition to their herding practices, which has intersected with his own practical enskilment and which is not antithetical to grassland sustainability.

This raises interesting questions concerning the relationship between new technologies, skill, and power. Indeed, just as Harris (2005) observed in the context of flood-plain fisherman in the Amazon, changes in the political and economic fields surrounding specific skills result in differences between generations, which then come to be framed through a discourse of perceived skill and 'tradition': older generation herders perceive themselves to be more skilled than their children, because of their long-term experience. Much as with Batukhan, some people emphasise the 'old' ways (i.e. non-motorised transportation) by equating 'the past' with specific skills and knowledge, such as being able to migrate via animal-drawn transportation. By the same token, however, younger herders such as Fenger perceive themselves to be generating new skills specifically through their use of new technologies, such as being able to herd animals of the back of a motorcycle. Here skill emerges as a creative expression of the objectification of social differences between people and the generations, specifically in articulation with the changes associated with new technologies.

Importantly, the flexible relationship between motorcycles and horses is something that also intersects with people's long-term cultural presuppositions concerning the value and importance of horse riding in pastoral life. Indeed, while some herders rely more heavily on motorised transport than others, all continue to ride horses frequently throughout the day, both as a mode of transport and for herding practices. In fact, all herding and rural households emphasised the importance of horse riding, particularly for young people who, it was said, 'must' be able to ride horses, specifically as they are representative of Mongolian 'culture'. As Davanjaam put it: "One of the most important things to do as a man is teach your children how to ride horses; I learnt from my father and I taught Fenger. I think horses will never be replaced with motorcycles in Mongolia. Even the president can ride a horse!". This brings to the fore the variable dimensions of people's experience of change, as well as problematises the unilinear shift from one mode of transport to another. Indeed, while the motorcycle is clearly valued as an important new technology, people simultaneously emphasise the value of horse riding as part of broader Mongolian social life, articulating the need for a mutual co-existence between the two.

Motorcycles, Economic Integration, and Overcoming the "Loss of Autonomy"

Now while these examples suggest the positive and/or flexible incorporation of motorcycles into herding strategies, this is complemented by other more problematic concerns. One major consequence is the creation of new dependencies between herding communities and regional centres, with motorcycles 'integrating' people more tightly into national and international commodity markets via the need to maintain their transport and acquire fuel. This 'integration' then comes to dictate local decision-making and practices, with herders remaining close to regional centres where spare parts and fuel can be obtained, as well as altering their sources of economic livelihood to afford them. As people themselves recognise, having a motorcycle is not only beneficial but it means they have to spend more of their income on fuel. In the 'snowmobile revolution' thesis this effect of mechanised transport is described as 'de-localisation' (1987), whereby herders are forced into new dependencies as a result of motorised transport. As Stammler writes of this thesis: "The energy needed for…maintaining

the snowmobile is not locally available, and has to be bought with cash, putting pressure on the productivity of the herding business. The loss of autonomy as a result of the snowmobile revolution is one of Pelto's important arguments" (2009:48). This is certainly visible in Mongolia, for as petrol stations and mechanical components are only found in regional centres, herders are forced to visit and remain at an appropriate distance in order to acquire them. Similarly, herders must adjust their livelihood strategies to generate income, such as in Davanjaam's case where he and Fenger both work informally in regional centres. Davanjaam's family now visit Ulaan Uul more regularly than at any other point, with the motorcycle increasing their dependence on non-local resources (e.g. fuel, spare parts) and spend one-quarter of their annual income on fuel[62]. In this regard, people's enskilment is caught up with new economic demands and wider structural processes, in some cases leading to deskilment and livelihood restrictions.

I encountered this in the large majority of households in the Shishged, whom emphasised the need to generate supplementary income to afford fuel for their motorcycles: while in some cases people undertook informal work in regional centres, others sold animals, while others carry out a range of informal activities throughout the year and whenever the opportunity arises, such as digging for gold, engaging in trade, or working as drivers. In this regard, Pelto's 'de-localisation' thesis has much applicability to Mongolia, with motorcycles transforming the economic structure of herding households and integrating them more tightly into the national (and global) economy. Unlike the case of the Sámi, however, for whom the economic demands of snowmobiles led to a permanent eradication of using reindeer for transport (Ingold 1980), in Mongolia this is not resulting in a permanent change. Here it is accepted as commonplace that people will periodically be unable to afford fuel or effectuate mechanical repairs, in which case they revert to only using animal transportation. Partly this is due to different economic contexts, for while the Sámi are formally integrated into the national economy through the supply of reindeer meat and organised through herding conglomerates, most herders in Mongolia operate at the intercedes between the national and subsistence (informal) economies, selling a portion of their herds to the market (when possible) and keeping a larger portion for household production (Sneath 1998). As all herders inevitably keep horses for household production – including for transport, herding, and milking - they can more easily adjust to the economic uncertainties of motorcycle ownership, by flexibly moving between motorised and animal transportation at different times and in changeable economic contexts.

It is also important to emphasise that people do not experience their 'de-localisation' and deskilment in passive terms but actively respond by developing new skills. This takes multiple forms. This takes multiple forms. First, herders overcome their economic integration by 'borrowing' fuel and mechanical components or acquire free mechanical repair, specifically drawing upon a vast network of people and strategically harnessing the social obligations characteristic of Mongolian social relations. On one occasion, we travelled to a small house on the outskirts of Ulaan Uul, where Davanjaam introduced me to a young friend of his who sells low-cost (and black-market) fuel. There we filled two large jerry-containers and paid his friend only a fraction of the 'official' price, something that Davanjaam explained he did with certain individuals who he 'could trust' and with whom he had a 'special' relationship: "You have to know the right kind of people to buy fuel this way; it can get you into a lot of trouble but I have built up some good friendships over the years with a number of 'black market' dealers; I save a lot of money this way". As I came to learn, many herders avoid having to pay for fuel for

[62] See page 12 for motorcycle costs.

extended periods of time by moving between friends and family to acquire fuel. This is something that can be seen as a kind of social skill that highlights another dimension behind the 'loss of autonomy' associated with motorised transport; by harnessing his social relations he is able to skillfully navigate the negative effects of his economic incorporation, acquiring fuel at a reduced price and generating new forms of practical coping. Connected to this, herders share their motorcycles between friends and kin relations, which enables them to use motorised transport when needed but without having to pay for the fuel and mechanical costs associated with regular ownership. Indeed, I found that motorcycles are widely distributed among family members, sometimes passing through five or six hands in the space of a year, with certain people having a far greater network from which to draw upon than others.

At the same time, people draw upon their kin relations to locate and purchase second-hand motorcycles and spare parts, such as in the case of Davanjaam who received a 'good deal' from his cousin. Drawing upon and maintaining one's social network is itself a vital skill, and some people are more skillful than others. This intersects with existing cultural presuppositions of social relations and reciprocity. Indeed, the exchange of goods and services is of a particular kind in Mongolia, where reciprocity is determined by the specific relationships between people (Sneath 1998:140). Thus, while there is a symmetry in the relationships between people of approximately the same age, this is not the case between people of different ages. As Sneath puts it, "while reciprocity is a strong social norm in Mongolia, it is the form of social relationship – rather than the abstract exchange itself – that determines reciprocity" (ibid:140). From this perspective, social relations in Mongolia are best seen as the mechanism which channels particular kinds of reciprocity on the basis of culturally defined expectations of obligation - what Sneath defines as the "social relations of obligation" (ibid). In other words, it is the particular relationship between people – such as determined by age and status – that dictate the giving and receiving of goods and support, such as fuel and mechanical repairs. The Mongolian word *yos* ('rules' or 'manners') is indicative of this, referring not simply to social conventions but, when applied to persons themselves, indicates that they know how to behave and reciprocate 'properly' (Sneath 2000:217). This applies to the context of motorcycles, for it is by engaging 'properly' in particular social relations - and fulfilling one's reciprocal obligations - that people share and acquire goods such as fuel and mechanical components, as well as support such as mechanical repairs. I saw people strategically navigate their social networks to harness the social relations of obligations, by giving assistance to specific family members such as brothers or grandparents (e.g. providing white foods, helping to move animals) who they knew would/could reciprocate and received fuel or mechanical repairs in return. Others provided support to junior kin relations such as younger siblings to inculcate the social relations of obligation and borrowed motorcycles later in the year. In this way, people actively cope with their economic integration through the prism of existing social relations and cultural presuppositions based on kinship, hierarchy, and respect.

Herders also overcome their economic integration by developing new skills such as mechanical repair and saving fuel when riding. Indeed, many people have developed a range of mechanical repair skills out of necessity, including for both automobiles and motorcycles. The ingenuity of people to effectuate repairs without any tools at hand is constantly visible across rural Mongolia. This came to the fore as I travelled with Davanjaam and Fenger by motorcycle and we encountered moments of mechanical breakdown. As I came to learn, both possess a vast degree of knowledge and skills in terms of automobile and motorcycle repair, all of which has only been learnt over the past decade since acquiring motorcycles. Some people are recognised in their communities for having extensive mechanical skills, something that serves

not only as an important form of social capital in broader networks of support but has important economic consequences as well. For example, Fenger was known in his family for having extensive mechanical skills, specifically as he spent many hours repairing motorcycles with his friends in the regional centre. As a result, he spent approximately two to three months during the winter season working in a mechanical repair centre, then using the money he earned to supplement his household's income. This was also recognised by Davanjaam who relied heavily on his son to repair the family motorcycle, and which to some extent disrupts the normative structure of generational expertise between fathers and sons. At the same time, herders have developed a simple but practical method for saving fuel while riding on the steppe; when travelling downhill they switch off the engine and use the motorcycle as a kind of toboggan until it becomes necessary to accelerate again when they switch the engine back on and continue driving. As such examples demonstrate, de-localisation is an effect of motorised transport but one complemented by new forms of improvisation and enskilment. This is important for revealing the active ways people cope with technological change, just as the informal activities such as digging for gold, engaging in trade, or working as drivers also demand their own forms of enskilment. Approached from this perspective, enskilment and deskilment should be seen as mutually interdependent.

The use of motorcycles also varies between different kinds of household, which highlights the variegated experiences of de-localisation and economic integration. For example, for those who practice full-scale multi-season herding, motorcycles are only used while living at their summer and spring encampments (closer to regional centres), but are then given to settled family members while they themselves migrate to winter pastures where motorcycles are no longer deemed necessary. This is because most winter pastures are situated far from regional centres at a distance where fuel is unavailable. In these cases, people flexibly revert to only using horses and animal-drawn transportation, which inculcates the learning and reproduction of older ('traditional) skills such as training yaks to pull carts and knowledge of pre-socialist migration routes. This highlights how herders overcome their de-localisation by maintaining skills tied to animal transportation, as well as the fact that while many herders use motorised transport, they are not reliant upon it. At the same time, they simultaneously incorporate newer technologies such as motorcycles and develop new skills associated with their use. However, they are not seen as a replacement for animal transportation because they recognise their limitations in particular ecological and economic conditions. This is something I encountered in a number of households, who used motorcycles while living in their summer and spring encampments close to the regional centre, but then gave their motorcycles to family members while they themselves migrated to winter pastures. On one occasion, Davanjaam and I went to collect a motorcycle from a neighbouring household just before they left to their winter encampment, specifically because the motorcycle was no longer deemed necessary. As the father of the household explained: "My winter encampment is about 100km away in the mountains west of Ulaan Uul. During this time, we give a lot of things to our family members that we cannot use, such as the motorcycle. It is only useful to travel back and forth to the sum but in the winter encampment it is not needed". Here we see the permeable relationship between 'mobility' and 'sedentarisation', as well as the possibility for herders to simultaneously adopt 'new' technologies while still performing 'old' practices such as using animal-transportation. Indeed, for people themselves, motorised transport is not experienced in linear terms – as leading to permanent sedentarisation - but rather, as something to be harnessed in relation to everyday survival and which necessarily fluctuates depending on the season and personal circumstance.

The situation for other herding households is different. For those who have reduced the scale of their migrations and remain more or less permanently in the vicinity of regional centres, motorcycles are used throughout the year, provided that people can afford fuel and mechanical components. For these households, motorcycles do play a role in de-localisation and economic integration, creating new economic demands and dependencies on outside resources. It is important to recognise, however, that this should not necessarily be seen as a permanent technological change. As Davanjaam remarked, while today his family are less mobile than before, he intends to start re-making full-scale multi-season migrations as soon as he is able to purchase a solar panel. Having a solar panel is perceived to make longer-distance travel safer via the use of complementary technologies such as mobile phones, as well as more comfortable by powering overhead lightbulbs and household appliances (see Fraser *forthcoming*). This again highlights the nonlinear relationship between mobility and sedentarisation, as well as the variegated ways households experience technological change. While for some motorcycles increase sedentarisation and de-localisation, for others they actually facilitate mobile herding by affording alternate opportunities in the uncertain postsocialist context. As Davanjaam emphasised, his household were unable to survive via herding alone since the 2011 *dzud* (winter storm)[63]. As a result, having a motorcycle was essential in order for him to carry out informal work and thus maintain his animals and herding lifestyle. From Davanjaam's perspective, having a motorcycle is what actually determines his ability to maintain the 'tradition' of mobile herding. Here Pelto's argument misleadingly presents the changes associated with motorised transport in unilinear terms, where a person is *either* mobile or sedentary, a herder *or* a village-resident, dichotomies which reproduce the notion of a singular transition. In particular, the narrative of a 'technological revolution' does not capture the full spectrum of people's everyday experiences and fails to consider the polydirectional ways people may move between mobility and sedentarisation at different times. While it is true that people spend a greater proportion of their income on fuel, motorcycles (and other new technologies) also afford new opportunities such as carrying out informal work and acquiring support from family members, which can actually support mobile lifestyles and even re-facilitate full-scale multi-season herding.

It is also important to recognise that many households enjoy certain aspects of their changing livelihoods brought about by so-called economic integration. Motorcycles are highly valued for facilitating social relations and leisure activities, particularly for younger generation herders who use their motorcycles to visit friends and maintain social networks. This is the case, in particular, with Fenger who uses the motorcycle to visit his friends and girlfriend, as well as Davanjaam taking his family to eat at restaurants in Mörön. As both of Davanjaam's sons still attend boarding school they spend considerable periods of time in, and travelling to, the regional centre, where many of their friends live permanently and where Fenger travels to meet his girlfriend. As a result, the new motorcycle is particularly popular with the two sons, who used it throughout my stay with the household at least once every two days. As Fenger explained: "It is much easier to travel by motorcycle than on horseback because with a horse you need to keep it fed, make sure it is safe in the centre, and it must not be needed back at the encampment. With a motorcycle, you can travel when you want. I think without a motorcycle it would be very difficult for me because I spend so much time in Mörön; all my friends live there

[63] Dzud are winter conditions in which herd animals are unable to access the grasses underneath thick ice and snow. 2009-2010 experienced one of the worst dzud in living memory, where 10-15 million animals perished nationally and with households losing between 20% and 100% of their herds.

and I also go to school. But at least with the motorcycle I can travel back and forth and still help my family with the *mal*".

On many occasions, I followed Fenger to Mörön and spent time with him while visiting his friends. Typically, they would meet at the local market where they would stand and observe the many different motorcycles standing outside, commenting on the different models and expressing their desires for purchasing them. On other occasions, the group would meet at the house of one of Fenger's friends, where they would drink together and again express their interest in motorcycles, mechanical repair, and even new forms of popular music: "I have been saving for a few months now to buy a new engine for my father's old motorcycle. We must go and install it together next month". Here motorcycles are essential for rural youth to socialise, participate in social activities, and as well as to travel to their encampments when they are not at school. From this perspective, 'de-localisation' and the 'loss of autonomy' are only one dimension of people's social experience, with motorcycles affording new avenues for generating meaning in the postsocialist context via the maintenance of relationships. From this perspective, the teleologies of globalisation and neoliberal reform are only one aspect of Fenger's everyday social experience, with motorcycles affording new avenues for generating meaning via the expression of new interests, tastes, and desires. For youth, in particular, motorised transport is a prominent status symbol and a medium through which to express oneself and one's practical skills in the form of mechanical repair. On one occasion Fenger and a friend poked fun at a younger friend of theirs because he could not 'handle' his motorcycle, telling him that he was 'too small' to drive such a model. Of course, for rural youth themselves, having been exposed to school education and staying for many years in villages, motorcycles are an important and highly desirable aspect of contemporary life, serving to establish and maintain social relations through extensive visiting of relatives, friends and neighbours in the countryside. For young herders and sum-residents, riding from one encampment to another is a frequent phenomenon, as well as travelling back and forth after the school season. Here the social and leisure aspects of motorcycles are at least as important as the debates concerning the 'loss' associated with their availability.

In this regard Pelto's argument mistakenly presents the 'change' associated with motorised transport in unilinear terms. As can be seen from the above, however, this is something which does not capture the full spectrum of people's complex experiences, for whom motorised transport is equated with a coexistence of multiple forms of livelihood, work, and existence. Here the argument that mechanised transport 'incorporates' people into the global economic system is not 'wrong' but rather fails to capture the 'bush' of variations within people's everyday experiences (Ferguson 1999). Indeed, the 'loss of autonomy' suggested by Pelto as only one aspect of Davanjaam and his family's experience of the motorcycle; while being economically 'integrated' they are also actively seeking ways in which to cope with it, creating new forms of work, leisure, and existence. As the above examples have shown, it is important not to equate the availability and use of motorised transport with a singular experience of social change, such as a technological 'revolution' or modernisation leading to a 'loss of tradition'. Instead, by focusing on skilled practice we are afforded insight into people's everyday lived-experience and the polydirectional ways in which they experience and use motorcycles, including the benefits and disadvantages, the losses and gains, as well as the multiple and sometimes contradictory aspects associated with their use.

Seeing by the Light: Solar Panels in Herding Life

It is common today to see solar panels attached to the outside of herders' dwellings, including in herding encampments, regional centres, and even in the ger-districts of Ulaanbaatar. These are available for sale and trade in regional centres across Mongolia, the technology typically comprising small, lightweight panels attached to recharge terminals which store energy during the day. Weighing on average between three and eight kilograms the recharge terminals feature multiple electrical outlets into which one can attach a variety of electronic appliances, the most common being simple overhead light-bulbs, televisions, radios, DVD players, and mobile phones. Importantly, the majority of solar panels are unable to power larger electronics such as refrigerators and freezers, which has important implications for how they are incorporated into herding strategies, the limitations associated with their use, and how they are experienced by people in relation to the late postsocialist context.



(Figure 38. A ger with small solar panel – photo by the author)

During my fieldwork Batukhan and his household acquired their first solar panel, which allowed me to observe the process of locating, purchasing, and installing the new technology, as well as how it came to be incorporated into the household's everyday strategies and its broader implications upon social life. One day a few months into my stay with Batukhan we travelled together to Mörön, specifically to collect supplies in preparation for moving to the autumn encampment. Along the way I enquired of Batukhan what exactly he needed to buy and was caught off-guard when he announced that he also intended to purchase their first solar panel. As a result, we were joined by Batukhan's brother, Davanjaam, who had himself purchased a solar panel six months earlier and who offered to assist Batukhan to choose an appropriate model and get a good deal from the same market trader.

Arriving in Mörön Davanjaam introduced us to the retailer, who operated a medium-sized stall selling a number of solar panels and related equipment, including recharge terminals, battery packs, adaptors, and wires, all of which lay spread across two tables and ranged in both size and price. The solar panels and recharge terminals all bore the logos of China's biggest companies, including major solar energy firms such as *Sungold*, *Singfo,* and *CP Solar*, which have flooded the Mongolian market. Looking over the assortment Batukhan admitted that he knew little about the differences between particular models and brands, and so Davanjaam took the lead in negotiating with the retailer by scrutinising their similarities and differences: "*Sungold* definitely make the best solar panels; they are more expensive but will last a longer time. (Pointing at one model) We have this one and have not had any problems". The market

trader also offered his advice: “It is easier to repair than other models and you can easily find spare parts (Pointing at another model) I sold this one to Dorj (a common acquaintance); it is good but heavier. It can also be hard to get spare parts and they are more difficult to repair”. As Batukhan’s household continue to make relatively long migrations between summer and winter pastures it was clear that size and weight were of paramount concern. Indeed, as we shall see below solar panels not only assist with the performance of everyday tasks inside the ger, facilitate the use of other new technologies such as televisions and mobile phones, but also help to maintain mobility in the face of collapsing state support. As the retailer emphasised to Batukhan: “If you want to return to your winter pasture then don’t get a heavy one or one which is difficult to repair; it will make *otor* (mobile herding) difficult”.

After considering Davanjaam’s advice Batukhan selected the same model as his brother and the retailer proposed a suitable recharge terminal, two LED light bulbs, and a large bundle of wires used to connect external appliances. Batukhan then discussed his payment options with the retailer, emphasising his inability to pay for the total cost in full. Many people in the countryside purchase more expensive items such as solar panels by entering into lease-agreements with known market traders. Given Davanjaam’s existing ties to the retailer the pair agreed for Batukhan to pay half of the price in cash and set up a bi-monthly payment plan with no interest for the remaining amount.



(Figure 39. Market trader selling solar panels and related equipment in Mörön – photo by the author)

With each of us carrying a different piece of the solar panel on the back of two motorcycles, we returned to Batukhan’s encampment and set about positioning it in place, first setting up the recharge terminal inside the ger. In most households, people place their recharge terminals in the northern part of their ger, typically beside the household’s most valuable possessions such as their wooden chests, photographs, and mirrors. This is widely recognised to be the most protected place away from the door and where the terminal and wires are least likely to get wet or dirty, and it is also easier for people to reach the terminal to switch on and off the lights at night. While positioning the terminal in place Davanjaam gave Batukhan instructions concerning its use, including how to attach the wires to different electronic appliances and the limitations associated with it: ‘The terminal is like an old generator; it is best not to attach more than two or three electronics otherwise it will lose power. You also cannot big things like refrigerators because there will not be enough power”. The pair then exited the ger and began attaching the panel to the roof of the ger, with myself pushing the wires through the lattice-

framework of the wall. Just as we were about to fix it in place Bayarmaa walked outside to observe the installation and immediately shouted, telling us that we needed to move the panel as that was the area which received the most sunlight and thus was where she positioned the wooden racks to dry aaruul. After sliding the panel further down Davanjaam secured it in place and we re-entered the dwelling to test it. Taking one of the LED bulbs and connecting it to the terminal, the ger was instantly illuminated with a faint but visible light, causing everyone in the family to applaud. Bayarmaa remarked how 'strange' it was to have electric light inside the ger for the first, as well as how different it made everything look inside the dwelling.

The first and most notable benefit of having a solar panel is that it provides electric light inside the ger. As people described, having even a single overhead light bulb made it easier to see and perform everyday tasks. This came to the fore almost immediately after installing the panel and particularly later in the day as the recharge terminal had accumulated more energy and it became sufficiently dark to appreciate the light. Prior to this Batukhan's household used candles to illuminate their ger, something that remains commonplace across the Mongolian countryside. Typically, the household would purchase a large stock of candles every few months and, as the sun would begin to set, they would light one or two candles and position them in different parts of the ger depending on what they were doing. If Bayarmaa was cooking, for example, she put a candle beside to her to illuminate the area in which she was working. Similarly, if Bayarmaa or Batukhan were putting the children to bed a candle would be placed beside them and blown out after the children had fallen asleep. Of course, candles are not particularly bright and, as Bayarmaa explained, they are also bad for the eyes and have the potential to be dangerous in terms of starting fires, something that was described to me by numerous households across the Shishged. Having connected two LED bulbs to the recharge terminal and hung them in the centre of the ger electric light now illuminated much of the dwelling, dramatically increasing visibility and especially brightening those areas that had previously remained dark.



(Figure 40. Davanjaam's ger with solar panel and satellite dish – photo by the author)

Now it is interesting to note that during the first few days after installing the solar panel all members of the household regularly remarked how 'strange' it was to experience electric light inside the ger. Related to this Batukhan and Bayarmaa often complained that the recharge terminal was 'in the way' of pre-existing objects such as those positioned in the northern part of the dwelling, as well as more viscerally as Batukhan bumped his head on multiple occasions

on the hanging bulbs. Over the course of the following days and weeks, however, the solar panel and the electricity it provided gradually came to be embedded into the everyday actions and experiences of the household and used in relation to an increasing number of tasks: preparing the evening meal, searching for or locating things around the ger, putting the children to bed, as well as simply to tidy up the dwelling after a wet or muddy day. By the end of my stay it was noticeable that the solar panel had become a taken-for-granted object inside the ger: it had become integrated or, we might say, 'entangled' (Hodder 2011) into the practices of everyday life, even while it altered such practices at the same time. For example, certain tasks that were previously undertaken outdoors were brought inside and carried out later in the day. Batukhan also began to attach secondary appliances such as his radio and television (see below), while Bayarmaa had shifted certain furniture items around the ger to better access the light. Later in the year Batukhan explained that he had stopped purchasing candles altogether, while the children had themselves become used to "claiming" the light in ways that they could not have done before, such as to play games during the evening or watch their favourite television programmes. Similarly, Bayarmaa jokingly remarked that having electric light meant that she spent more time cleaning than before, specifically as the brighter LED bulbs made dirt and dust more visible. At the same time, the electric light came to add a new ritualised order to the structure of the day, by being switched on and off at roughly the same time and marking the official 'bed time' of the family each and every night.

The process by which the solar panel gradually became incorporated into everyday life has important implications for understanding human-technology relations and how people experience technological change. Indeed, the integration of the panel was – like with any new technology – a cumulative and gradual process, generated in articulation with the practical embodiment and adjustment of skills. By using the technology more and more in relation to everyday tasks and practices – preparing the evening meal, cleaning the ger, and playing games in the evening – what was once seen as a new and 'strange' object that 'took up space' eventually became just another item inside the ger. From this perspective, we can see an important experiential gap between the linear conceptualisation of technological change – and the related notions of 'new' and 'old', 'traditional' and 'modern' – and how it is experienced by people as caught up with the practical concerns of everyday life. Of course, this is not to suggest that new technologies are somehow beyond conscious experience or that people do not reflect on the political and economic conditions associated with their production (such as being Chinese-made). Instead, it is to emphasise the gap that emerges between these conditions and the phenomenological experience of use itself: Mongolian herders, like all human beings, do not experience technological change as distinct from their immediate, taken-for-granted concerns, but rather, as something embedded within the practical unfolding of quotidian tasks and activities. To paraphrase Humphrey and Sneath in the context of other technological changes such as water-carrying trucks, motorised transport, and haycutters, all of these can be used to support the distinctive Inner Asian 'tradition' of mobile herding (1996:199-200). Another important dimension is the impact of solar panels upon herding mobility. This is of particular relevance for those households such as Batukhan's who undertake relatively long migrations and who may not visit regional centres for extended periods of time. Indeed, many households I visited emphasised that having a solar panel had actually allowed them to increase the scale of their movements between seasonal pastures, by making travel more comfortable and safer via the use of complementary technologies such as mobile phones. Connected to this is the fact that solar panels can be dismantled, transported, and erected with little additional effort, something that explains peoples' preferences for smaller and light-

weight models as they can simply be added to existing mobility strategies. As I show below, this has further implications for understanding the differences between what we might call privatised solar energy and other forms of rural electrification as they were implemented during the socialist era, as well as how rural households experience technological change in the late postsocialist context.

Light and Dark: Electrification, Modernisation, and Experience

The advent of electricity has long been characterised as one of the most important technological changes in human history, described as the 'greatest engineering achievement of the 20th Century' (Pursell 1994) and a defining feature of modernisation, including in socialist Mongolia. Indeed, electrification has, and continues to be, equated with the transition from 'traditional life' to 'modernity', laying the foundations for a variety of other technological changes characteristic of the so-called modern era such as industrialisation, urbanisation, and mass communications. In fact electrification has long been seen as not simply a technological change – replacing candles, oil, and gas lamps with electric light, and having health benefits in terms of improving eye-sight and safety – but as an emancipatory and revolutionary innovation with an almost religious quality: by literally 'bringing light' to people electricity is imbued with profound symbolic meanings via associations of light with transcendence, enlightenment, and reason, and darkness with backwardness, evil, and primitive fantasy. This is the case in various historical and ethnographic contexts where electricity has been perceived as a quasi-magical force, something that, as David Sneath writes, has much to do with the spectacle of light and the visible transformation of dark surroundings that it affords: "Brighter, whiter than flame, silent and cool, it banishes shadows and transforms the night. But it works by means that are not evident to the eye – an invisible flow along wires, something quite unlike the movement of physical substances with which we are familiar" (2009:75). It is for this reason why electricity formed such a prominent part of modernisation projects throughout history, including colonialism, missionisation, democratisation, socialism and, in the contemporary era, neoliberal economic development. In the United States the Rural Electrification Administration of the 19th century was fundamentally tied to the urbanisation of the country, articulated through democratic ideals of national development and expansion (Nye 1990), and pioneering many of the electrification schemes still practiced in other parts of the world. In the former Soviet Union electrification also played an important part in the socialist state's 166urbanisation project, something captured in Vladimir Lenin's famous remarks that "Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country" (1966:496-518). Here the so-called GOELRO project – the first ever plan for economic development and the prototype for the USSR subsequent Five-Year Plans – directly equated electricity with modernisation, literally translating the project as the 'State Commission for the Electrification of Russia': "We must now try to convert every electric power station we build into a stronghold of enlightenment to be used to make the masses electricity-conscious" (ibid).

In Mongolia electricity also played a central role in the socialist transformation of the country and was seen as a necessary first-step towards the twin goals of modernisation, namely, urbanisation and industrialisation. Electrification of rural areas was seen as an aspect of socialist modernisation and electric light was installed in regional centres over a vast area in a relatively short period of time (Rossabi 2005; Bawden 1991). Electric light, Sneath writes, became a central symbol of Mongolian modernism, and indeed of the particular political project of Leninist state socialism as it developed in the country: "This new form of light was ideally suited as a vehicle for the particular imaginative construct of modernity and progress

(*hogjil*, *devshil*) as it was powerfully produced by the new revolutionary state" (2009:74-75). This came to be manifested in the socialist propaganda images and artwork of the time, which depicted Mongolia's electrification through brightly illuminated revolutionary figures opposing dark, counter-revolutionary opponents.

Today the electrification of rural areas in the so-called developing world continues to be directly equated with modernisation, playing a central role in national development strategies and the goals of international development and funding organisations. Electrification serves as a prominent vehicle through which state and non-state actors implement and justify modernisation policies, bringing electrical light to rural households in the name of 'modernisation' and laying the foundations for the expansion of industrialisation and urbanisation in previously 'under-developed' regions (Mosse 2005; Hart 1992). Within this narrative electrification continues to be seen as a necessary precursor for the incorporation of rural communities into the broader nation-state, as well as national and international labour markets, and is envisioned as increasing productivity at reduced cost and physically connecting people on par with the expansion of transportation networks. Levels of electrification are widely seen as a measure of national development and 'growth', while the lack of electricity is directly equated with so-called underdevelopment. This is aptly captured in the concept of 'Energy Poverty', which specifically relates the negative well-being of a population with low energy consumption, use of dirty or polluting fuels, and excessive time spent collecting fuel to meet energy needs. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA) (2011) 1.4 billion people around the world do not have access to electricity, of which 83% live in rural areas, a statistic which links electrification with not only modernisation but urbanisation as well.

In recent years the advent of renewable energy has added a new dimension to the electrification process, as well as the correlation between electricity and modernisation. With the development of new technologies such as small-scale wind turbines and solar panels electricity can now be provided to, and accessed by, people with relative ease and at significantly lower cost than standard electrification, something of particular importance in rural and remote areas where standard electricity has yet to be implemented and where the transmission and distribution of energy generated from fossil fuels is difficult and expensive. Indeed, renewable electrification grows faster than grid electrification and national schemes of solar component importers, local manufacturers of batteries and components, as well as hundreds of retailers, are rapidly developing around the world.



(Figure 41. A herder changes a light bulb inside his ger – photo by the author)

From the perspective of international development organisations and funding initiatives the advent of renewable energy is characterised as a revolution in rural electrification, serving as a prominent vehicle for social and economic development. A number of organisations and funding initiatives exist to promote the use of off-grid renewable energy, emphasising its benefits over standard electrification and its adaptability to local conditions. The Alliance for Rural Electrification, for example, promotes the use of private solar energy in the so-called developing world, while the United Nations, World Bank, and various national governments all oversee a range of similar schemes. In Kenya, for example, while only 5% of rural households have access to standard electricity an additional 5% have already been connected to solar electricity systems in the last decade alone, with annual sales of solar modules now reaching 20,000 to 30,000 per year. As a result, an estimated 3 million Kenyan households now obtain their power from private solar energy, making the country the world leader in renewable energy use per capita (IEA 2011). As a United Nations reports put it: "Renewable energy projects in developing countries have demonstrated that renewable energy can directly contribute to poverty alleviation by providing the energy needed for creating businesses and employment. Renewable energy can also make indirect contributions to alleviating poverty by providing energy for cooking, heating, and lighting" (UNDP 2011:134). Here parallels are drawn between off-grid electrification and social and economic development, with small-scale renewables seen as improving people's livelihoods and directly contributing to poverty alleviation.

Studies of rural electrification have typically emphasised its role in integrating rural and previously remote communities into nation-states, including the social, economic and political implications associated with this. The situation with regards to off-grid electricity such as solar panels is rather different. While on-grid electricity is either controlled by the state or private energy companies, solar energy is specifically private and democratic in form, able to be harnessed by individual households and thus capable of facilitating flexible responses without centralised systems of support. In Mongolia, for example, a country where 85% of the population live without standard electricity, the availability of low-cost panels and high-efficiency LED lights - which can light a ger with just 4 watts instead of the standard 60-watt bulb - means that people in even the most remote areas can access electricity and use subsidiary electronic appliances, particularly mobile phones.

Of course, there is an important degree of variability here, for while some herding households have used solar panels to re-facilitate mobility, for others solar panels have played a role in maintaining their reduced mobility, such as those who have already lessened the scale of their migrations and remain more or less 'settled' in or near regional centres. In these cases, solar panels have not increased peoples' movements but further extended their 'sedentarisation', specifically by allowing them to transpose their 'settled' life to their herding encampments. For these households, solar panels are not experienced as a means of facilitating mobility but creating the possibility to live a more comfortable life. This is something that once again shows the variability of experiences associated with technological change and the need to avoid unilinear models and assumptions. As many people emphasised to me throughout the Shishged region, having light inside the ger is simply more comfortable and safe, while their children emphasised that it is nicer to have electronic communications such as televisions and mobile phones.

While, on the one hand, this can be seen as another facet of 'sedentarisation', it is too simplistic to assume a unidirectional change: indeed, as we have seen, for Davanjaam and his

family solar panels have (much as with motorcycles) created an altogether different kind of 'herding life' that is somewhere in-between the countryside and the regional centre. Here we see the variability of people's experiences in the late postsocialist context, as well as the dialectic relationship between integration and building new lifestyles. At the same time, however, it is important not to envision this as a unidirectional change, for as Batukhan's example demonstrates solar electrification actually enables his family to undertake longer migrations than before, suggesting that technological change is not experienced as a transition from 'tradition' to 'modernity' and not solely determining either mobility or sedentarisation.

Solar Panels and Televisions

Besides providing electric light solar panels also allow herding households to use secondary appliances such as those that would not normally be possible without on-grid electricity. By far the most popular of these are televisions, which are fast becoming ubiquitous items across rural Mongolia. Indeed, more than half of all households I visited owned their own television, including in some of the most remote parts of the Shishged, while the remainder emphasised their desire to purchase one in the near future. In fact, televisions were widely described by people as one of the most important benefits of having a solar panel alongside mobile phones, with many households often purchasing the two simultaneously. There are a range of televisions available in rural Mongolia, including larger models typically found in fixed dwellings and smaller models more suitable for herding encampments. Many herding households owned what could best be described as 'micro televisions', which are models measuring not more than thirty centimetres in length and selected specifically because they are low-cost and easy to transport. While the majority of households connected their televisions to small satellite dishes, facilitating reception and connecting encampments to Mongolia's national media network, others simply connected them to DVD players, allowing people to watch movies and play music.

Anthropology has been a relatively late entry into the field of television research, something that reflects the discipline's ambivalence with the medium and its' underlying perception that they are a vehicle of cultural homogenisation. Indeed, television is usually seen as spreading cultural similarity and reducing diversity (Kottak 1999). The lack of television research is certainly true in the context of Mongolia, where few studies have considered the impact of televisions on social life and, in particular, on herding households who have recently acquired televisions as a result of off-grid electrification. As I show below, this is of fundamental importance as television ownership has increased rapidly in the postsocialist era. Furthermore, televisions have the capacity to influence the dissemination of information and knowledge, alter consumption patterns, desires and even shape political values. At the same time televisions are also fundamentally intertwined with herding practices and strategies, helping to facilitate mobility and generating new skills in relation to postsocialist survival.

The field of television research has a long and variegated history and covers a range of themes and issues. Of particular importance for the purposes of this chapter is the widespread perception that televisions act as a vehicle of modernisation, specifically due to the immediacy of the medium and its capacity to disseminate national and international media content (Hall 1973; Bourdieu 1977). Indeed, perhaps more than any other technology televisions are characterised as symbols of modernity itself, connecting people to media networks in real-time and presenting new lifestyles through programmes and advertising, as well as to news and current affairs (Abu-Lughod 2009; Ang 1988).

> Television has become the mass medium of the modern era par excellence. Its steady stream of electronic signals has brought glimpses of the industrialized West into the rural villages of developing countries; momentous events across the globe enter our households as they are occurring. Not only is television a medium which reflects the modern world, but it is also a medium through which modernity actively propels and shapes itself (Zin 1998:21).

While the large majority of research has centred on the content of individual programmes and the control of that content by powerful actors (Schiller 1976; Burton & Franco 1978), a more pertinent issue in the Mongolian context is the effect of televisions on people's everyday practices and experiences. Indeed, televisions have an important role on the experience of daily life by installing a sort of daily rituality through the regularity of programmes, fixed encounters with media stars and personalities, as well as news reports. This has been described in a number of ethnographic contexts where the advent of televisions has been equated with both a transformation of daily routines and modification of people's phenomenological experience of time (Wilk 1995). After all the greatest impact of television lies not in the content of particular programmes but in the concepts of time and distance carried by the immediacy of the medium: "And when television acts as a timepiece, it challenges the temporal basis of the legitimacy of the political and economic order in other societies" (ibid:36). Here the relationship between television and temporality is fundamentally tied to the notion of modernisation, with televisions seen as imposing a specifically 'modern' sense of time on communities yet to be exposed to pre-existing mediums. Comparable with the introduction of the clock in 19th century Europe (Thompson 1951) television is seen as part of the modern attempt to control the lives of citizens, integrating them into the global capitalist priorities of work and accumulation. As Wilk puts it: "With television, the production of information is more and more concentrated, channelled and controlled, and the audience becomes more passive and anonymous. Television manipulates, controls and sells time, serializing the flow of experience, with the goal of profit" (1995:37). Here the implication is that televisions' manipulation of temporality and control of content enforces the dominance of mass-produced, northern capitalist consumer culture (Belk & Zhou 1987; Nordenstreng and Vans 1974).

At the beginning of my stay with Batukhan's household he and his family did not own their own television. A few days after installing the solar panel, however, Hurelbaatar travelled to Ulaan Uul to borrow a micro-television from a friend. He also arranged for one of Bayarmaa's family members to bring an old satellite dish to the encampment, which facilitated access to multiple media channels from Mongolia's national network. On the one hand televisions are certainly watched by people on a regular basis and at various points throughout the day. This came to the fore in Batukhan's household where he and his family watched increasing amounts of television over the days, weeks, and months, at particular times and at regular intervals. Most evenings, for example, Batukhan started watching the national news, which typically involved Bayarmaa as well, who would either stop what she was doing to come and sit with her husband or watch the television from the kitchen area of the ger. Similarly, Bayarmaa herself would watch a number of Korean dramas and films, typically around mid-afternoon, while both Hurelbaatar and his younger sister, Oyun, watched cartoons and music programmes in the late morning. I observed this in other herding households where families would sit together and watch the news at the same time each evening, as well as popular Mongolian soap operas. On a number of occasions, I sat with young people waiting for particular shows to start, as well as with older members of a household to watch political broadcasts. In this regard, the advent of solar panels and televisions can certainly be said to have installed a certain degree of rituality,

influencing people's experiences of time in relation to specific programming in much the same fashion as described in other ethnographic contexts.

Televisions are also experienced as new devices enabling leisure and consumption, as well as connecting people more directly with advertising and national and international media content. This could be seen where households would watch television and express their interest in specific programmes, media stars, and particular features of the national imaginary. When Bayarmaa would watch Korean films and soap operas, for example, she clearly followed the stories closely and identified with certain characters, sharing the narratives with visiting friends and family members who themselves had seen the same shows. Given the relatively recent availability of televisions it is difficult to speculate on their broader implications in shaping consumer desires and experiences of class. Indeed, the proliferation of entertainment serials and televisions has been shown to connect viewers with particular articulations of 'middle-classness' through advertising and consumerism. Whether or not this comes to the fore in rural Mongolia remains to be fully seen, although it is significant to note that the majority of shows Bayarmaa would watch exhibited a lifestyle of consumerism embedded in middle-class aspirations and discourses of modernity, something similarly promulgated through targeted advertising between shows such as for health and beauty products.

Connected to this, televisions also have the potential to connect herding households to national and international events in new ways, allowing them to express national sentiments and express attachments to particular national imaginaries. This could be seen in the daily ritual of watching the national news, but also at key moments such as during the summer when neighbouring families visited Batukhan's household to watch the annual Naadam festival live from Ulaanbaatar. Besides bringing people together and socialising in front of the television, this also generated discussions about Mongolia, the city of Ulaanbaatar, and Mongolian national identity, with people offering comments on a range of cultural and political issues, including the construction of a new stadium built by the Japanese government and complaining about perceived government corruption. In this regard televisions and solar panels combine to connect rural people to the happenings of the broader nation-state, something that might arguably have important implications for political consciousness as well.

It is important to recognise, however, that although televisions are increasingly watched and serve to connect people to new media networks, it would be wrong to assume that they are experienced in unilinear terms - as somehow instilling an 'urban' experience or as unproblematically connecting people to a unified national imaginary. Indeed, while I do not deny the power of television to facilitate these kinds of changes, people's experiences of televisions are too complex and finely textured to be forced into a simple pattern of modernisation, homogenisation, and the so-called erosion of local cultural autonomy (also see Wilk 1995; Arnould and Wilk 1984). Approached from the perspective of skilled practice we see the variability of people's experiences and their active uses and negotiations with the technology for their own needs, specifically in relation to ongoing uncertainties associated with the postsocialist context. For example, televisions are also harnessed specifically for herding strategies. Most notably, people watch their television to get regional and up-to-date weather information, and use the information to decide when to move between pastures and rotate their herds. At the same time, having a television affords access to other important forms of information such as market prices of herd animals and animal-products – particularly those that are dictated by global fluctuations such as cashmere and wool – and which directly affect people's strategies and herd composition. On numerous occasions, I heard families discussing the prices of cashmere while watching the news and whether or not they should sell their goats

to the Chinese or Russian markets.

This could also be seen in the different experiences and uses of televisions in relation to different seasons. I found that while in the more relaxed summer months, families tended to spend up to a few hours a day watching television and catching up on particular shows, in the busier spring and autumn months many watched little or no television at all. This came to the fore towards the end of my stay with Davanjaam as we prepared ourselves to pack up the encampment and move to the regional centre. A few days before Batukhan had arrived to assist his younger brother to dismantle the ger and pack up their belongings. Throughout this time Davanjaam and his family watched television only a few times, typically the news and to get weather information. Here the daily rituality that I had seen emerge in the warmer months dissipated and was replaced by the practical concerns of herding life. On another occasion Davanjaam and I visited a neighbouring household as they themselves prepared to migrate to their winter encampment. Upon arrival, the household gave their television to Davanjaam to transport to a family member in Mörön, specifically explaining that they would not need it at the winter encampment: "In the winter months we are too busy to watch television; there is too much work to do. My sons watch too much television during the summer and in the winter, there is too much to do". Such examples are important as they problematise the assumption that televisions result in a unilinear experience of technological change. Indeed, although televisions do have a clear and visible impact upon daily life, including influencing the temporal structure of a single day, this is not necessarily a permanent change but is dependent on the wider context in which herders are using the technology.

Solar Panels and the Limits of Repair

It is important to recognise that the advent of solar energy has not only created new benefits and opportunities but has also brought about certain limitations for herding households. Much as with motorcycles described above, because all solar panels are manufactured outside the country they integrate people into international commodity markets and make them susceptible to prices and the laws of supply and demand, which in turn influence people's economic decision-making and wider livelihood strategies. As described Batukhan was forced to enter into a lease-agreement with the market trader to acquire his solar panel, specifically as he was unable to make the purchase in full. The solar panel was by far the most expensive item his family had ever bought, and it required them to save for approximately six months. As a result, throughout the lease-period he and his family were forced to stay in or around the regional centre much more so they could better market their animal products and avoid the price fluctuations typically associated with utilising middle-men. Having to meet this additional cost, coupled with the rising cost of fuel to travel to the centre by motorcycle, this not only problematised the household's economic independence but further integrated them into the national economy. From this perspective, the advent of solar energy cannot simply be seen as unproblematically facilitating mobility and resulting in new kinds of autonomy. Indeed, renewable energy can in some cases signify a new economic dependency akin to that of regular electrification, which problematises the developmentalist narrative that small-scale renewables inevitably result in unilinear positive change.

Connected to this are the limitations associated with using a solar panel in the postsocialist era, as well as the practical need to use candles in the changing seasons. Indeed, given the possibility that one's solar panel will encounter technical difficulties, as well as the high cost and necessary travel involved to effectuate repairs, it would make little practical sense to replaces one's candles entirely. This came to the fore in Davanjaam's household as the solar

panel stopped working one day and we were left without electric light for a number of weeks. While Davanjaam contemplated whether to pay and have the solar panel repaired, Endelger simply took out more candles during the evenings and once again used them to illuminate the ger. At the same time, while the LED bulbs are certainly brighter than candles, they are also an additional cost and it is only possible to connect a maximum of two light bulbs to the majority of small recharge terminals, as otherwise the energy will be drained too quickly. This is the case, in particular, during the autumn and winter months when there are less hours of sunshine and households tend to use more energy, such as to listen to the radio (see below). This is something I came to experience in all of the households that I visited, where solar panels and electric light had not replaced, but rather complemented, the use of candles. As people explained, while having a solar panel certainly meant that they bought less candles it was impossible to rely on electric light alone, and having candles made practical sense to complement certain limitations.

Another important aspect of this concerns the specific technological limitations associated with solar panels. Indeed, because the technology consists of materials and electronic components that are not easily available in all regions of Mongolia, people are often forced to travel or remain close to those areas where spare-parts can be acquired should they encounter technical difficulties. For example, while all spare parts are readily available in the provincial capital of Mörön, many items were not easy to acquire in smaller regional centres such as Ulaan Uul. I encountered households with both solar panels and small wind turbines that were simply not in use. In all cases the reason given was that the technology had broken and either the household could not afford to have them repaired or they were waiting for spare parts to be delivered. This further reveals the structural limitations associated with technological change in the late postsocialist context, particularly in rural areas, and suggests that households might not experience renewable electrification as a unilinear process but demands that they flexibly shift between having and not having access to electricity at different times.

Connected to this are the structural limitations associated with the kinds of skills that people are able to generate in relation to particular new technologies. Thus, while in the case of motorcycles many people have been able to overcome their economic integration by developing skills such as mechanical repair, this is far more difficult in the case of solar panels. Not only does the technology require more specialist skills and knowledge that are not easily learnt, but as they comprise materials such as photovoltaic cells that are not used in other new technologies solar panels are virtually impossible to 'take apart' and 'put back together'. As a result, and, to a greater extent than motorcycles, they integrate people more tightly into wider networks of expertise, economic relations, and need for support.

Communicating while Moving: Mobile Phones in Herding Life

Mobile phone usage has soared in Mongolia since the postsocialist transition, particularly over the last decade as people in both rural and urban areas have taken advantage of the availability of new low-cost phones flooding the local market, as well as the expansion and improvement of mobile phone networks. As in many parts of the world, the large majority of Mongolia's rural population never had access to a land line telephone before acquiring their first mobile phone (Horst & Miller 2006). This is something which signifies a particular technological 'leap' and has important implications for how mobile phones are experienced in the postsocialist context.

There is a burgeoning literature on mobile phones and their implications upon social life Wajcman 2007; Katz and Aakhus 2002; Nawfus & Tracey 2002; Elliot & Lemert 2009; Geser 2004), though few studies have considered their impact on already mobile communities such

as in Mongolia. The only notable exception is Stammler's (2009) fascinating account of mobile phone usage among reindeer herders in the Russian North which, as I show below, has both similarities and important differences to the Mongolian case. The standard analysis of mobile phones is that they facilitate new forms of communication, mobility, and flexibility (Gladarev 2006), while simultaneously intersecting with and affecting existing social, economic, and gender relations, as well as hierarchies between the generations. As I show below, while much of this applies to the Mongolian case, the situation is more complex as communities are already mobile to varying degrees and thus the technology does not necessarily increase mobility but rather intersects with - and demands - new types of movement and practices.

The Anthropology of Mobile Phones in Mongolia and Beyond

Much as in other parts of the world (Wajcman 2007; Katz and Aakhus 2002; Nawfus & Tracey's 2002; Elliot & Lemert 2009; Geser 2004), Mongolia has experienced a rapid distribution of mobile phones since they were first made available in the late 1990s, and particularly as costs have reduced for both phones and pre-paid SIM cards over the last decade. In a place such as the Shishged, where distances between people, regional centres, and services are vast, mobile phones have radically changed the experience of communication and the possibilities for generating livelihood strategies. For the first time on the grasslands, mobile phones afford direct and private communication between households, dramatically diminishing space and allowing people to convey real-time information over large distances. While many herding households had access to radios during the socialist period, the use and experience of these differed considerably. Radios were typically provided by the collectives to convey official information such as news and weather updates, facilitating only 'one way' communication from *sum* centres (and the state) to individual households. As many people told me, although most households had a radio they were not very reliable. As they were also dependent on battery power, many herders only used them intermittently such as to listen to the national news or when the negdels announced seasonal movements between pastures.

Mobile phones afford flexible, personalised, and 'two-way' communication directly between people and households on a day-to-day basis. They are small enough to be carried 'on the move' both within families and 'on' individuals themselves. Most households kept a mobile phone somewhere within the ger, while people also carried their phone themselves at particular times or had a second phone inside their *deel*. Unlike radios, mobile phones can be recharged directly at home via the electricity provided by solar panels, and are thus far more integrated into people's livelihood strategies. Davanjaam and his family owned two mobile phones during the time of my fieldwork, one kept by Davanjaam and Endelger, and a second by Fenger. As with many households, mobile phones have become ubiquitous items in their everyday lives, used on a regular basis for a variety of both social and practical purposes. As Davanjaam explained, he first purchased a mobile phone in 2009, followed by his oldest son in 2011. Throughout my time with the household Davanjaam's youngest son, Bulgur, also petitioned his father to buy him a phone, though Davanjaam explained it was unnecessary and too expensive. Last year, in 2017, I heard from a mutual friend in the Shishged that Davanjaam had finally agreed to buy Bulgur a phone as well.

Herding households use mobile phones for a variety of social and practical purposes in the postsocialist era, including to communicate while moving across the landscape, arrange for the delivery and collection of goods, to call upon medical and veterinary services, as well as to facilitate trade and sales by contacting middle-men and market sellers. During a typical month, Davanjaam's household would use their phone at least a few times per week, such as to

arrange for the delivery of white foods and animal products to family members, to contact neighbouring households to assist in tasks such as moving between encampments or castrating animals, to market their products through settled retailers, as well as to inform kin relations when they would be visiting the regional centre. At the same time, they used their phones for less frequent but similarly important practices such as to coordinate herding with members of their khot-ail, to organise hunting trips into the taiga, as well as to generally socialise and keep up to date on the latest news and gossip. Importantly, they sent a larger number of text messages alongside a smaller number of phone calls. Thus, as I show below, not only makes economic sense but is also more conducive to the practical limitations associated with mobile networks in the Mongolian countryside.

Unlike with motorcycles, which have been fully integrated into the practices of herding, I rarely observed Davanjaam and Fenger using their phones while out on the pastures. The only exceptions were to update one another on the location of missing herd animals and to give instructions to return to the encampment during changeable weather conditions. This is significant as it highlights the context-specific nature of mobile phone usage among herding households, as well as the ways in which they become integrated according to existing practices, rather than replace practices themselves. On one occasion, I was visiting a neighbouring encampment where a number of goats had gone missing; after thirty minutes of searching, the household received a phone call from another neighbour to say they had been spotted on the other side of the valley. I also saw people use their phones to call hospitals in medical emergencies, to organise for the transportation of veterinary medicine, and to arrange for children to be driven to regional centres at the start and end of the school year. In this regard, while in sedentary and urbanised settings people are often characterised as using their phones (and surfing the internet) throughout the day (on trains, while at work, walking, etc.) - which has explicitly changed the structure of daily life itself (Katz and Aakhus 2002) - here herders used their phones for more specific tasks rather than as part of a new "mobile phone lifestyle".

As people nevertheless emphasised, mobile phones were rapidly becoming fundamental tools in their everyday lives. They enabled households to harness broader networks of support and, much as with motorised transport, they inevitably impacted the timing of everyday practices. They therefore have major consequences for the learning of new skills and transposition of skills in new contexts of human-technology relations.



(Figure 42. An advertisement for Mobicom (Mongolia Telecom), featuring a herder and his mobile phone – photo by the author)

Mobile phones first appeared in rural areas during the late-1990s. At that time, charging mobile phones had been difficult because of a lack of solar panels, with people travelling to regional centres to access electricity and pay to leave their phones at charge points in specific shops for days, weeks, or even months at a time. With the availability of solar panels, however, charging can be done while on the move without payment, and allows the technology to be better integrated into people's already mobile lifestyles. Connected to this, the majority of people use mobile SIM cards purchased on a pre-paid basis, which means they can avoid the restrictions and higher costs associated with fixed and long-term contracts. However, topping up these SIM cards can pose certain problems, such as if households are away from regional centres for extended periods of time or in locations at a distance from regional centres. This is something similarly described by Stammler (2009:62) in the context of the Russian North, where reindeer herders are often reliant on settlement-based friends or kin relations to charge their SIM cards. I found that the majority of herders in Mongolia kept close track of how much credit they had left on their phones and when to call family members in regional centres asking them to 'add credit'. Typically, this would then be followed by a trip to the centre at some point to pay the respective person, with households keeping records of their monthly phone usage and debt payments. This reliance on wider networks is interesting as it problematises the perceived increased possessive-individualism typically associated with mobile phone usage (Elliot & Lemert 2009:129). Indeed, as people explained, having a working phone was entirely dependent upon already existing networks of support, and this again highlights the fluid connections between the mobile and sedentary sections of rural life.

Katz and Aakhus (2002) have edited a thorough account of mobile phone usage. Particularly important for our analysis in relation to skills and generational change is Nawfus & Tracey's (2002:219) contribution concerning how mobile phones affect people's sense of personhood. They identify a greater enthusiasm for mobile phones among young people, who base their identity on the private communication afforded by the technology and the ways in which this accentuates generational difference. Lemish and Cohen (2005) posit a gendered dimension to mobile phones, which are said to be used and experienced differently by men and women, and intersect with particular constellations of taste and aesthetics. Geser (2004) also provides an important account, arguing that mobile phones make social life more 'flexible' and 'unpredictable', associated with what is seen as a new form of nomadism generated by their use. This is a view shared by Kopomaa (2000), who argues that mobile phones have accelerated people's experience of freedom, or what he terms the increased "elasticity of life". As Stammler (2009: 70) writes in summarising these works: "[Mobile phones] are indicative of a new 'nomadic social participation' (Geser 2004: 21) among sedentary city-dwellers, particularly the young generation who use the technology to forge and maintain social networks".

In Mongolia, mobile phones appear to be having comparable effects on social relations, gender constructions, and generational change, but with particular cultural dynamics. Concerning mobility and freedom, for example, it must be remembered that in the Mongolian countryside people of different kinds were already mobile long before the advent of mobile technology. This is the case not only with mobile herding households, but more generally across the wider population. As we have seen in Chapter 2, even village-dwellers are to some extent nomadic as they move between different kinds of residence and lifestyle at different times of the year. In this regard, the impact of mobile phones on people's mobility and senses of freedom has taken different forms for particular groups. These differences are significant as they highlights the variability of people's uses and experiences of mobile phones, and thus

problematises the notion of a unilinear technological change. Approaching them from the perspective of skilled practice allows one to bring this variability to the fore and render visible the multiple ways people experience technological change.

For example, for those who live more or less permanently in regional centres, mobile phones do indeed facilitate new forms mobility and inculcate new skills. It is relatively easy for these people to charge their phones at home because of the availability of electricity and, even if they themselves move about, are typically only a few hours or days away from electricity sources. These people use their phones to more easily contact friends, family members, and business associates, which is important given the lack of stable employment and need for economic flexibility in the postsocialist context. I observed many rural residents across the Shishged using their phones to coordinate trade or sales, to seek out informal work, to facilitate transport when travelling to Mörön or Ulaanbaatar, as well as to call herding kin relations when they wished to visit the grasslands. The situation for so-called 'semi-sedentarised' herders is somewhat different. Mobile phones also facilitate new connections and opportunities, though not necessarily associated with movement. They too could easily charge their phones while living in regional centres because of access to electricity, and like other rural residents used phones to coordinate trade or sales, to seek out informal work, and to facilitate transport. In this regard, the flexibility afforded by mobile phones has direct applicability to such people whose livelihood strategies are themselves highly flexible, cutting across the divisions between settled and nomadic, urban and rural. Importantly, many used their phones to coordinate herding their animals on the outskirts of regional centres by calling friends and kin relations to borrow motorcycles and 'check on the herds', as described above. They also used their phones to contact middle-men and market their animal products, as well as full-time herding kin relations when it was time to integrate their animals into the latter's' herds at seasonal movements. Much as with motorcycles, mobile phones thus play an important role in enabling semi-sedentarised herders to maintain their animals, to ensure the grasslands around regional centres are not overgrazed, as well as to facilitate their particular lifestyles 'in-between' the mobile and the sedentary.

For full-time herders practicing long distance animal herding, the situation is again different. While, on the one hand, mobile phones afford new modes of communication and increased networks of support, they do not necessarily accelerate the experience of 'freedom' or 'mobility as described above. This is because, unlike more sedentary communities, such households are already mobile to a significant extent, and thus experience mobile phones from within the context of their already existing mobile relations, both to each other and to the landscape. In this regard, mobile phones do not make life more 'elastic' in Kopomaa's (2000) words, specifically as life is already characterised by a high degree of elasticity.

This is a theme also taken up by Stammler (2009) in his account of reindeer herders in the Russian North. He posits that mobile phones do not increase elasticity but to some extent reduces it. This is because mobile phones render the experience of communication more formalised between herders, by heightening the sense of planning and coordination within daily life: "planning security increases, moments are stated more precisely, and life becomes less "elastic"" (ibid:70). This is partly true in the Mongolia case. For example, I observed herding households call each other to organise movement between pastures or to acquire assistance such as to castrate animals at particular times of the year. Using a mobile phone meant that this would be agreed upon beforehand at set times and days. In this regard, there certainly is an increased level of formality brought about by mobile phones, with people

planning events more precisely and coordinating activities according to a greater degree of fixity.

It is important to recognise, however, that this is by far a universal change, and I also observed people making more flexible arrangements alongside these formalised meetings. For example, people often made phone calls to arrange a time and date, but then these arrangements were altered or ignored. At other times, a specific date would be set for a particular activity, but then a visitor would physically arrive to "drink tea" and reschedule. In addition, a phone call would often be made to arrange some activity, but it would only be designated approximately such as "in March" or "later in the Spring". This reveals - at least in the Mongolian case - a different attitude to 'time' which problematises Stammler's argument that mobile phones increase formality and planning. I myself had to get used to this when trying to arrange interviews with specific people. Sometimes I would call ahead to a particular person and arrange what I thought to be a fixed date. However, after travelling for hours on horseback I would arrive to find that the person had disappeared, 'gone hunting', or moved to a neighbouring encampment for a few days or to a regional centre to do some trading. While at first this caused me some frustration, I was told repeatedly that "this is just how people are in the countryside" or that "in the countryside time is different". We have already seen that life in the countryside is characterised by a high degree of flexibility, specifically demanded because of the uncertain economic situation. Thus, if an opportunity arises to 'do some trading' or 'go and dig gold', people will take it. While I would agree, therefore, that mobile phones have the capacity to increase planning and a wider sense of formality in social relations – and in some instances in Mongolia they do - I would not go so far as to state that mobile phones are having a unilinear reduction of the 'elasticity' of life. Instead, they are incorporated into particular contextual settings and practices, such as to organise movement between pastures at particular times and dates, but still within a wider context of experiential elasticity. In other words, I detect a linear characterisation in Stammler's account which does not, at least in the Mongolian case, fully capture the wide variety of interactions I observed. I would suggest we look more closely at how mobile phones intersect with people's everyday practices (including those where their impact is negligible), rather than assuming a particular "direction" to the changes they bring about. While certainly mobile phones affect existing practices such as how people coordinate their time and planning, this must also be set against a pre-existing context of more general flexibility with regards to 'clock time' in the countryside and amidst the ongoing uncertainties associated with life in the postsocialist era.

A characteristic feature of herding life is that a visitor can come any time and receive accommodation and food, what Stammler describes in the Siberian context as the 'law of the tundra' but which in Mongolia may be characterised as the 'law of the countryside'. This unwritten rule is certainly present in Mongolia and also amongst Evenki communities in Inner Mongolia (Fraser 2010), with different people regularly and informally 'dropping by' throughout the year, sometimes staying for a few hours and other times for multiple days. Stammler (2009:63-4) asserts that in the Siberian case mobile phones alter the entire structure of such visits, and thus the experience of face-to-face contact. As people can and usually do "call ahead" by first announcing the dates and times of their visits this, Stammler writes, reduces the element of surprise and excitement to see their neighbours. This is again partly true in Mongolia, and I travelled with many herders who first made a phone call before visiting neighbouring encampments. For them, this made practical sense to ensure that someone was home and, similarly, this enabled the host to prepare for their visit. It is true that this reduced the element of surprise and possibly 'excitement' to see their neighbours, but this was by no

means universal. On many other occasions people arrived completely unexpectedly and were always offered tea, food, and the possibility of accommodation. In this regard, while mobile phones certainly do affect the experience of face-to face-contact by people 'calling ahead', this occurs alongside the maintenance of pre-mobile phone forms of communication such as 'dropping by announced' and has not diminished the so-called 'law of the countryside'.

It is also important to recognise that mobile phones are not used by herding households throughout the year, specifically as a result of the structural limitations associated with mobile networks in the Mongolia countryside. When staying with households at their winter encampments, for example, mobile phones were rarely used, specifically as they no longer had enough credit and mobile reception was not available. Importantly, this was never seen as a cause for concern and people simply accepted they would have periods of time 'without connectivity'. This is certainly different to sedentary contexts where constant mobile connectivity is considered the norm. This is significant as it demonstrates the specifically partial ways herders incorporate mobile phones into their livelihood strategies and thus experience technological change, using them at particular times only and in appropriate contexts but not seeing them as a dependable tool in their daily lives. While mobile phones are thus integrated into people's livelihood strategies, they are not necessarily experienced as a permanent technological change, especially for more mobile herding households who undertake longer distance migrations. While I saw many families use their phones to arrange for the collection of supplies or to sell animal products to market when staying closer to regional centres (within the catchment area of the mobile network), these practices were not seen as dependent on mobile phones or a replacement for existing practices and modes of communication. Thus, the same people would still travel by horseback and motorcycle to neighbouring encampments and regional centres, to collect supplies, arrange sales, etc. In this regard, while mobile phones may intersect with non-mobile phone related skills such as animal herding, people are aware they cannot be totally reliant on them given the physical and structural limitations associated with their use.



(Figure 43. Davanjaam visits the bank in Ulaan Uul to recharge his SIM card – photo by the author)

Mobile phones are used and experienced differently between the generations. Perhaps not surprisingly, it is mostly older-generation herders who suggested that mobile phones were "changing the pace of life", as younger friends and family members would be, in their own

words, “always on their phones” and “never sitting down”. As Stammler (2009:70) notes, studies in sedentary contexts have shown that mobile phones do indeed reduce the frequency of so-called ‘idle-time’, whereby any ‘free’ moment is now filled by using a mobile phone, such as to talk business, socialise, send text messages, or surf the internet. It is interesting to speculate here how this might come to impact more mobile communities such as in Mongolia, as telecommunication technology improves and particularly as mobile internet becomes the norm. For example, since a good deal of so-called ‘idle-time’ in herding life is usually spent out on the grasslands, and performing important tasks such as observing the herds, weather, and making preparation for seasonal changes, this might well conflict with new forms of mobile connectivity. As one herder described it: “Mobile phones are good but it also means young people are less attentive. I get sick of them always playing on their phones”. However, given the ongoing limitations associated with mobile networks in the Mongolian countryside, and the season-specific uses of them among more mobile herding households, these changes are likely to be progressive rather than ‘revolutionary’ in kind.

Mobile phones are used by a diverse range of people in rural Mongolia, including men and women, girls and boys, young and old. However, the ways different people use their phones and therefore experience technological change differs between social groups. For example, it is clearly the younger generation who are at the forefront of mobile phone use. This is to be expected because the majority of youth spend more than half the year living in rural centres attending boarding school, where mobile phone ownership (and good quality mobile reception) is greatest. For rural youth, mobile phones are an important aspect of their social identities and it is commonplace to see young people not only text messaging, sending images, and surfing the internet on their phones, but also talking about different models and brands. In this way, mobile phones are creating new spaces for socialisation which will require further consideration in the future, as well as a vehicle through which new tastes and lifestyle expectations are expressed.

This has particular relevance for the generation of new skills and generational differences, with rural youth developing phone related skills most rapidly and in many cases serving as their entry points into herding households. This has important implications for the transformation of generational expertise, as mobile phones grant rural youth skills specific to their age and ability at harnessing new human-technology relations. On many occasions, I observed older-generation herders (who were less familiar with phones) ask the children in a household to ‘use their phones’ for specific purposes, such as to arrange for the delivery of goods from regional centres or to call family members. Younger men and boys, in particular, are highly active in teaching their fathers’ generation how to use mobile phones and demonstrating their practical uses beyond communication (also see Stammler 2009), such as taking photos of grassland quality to monitor degradation (see below). This is something that will continue to change as mobile phones become more established and generations age. Not only with their use increase but also come to intersect more explicitly with a wider range of livelihood practices, which is sure to have consequences for the inculcation of new skills and the teaching and learning of skills between the generations.

Mobile phones also have gendered dimensions in terms of taste, aesthetics, and perceptions of use. I found that young men are most interested in the technical aspects of mobile phones, including their speed, storage of memory, quality of camera, and generally use their phones for purposes beyond immediate communication. Increasingly amongst this group, the type of phone a person has and its technical capabilities are considered just as important as other new technologies such as motorcycles described above. This is similarly noted by Stammler (2009:

66) among Nenets reindeer herders, where technologically sophisticated mobile phones have entered local narratives of value and are seen as symbols of prestige amongst young men. Of course, younger men also use their phones for leisure activities too, such as playing games, downloading music, as well as capturing photos and videos and surfing the internet. It is significant therefore that this group are most able to flexibly adapt their phones between leisure and livelihood strategies, suggesting a concretisation of skills associated with particular social groups and human-technology relations. Middle-aged and older men typically use mobile phones for livelihood strategies only, such as to organise the movement of herd animals, delivery of goods, and networking with relatives. I observed Davanjaam only using his phone when discussing herding matters, such as talking with neighbours about timing of migrations, pasture use, slaughter, and even with NGOs to discuss local environmental issues. I never saw him sending pictures or videos, downloading music, or playing games.

Women appear to use mobile phones for more leisure and social activities, something also reported by Stammler (2009:66). An important use is to exchange news and gossip with neighbours and relatives, as well as maintaining contact between herding households and friends and family in regional centres. Throughout my time with the household Endelger used their phone to chat with friends and family members both in neighbouring encampments and in Ulaan Uul. On one occasion, a group of her female friends arrived by motorcycle to spend the day, drinking tea and sharing stories. Much of their time was also spent exchanging ringtones and playing games on their phones, as well as discussing the outward appearance of their various handsets. Here mobile phones create new spaces for socialisation among particular gendered groups, as well as a vehicle through which new distinctions of gender-specific taste and consumer demands can be articulated.

It is interesting to speculate here on the future influence of mobile phones as phones themselves undergo further technological change, such as with regards to the availability and improvement of cameras, video, and voice recording capabilities (also see Stammler 2009:73). By the end of my fieldwork in 2013 increasing numbers of rural youth were themselves having access to digital recording via their mobile phones, which is sure to facilitate new forms of communication and identity-making such as by sending images and videos and sharing visual content over social media and the internet. I also observed households using their cameras for tasks related to pasture management. On one occasion, Davanjaam and I visited a wealthy household on the edge of Lake Khövsgöl which owned a comparatively large herd of approximately 750 animals. As there had been an ongoing dispute between the households of the area and local developers seeking to build tourist accommodation along the lake, the head of the household used his camera phone to take pictures and video of the development and showed these to both the regional mayor and a local NGO, specifically to capture the apparent damage to the grasslands and strengthen their case. As the use of camera phones increases it is highly likely that they will not only be used to communicate but also for dispute resolution and the very strategies of pasture management, particularly in the context of climate change. On another occasion, I met a household on the outskirts of Ulaan Uul who were using their phone to take pictures of the degradation of the grasslands. When asked what they intended to do with them they explained they were documenting the degradation on behalf of a Mongolian NGO who had been working with herders in the area. Such examples point to the potential future of mobile technology in a rapidly transforming environment, something that has already been reported among herding communities in East Africa, where people use their mobile phones to record ecological information such water levels and the number of households and livestock using particular waterholes (Butt 2014). This will certainly continue in Mongolia as

more households acquire phones and use them to take photographs and videos, as well as possibly uploading them to the internet via networks such as YouTube. In this way, mobile phones become new tools for environmental management, monitoring the condition of the grasslands, and even perhaps staking claims to particular areas or water sources in situations of climate induced conflict.

Mobile Phones, Social Change, and the Limits of Communication

It is important to recognise that not all regions of Mongolia are connected to mobile coverage. As a result, their use is dependent on people accessing mobile networks, which in turn affects their patterns of mobility and relationship to the landscape itself. Particularly given Mongolia's sparse population and lack of infrastructure in rural areas, it is not only the presence or absence of phones, but also, access to mobile networks that are crucial to facilitate communication and information flow. This further differentiates people's experiences of technological change and creates new divisions between households based on mobile phone usage. Away from regional centres, mobile coverage is either poor, sporadic, or not available at all, depending on the location. This has important implications for the variegated ways people can use their phones and thus experience technological change.

For less mobile households and so-called semi-sedentarised herders, the location of mobile networks plays a fundamental role in influencing their movements and where they choose to erect their summer and winter encampments. Indeed, because mobile reception was almost universally available in and/or near to regional centres, many households specifically erected their gers at a distance appropriate to mobile reception, much as they did with motorcycles. Through this they could still graze their animals on what remained suitable pastures while retaining the ability to utilise their phones to communicate with friends, family, and business contacts. In this regard, I would not characterise mobile phones as having a singular effect upon households in rural Mongolia, but rather, they intersect with people's existing skills across different levels of rural life. Different households incorporate them to varying degrees depending on their social, economic, and spatial context. They are an apt example of the way in which new technologies do not replace, but rather, become 'entangled' (Hodder 2011) within existing practices. I once asked a friend to draw a map of Ulaan Uul and the surrounding area, and was surprised to see that he drew a series of concentric rings emanating from the regional centre, which showed his knowledge of where mobile reception began and ended. While I could not precisely check the validity of this it is significant to see how mobile phones and their broader field of communication appear to be incorporated into people's conceptualisations of the landscape, as well as their changing practical engagement with the landscape through the new technology. Of course, there is an important element of differentiation here: while those households who stay more or less permanently in the vicinity of regional centres are able to use their phones more frequently in relation to a wider range of strategies, more mobile communities, however, tend to use their phones more restrictively, typically only during particular seasons and for more important decisions such as acquiring medicine or veterinary care. Indeed, it is the most mobile households who undertake long-distance multi-season herding that use mobile phones the least, typically only when at their summer and spring encampments, for in winter they travel out of reach of mobile networks. In this regard, there is a counter relationship between the mobility of a household and the use of mobile phones, something that not only affects their uses and intersection with existing skills and practices, but which is sure to remain for the expected future as mobile networks only partially expand to the more remote areas of Mongolia.



(Figure 44. A trip to the "post-office" to use a mobile phone – photo by the author)

The issue of limited mobile coverage was described in the Introduction, where Hurelbaatar travelled to the 'post office' to use their mobile phone because of the sporadic coverage away from the regional centre. This came to the fore throughout my time with herding households, particularly in those areas still poorly or unconnected to mobile networks. This exemplifies the ongoing limitations associated with life in the postsocialist context and also problematises the purported connectivity associated with the 'globalisation' of telecommunications: many places, such as across the majority of the Shishged Depression, remain unconnected.

It is interesting to note that despite the limitations of using mobile phones in the Mongolian landscape, they were still used to varying extents and even in some of the most remote parts, and travelling to the post-offices was simply seen as an additional aspect in using one's phone. Of course, this has become a fundamental aspect of how people harness mobile phones for herding strategies and has transformed how herders perceive and experience the landscape. Indeed, all people I encountered were aware of a wide range of 'post-offices' in different areas, and knowledge of these was something shared between the generations and between households. In addition, people had developed other novel ways of using their phones despite limited connectivity. For example, I travelled with people not only to 'post-offices' to make phone calls but to areas where they could intermittently 'catch' just enough mobile reception to send text messages. For this, people typically typed the message into their phones beforehand and, immediately upon clicking 'send', they would hurl their phones up into the air where reception was stronger. People also did this by climbing onto the back of vehicles or ox-carts in an attempt to achieve the height of mobile signals. While this only worked intermittently it again demonstrates people's flexible responses and new skills in relation to the limitations associated with using new technological devices. Of course, the use of text messages is especially convenient because people can remain in contact even when not in the range of network coverage. Just as with Hurelbaatar, people can send messages and, whenever the phone of the recipient is in range of network coverage, they can be received (also see Stammler 2009:66). This is significant as it may take minutes, hours, or even days for the recipient to come into range of network coverage and thus receive the message, which further highlights the partial ways people experience mobile phones and technological change. While

in sedentary contexts mobile phones are associated with direct forms of communication, in these cases people do not communicate directly but in an extended way over periods of time.

Stammler (2009:65-6) argues that text messages might acquire a particular position among herding households as they afford a non-verbal form of communication in a context where non-verbal communication is valued. In the Russian North, for example, a locally embedded 'culture of silence' makes mobile phones particularly conducive to existing modes of social interaction, a tool that "extends beyond the verbal sphere, and yet allow expression of emotions, for instance, through the application of 'emoticons' (smileys, etc.)" (ibid). This is also similar to China where I have observed a definite preference for messages to real-time voice calling, specifically through the social media platform *WeChat*. In Mongolia, people did tend to prefer text messaging to phone calls, though this was generally explained in practical terms as text messages are cheaper and because of the intermittent access to stable mobile networks. Stammler's point is important, however, as it highlights issues surrounding the phenomenological experience of mobile phone use in different cultural contexts, as well as its implications upon unarticulated dimensions of sociality such as non-verbal communication and embodied emotional responses. I definitely observed younger generation people prioritising text messages over phone calls when communicating with their generational peers, while phone calls were preferred when they communicated with older people. This can be seen as intersecting with particular notions of sociality and respect, for while text messaging affords more informal communication conducive to younger social relations, phone calls are more formalised and thus relative to existing hierarchies of age and respect between young and old.

Mobile phones also highlight important levels of differentiation between wealthier and poorer households, specifically in terms of the kind of mobile phone they can afford. While the majority of people own standard mobile phones, and thus have to negotiate the practical limitations associated with using them in a remote landscape, a small but increasing number of wealthier households have satellite phones which can be used virtually anywhere in the country. This is an important example of the way in which new technologies intersect with pre-existing patterns of economic differentiation and, through their incorporation, actually reify those patterns over time. Indeed, there is a significant economic benefit of being able to use a satellite phone from anywhere in the landscape, as it enables a higher degree of flexibility to market one's animal products, more easily contact traders and middle men, as well as better ensure the health and well-being of one's herd. It will be interesting to see how this progresses as satellite phones become cheaper and the impact upon existing patterns of economic differentiation.

Herders in Mongolia have always adapted to technological changes in their environment. As mobile networks become more expansive and the use of mobile phones increases, they have the potential for dramatic social and economic changes among both mobile and non-mobile communities. Unlike other new technologies, they are relatively low-cost and do not result in major internal stratification. They are easy to acquire, maintain, and do not need expensive spare parts; they are light and easy to take along, and can easily be integrated into people's movements and strategies. They also require minimal energy that can be provided from solar panels, and they connect people not only to their neighbours but, through the internet and social media, to people and groups in the rest of the world, something that is sure to have broader implications in the future.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the availability and use of new technologies in herding life, specifically motorcycles, solar panels, and mobile phones. I showed how these are fast becoming ubiquitous features of life throughout rural Mongolia, incorporated into herding practices, generating alternate livelihood strategies and, despite being relatively unexplored in ethnographic terms, resulting in significant changes in social life. Approached from the perspective of skilled practice, I showed how motorcycles, solar panels, and mobile phones are not experienced in linear terms – as a transition from 'tradition' to 'modernity', as a singular 'improvement', or as replacing pre-existing technologies in a uniform way. Instead, they are experienced in polydirectional ways and from within the context of the postsocialist transition and the return to a subsistence economy - as simultaneously providing benefits and disadvantages, producing losses and gains, and resulting in enskilment and deskilment.

4. Hunting, Ontological Change, and Spirits in the Taiga

Introduction

In this chapter I explore the relationship between skills, generational change, and the ontological presuppositions of the people with whom I lived and worked. The chapter is based on a hunting expedition through the taiga with Batukhan, Hurelbaatar, and Batukhan's former school friend, Davaadorj, during which we performed an informal ritual at a mountain ovoo and engaged with both animals and nonhuman agencies through hunting. Here I describe the particular skills associated with taiga based hunting and elucidate the ways in which novices learn hunting via participation, as well as demonstrate how hunting skills are intertwined with those of 'properly' relating to nonhuman agencies, the forest, as well as certain wild animals. I also describe how people's ontological presuppositions have intersected with the collapse of state socialism and the advent of a market economy, contributing to the recent theoretical debates on the 'new animism' and multiple ontologies (Willerslev 2007; Da Col 2009; Pedersen 2001, 2011; Descola 1992, 1994; de Castro 1998; Ingold 2000). I show how for Darhad people in particular, who occupy a specific place in Mongolia's cosmo-geographical imaginary (Pedersen 2011), this is not simply one aspect of 'religious life' but representative of people's

broader understandings about 'what exists' and has important implications for their experiences of postsocialist change. For analytical purposes these understandings about 'what exists' shall be called Darhad ontology, although as shall be shown my conceptualisation of this is both critical and distinctive. In particular, I problematise what I see to be a teleological undercurrent implicit within the new animism, arguing instead for a processual approach based on skilled practice. Here I posit that people's understandings about 'what exists' are not fixed or determined 'in the mind' but come to be generated through cumulative processes of enskilment and deskilment, and thus have the capacity to be both changed and contested, which in this case results in instances of generational difference and debate. I show how approaching Darhad ontology in this way allows one to reposition multiple ontologies as open to transformation and re-imagining, as well as forgetting and loss, which are dimensions not accounted for in most recent debates. I provide ethnographic examples of this including people's inability to identify nonhuman agencies, the impact of marketisation on younger people's ontological presuppositions, and contestations between the generations. In the process, I show how the concepts of enskilment and deskilment can add a much-needed element of flexibility to the new animism and theoretical conceptualisation of ontology.

An Invitation into the Taiga

By the spring of 2013 I had been staying with Batukhan's household on and off for 8 months. Around this time Batukhan's former school friend, Davaadorj, arrived to visit the family. He and his household live as herders in a steppe-forest region a few hours from Ulaan Uul, and the two friends saw each other regularly throughout year. Davaadorj is widely recognised by friends and family as an experienced and expert hunter and, after meeting me and hearing about my research, he suggested that we travel together into the taiga where I could learn about hunting and its significance in Shishged life. I had already spent time with Batukhan and others hunting on the steppe, specifically in pursuit of the tarbagan marmot – the large grassland rodent hunted for centuries in Mongolia[64]. As I saw first-hand, hunting tarbagan is extremely difficult and demands particular skills. The animal is not easy to approach within the distance of a rifle shot and so hunters must crawl on the ground waiting for hours for it to exit its burrow. The animal also rarely goes far from its burrow, meaning that if it is not killed immediately with a clean shot it typically manages to re-enter its burrow in which case one must dig it out, which involves a lot of time and labour as these burrows are extremely deep (Maak 1959). Upon hearing of my experiences hunting tarbagan, Davaadorj became even more adamant that I spend time in the taiga, emphasising the importance of the forest for understanding hunting and the Darhad people themselves: "Anyone can hunt marmot but they do this across Mongolia, even in the south. But in the forests of the North there are different animals, different *baigal* ('environment'), and you need special knowledge *(medekh*). The forest is a dangerous place with different spirits and demons. The forest is the most important place for Darhad culture'.

[64] Tarbagan are hunted primarily to make *boodog*, a dish where the meat is cooked by inserting hot stones into the abdominal cavity of the deboned animal, the skin then re-tied within which the meat is cooked. It is a delicacy across rural Mongolia.



(Figure 45. Darhad men preparing for a hunt – photo by the author)

As noted in the Introduction, Darhad conceptualisations of personhood are based on the assumption that all Darhad people possess a 'yellow side' and a 'black side', a division that has its origins in the Darhad Ih Shav' and the entanglement between Buddhism and shamanism in the region. As Pedersen (2011:116) describes, the 'black side' of Darhad personhood (shamanism) comprises everything that is considered violent, harmful, and morally ambiguous, while the 'yellow side' (Buddhism) comprises all that is peaceful, benevolent, and morally unambiguous. As Batukhan once put it: "Darhad people are like split in two: on one side, we are friendly and quiet, but on the other we are cunning and violent. This is why *Khalkh* Mongolians fear Darhad people because they know we have both side". Importantly, this division is also mapped onto the Shishged landscape itself, with the 'yellow side' referring to the flat grasslands where herders live and graze their animals and the 'black side' to the taiga where typically only hunters enter. Importantly, the taiga is also the assumed location of shamanic spirits (Pedersen 2011, 2009) which, as I shall show below, draws an important connection between the specialist skills and knowledge associated with hunting to shamanism. As Batukhan put it: "All Darhad are really from the forest. We live on the steppe where it is quiet but look around and you will see the forest is always nearby. This is why Darhad people have the last real shamans and why others come from all over to be healed". This ecological-cultural division of the Shishged is aptly described by Pedersen (2011:128-9):

> The pancake-flat grasslands that define the Darhad Depression proper are considered the peaceful (*taivan*) place par excellence in the Shishged. It is where the pastoralists nomadize; and it is where the wild predators usually do not go – though not always…Above all the steppe is not associated with shamans and shamanic spirits as the taiga is. It is true that the taiga encroaches on all sides, but one does not need to venture there unless one is a hunter…The taiga constitutes everything that the steppe does not…The steppe provides a spatial refuge where people can live beyond the reach of the shamanic 'influence from nature'.

As I myself was told by both Darhad and non-Darhad people alike, it is because of the divisions between steppe and taiga, Buddhism and shamanism, yellow and black, that the Darhad have an ambivalent relationship to the taiga, perceiving it to be both generative and powerful but also dangerous at the same time (also see Pedersen 2011:85 Hangartner 2006). As Davaadorj explained, this is what makes taiga based hunting distinctive from hunting on the steppe, specifically because hunting in the taiga does not follow the same rules and logic of life on the grasslands. For example, unlike meat from herd animals, hunted meat from the taiga is rarely sold, specifically because it is perceived as possibly containing wild elements from the spirits

(Pedersen 2011:69). However, as we shall see, hunted pelts and wild animals are sold, precisely because of their presumed power based on their originating in the wild taiga. It is for this reason why taiga-based hunting is said to require specialist skills and is certainly not practiced by anyone: "Hunting is like shamanism", Davaadorj once remarked, "if you do not have experience then it can be very dangerous for you and your family. The forest is an unsettled place; spirits, ghosts, and animal-masters live there and you must know how to deal with them properly". As we prepared for our journey I talked with Davaadorj further about the relationship between Darhad people and the forest, asking him why, if it is so dangerous, do hunters venture into the taiga at all: "Because no Darhad person can ever move too far away (from the taiga); it has a force pulling you back, especially hunters and shamans. Many people move to Ulaanbaatar but feel lost away from the forest; this is because their ongods ('shamanic spirits' - see below) are too far away. As a hunter, my ongods are only found in the taiga; when hunting I come close to them and they give me protection".

Hunting is a widespread practice across rural Mongolia and considered a fundamental right by steppe-dwelling herders for the protection of herd animals against predators. As I experienced first-hand, wolves and foxes are a regular feature of life in the Shishged, with three sheep and two goats from Batukhan's herd attacked over a period of 12 months. At the same time, hunting serves as an important economic activity since the collapse of the socialist state, both in terms of supplementing food and for the sale of animal pelts (especially deer, marmot, and sable – but also occasionally higher-prized foxes, wolves, and bears). In the Shishged, however, where the steppe and forest intersect, hunting occupies a more specific position, perceived to be a specialist activity demanding certain kinds of skills. As Pedersen (2011:87) remarks, Darhad hunters are one of a number of recognised 'specialists' in the Shishged alongside shamans (*boo*), diviners (*meregch*), bone-setters (*bariach*), and midwives (*eh barigch*), all of whom are said to possess unique powers beyond the reach of ordinary people. Like these, hunting is seen as an important medium through which 'proper' relations between human and nonhuman agencies are maintained, as well as taught and learnt between experienced and less experienced individuals and generations, particularly males. In recent years, hunting has been increasingly controlled by the state administration due to environmental conservation. By 2012, a number of protected areas had been established in the Shishged where hunting was seasonally restricted or entirely banned. I heard many stories of people being caught by forestry patrol officers while hunting, who were either imprisoned, fined, or forced to pay substantial bribes to local officials. Nevertheless, hunting continued to be widely practiced across the Shishged during the time of my fieldwork, in some cases openly (such as to hunt tarbagan) and in other instances in secret (usually to hunt taiga-dwelling animals such as deer and bear). This, I was told, was one of the reasons why our hunting expedition took place so far away from the Shishged Depression and deep in the taiga close to the Mongolian-Tuvan border.

After preparing our belongings Batukhan, Davaadorj, Hurelbaatar, and I left the ger and headed across the steppe carrying three rifles and a relatively small amount of ammunition, the price of which has increased dramatically since the postsocialist transition. From Batukhan's spring encampment it takes four hours of non-stop riding to leave the Depression proper and, upon reaching its perimeter, one is forced to cross a river thirty-metres wide in order to enter the taiga itself. Despite the fact that my horse riding skills had improved over the previous months, I was not at all confident in driving my horse through what I considered to be a wide and fast-flowing river. Luckily, however, horses are pack animals and, once a single horse begins to cross the others generally follow. With Davaadorj entering the river first I

watched as he whipped his horse hard at the edge of the river, while a few moments later my own horse grudgingly pushed through the icy water which lapped against its stomach and submerged most of our legs. After making it across the river we arrived at the edge of the Shishged Depression and started to enter the taiga proper, what appeared in front of us as a wall of high mountains and dense forest. In this part of Mongolia horse riding takes on a different character to that on the steppe, with the elevated and dense landscape slowing one down considerably and demanding new skills such as being able to navigate through the forest, watching closely that one's horse does not lose its footing, and pushing through trees, branches, and rain-soaked mud. After spending a few hours climbing an array of hills and mountains we eventually crossed into the valleys of the Shishged, surrounded entirely by steep slopes covered with forest, fields of wild flowers and berries, as the flat expanse of the Depression faded from view.

There are no roads or paths in this part of Mongolia and some mountains reach nearly 4000 metres high, stretching in a chain across the border into Russia's Tuvan Autonomous Republic. Throughout the journey Davaadorj navigated the route from the front, using particular mountains and rivers as geographical reference points marking our way. Having accompanied Davaadorj on numerous hunting trips before Hurelbaatar also knew the route well, pointing out features of the landscape and telling me stories of previous hunting expeditions and encounters: "This is where we found deer last spring; that place is where my cousins erect their winter encampments; and behind this hill is where I killed my first wolf". Much as with the steppe landscape described in Chapter 2, experienced hunters 'know' the forest through cumulative practice and engagement, manifested in an embodied sense of familiarity and articulated through memory and story-telling. For hunters such as Davaadorj the taiga is experienced as a multiplicity of sites in which previous actions are embedded, memorised in terms of prior and therefore potential affordances (also see Pedersen 2009). This is comparable with what Fred Myers (1986:54) notes in regards to the Pintupi of central Australia, where the landscape is not experienced as an inert 'environment' but quite literally a lived-in space, part of people's memorised activities and where movement is seen as taking place not 'on', but rather, 'in' the environment. This came to the fore in numerous informal ways, such as Davaadorj quietly humming a tune to 'relax our horses' in supposedly dangerous locations such as near a high cliff, or when quickly changing directions to access a seemingly unidentifiable path.

Of course, this has implications for understanding how hunters learn to move across and engage with the landscape itself, for while I regularly pointed out 'a beautiful view' or 'an impressive mountain' Davaadorj (and to a lesser extent Batukhan – see below) recounted stories of particular locales, describing how some months ago he hunted a specific animal or how a fellow hunter encountered an animal-master or spirit at a particular location. Here the landscape is rendered familiar through practical engagement and use, which younger hunters come to learn for themselves by incorporating its features through their own participation and enskilment. At one point during the journey Hurelbaatar became excited when he recognised a river where he and his friends had hunted the year before, and he recounted stories of the animals they found including their size, sex, and the various challenges experienced during the hunt. This is comparable to Joachim Otto Habeck's (2006:131) description of the Komi reindeer-herders of the Russian North, where people cover large distances and memorise features of the landscape such as isolated trees, forest islands, lakes, hills, and ridges, which they use as mnemonic devices and serve as tools for narrating stories when they come back to their encampments. Similarly, for Shishged hunters, places in the taiga are embedded in a

temporal and spatial context, attached to specific memories, stories of encounters with other hunters, animals, and nonhuman agencies, as well as specific moods (Pedersen 2009; also see Tilley 1994). Here it is people's engagement with the landscape that renders it 'known', and novices come to learn by listening to stories and forging their own memories of particular sites. To paraphrase Ingold, it is through dwelling in a landscape, through the incorporation of its features into a pattern of activity, "that it becomes home to hunters and gatherers" (1991:356). As I will show below, it is through engaged experience and enskilment that nonhuman agencies also come to be learnt and experienced, not only by novices such as Hurelbaatar but occasionally by the anthropologist as well.



(Figure 46. Riding beyond the Shishged Depression towards the Khordil Sar'dag mountains – photo by the author)

After riding for nearly eight hours we eventually stopped beside a small river to set up camp for the night, where we could allow our horses to drink and graze and where we could collect water to cook and make tea. After unsaddling our horses Hurelbaatar and I walked down to the river to collect deadwood to start a fire, while Batukhan and Davaadorj tied the horses in a suitable area for grazing. After lighting the fire Davaadorj came to join us and, kneeling down, picked up a mug and filled it with some freshly brewed tea. Without uttering a word, he stood up again and splashed some tea into the newly lit fire and towards the four cardinal directions, then mumbled a short prayer giving thanks to the spirit owners of the site. As he sat down I asked him to explain the meaning of his actions, telling him that I had seen similar offerings made by women on the steppe and amongst Evenki reindeer herders in other parts of Inner Asia (also see Fraser 2010): "People do this on the grasslands too but here it is more important; we are close to the forest and there are many dangers. Ezed (spirit-owners) are situated here and we must respect them. Each of these mountains has a different level of power (*huree)*. Some are so strong that only the most powerful shamans can perform rituals to them. People are always vulnerable to spirits so by making offerings you build up your protection".



(Figure 47. Close to the Mongolian-Tuvan border – photo by the author)

Many Darhad people experience the landscape as animated by nonhuman agencies, which are understood to dwell within different phenomena such as prominent mountains, trees, rivers, and, as we shall see below, certain wild animals. The mountains that encircled our campsite, for example, were considered to have important spirit-owners, that is intentional nonhuman agents with whom people must engage in a respectful manner. By offering tea to the fire and the four cardinal directions Davaadorj was acknowledging the agency of these entities, as well as his (and our) respectful negotiation with them. This was made apparent as Davaadorj told me a story about Agaya, or 'White Cliff', what he described as a particularly powerful mountain in the region: "Agaya mountain is protected by a special spirit called *Avlin*. Avlin is invisible but some hunters have seen it when travelling in the forest. I have seen it and I knew it was Avlin because it appeared to me as an old woman in half-form". Each of the many spirit owners that occupy the Shishged landscape are believed to control something within the environment, for example the fireplace, the wild animals in the taiga, or prominent mountains. Not only does this reveal Darhad experiences of nonhuman agency (and 'what exists'), but correlates with the widespread understanding (particularly among hunters) that such agencies often present themselves to human beings in the half-shape of something; thus, while one hunter may report seeing the avlin in the form of 'half-people', another may see them in the shape of a deer with only half their antlers[65] (Pedersen 2011: 92-4; Hangartner 2010). Here the relationship between Darhad hunters and phenomena within the landscape has parallels with what Bruno Latour (2005) calls an actor network. Sacred mountains, nonhuman animals, and spirits can be seen as 'actants' in the terminology of ANT and are granted equal agency by people within wider 'webs' of relations (or 'actor-networks'). The language of ANT is particularly useful in this context as it gives equal treatment to both human and non-human actors without presuming their ontological status. ANT assumes that all entities in a network can and should be described in the same terms, called the principle of 'generalised symmetry', which accords with Darhad ontological presuppositions about 'what exists'[66].

This further points to the relational character of Mongolian notions of personhood. We have already seen how Mongol experiences of the self are interconnected with, and given expression

[65] This is something also see in the context of the semi-mythological creatures called *badagshin*, discussed on page 261. For a fuller discussion of the implications of the 'half form' of these and other nonhuman agencies, see Pedersen (2009: 92-4).
[66] For a fuller account of the Shishged landscape through the lens of Actor Network Theory see Pedersen (2009).

through, those of other material entities (or actants) such as herd animals, mountain-masters, and enacted through making offerings to particular nonhuman agencies. Here personhood is not unitary but 'dividual' in Marilyn Strathern's (1986) terms, following Deleuze (1992), comprising a relational – or 'fractal' (Wagner 1991) – constitution of the self.
Strathern used 'dividual' to differentiate between Melanesian and Western concepts of the person. The concept of the 'dividual' as opposed to the 'individual' has been taken up by various anthropologists and used to explain contradictions within the formation and conceptualisation of identity as culturally relative. The basic premise is that the term *individual* means *indivisible*, the smallest unit which society can be reduced to. Some good examples of this can be found in the collection of essays edited by Joanna Overing and Alan Passes (2010). Here it is suggested that a society based on an *aesthetics of community* cannot be analysed using the dualisms of Western philosophy, and that persons cannot be understood as distinct from the social relations of which they are a part. Similarly, in Darhad areas, people's experiences of personhood and notions of the self cannot be divorced from the other material entities within the environment. Like the Darhad, people are not whole self-contained 'units', but may be broken down (divided) into composite parts of social (human and nonhuman) relations (also see Busby 1997; Battaglia 1983; Nooter 1980). This is the shape of Darhad ontology.

As nightfall approached we prepared ourselves to sleep at the foot of the mountain. The four of us circled the warm embers of the fire while Davaadorj quietly hummed a tune. As he did, I asked whether there were lyrics to this song as I had not heard it before: "No, this is not a song like that. I am singing to my ongods ('shamanic spirits'); I am calling them for protection as we travel deeper into the forest".

Ontological Presuppositions and "the New Animism"

Many Darhad people experience the world in culturally specific terms. This includes, among other things, the experience of nonhuman agencies and intentional actors within the landscape, forming part of what I characterise as Darhad ontology. Following Pedersen (2011:2), I use ontology in its philosophical sense as understandings or experiences about what exists, and by using the term in the plural I accept the possibility that not all human beings share the same ontology. As Pedersen puts it:

> Like Western philosophers engaged in metaphysical speculation, Yukaghir hunters and Mongolian pastoralists deal with the question of being, perhaps not so much through rigorous philosophical scrutiny as through social practices such as making sacrifices to spirit-owners of wild animals or carrying out shamanist ceremonies for sick family members (2011:2-3).

Now if we accept that people experience the world in culturally specific terms - on the basis of different understandings about 'what exists' – then it is logical to assume that these understandings will intersect with the ways in which people learn and embody skills in the course of their everyday lives. Indeed, this is something we have already seen, with our safe passage through the landscape and being in close proximity to prominent mountains fused with the skills of 'properly' respecting particular spirit owners (and animal masters – see below) and manifested in practices such as making offerings to the fire and four cardinal directions. Here Davaadorj is embodying what has been called in the anthropological literature an 'animist ontology', an experience of the world in which people "endow natural beings not only with human dispositions, granting them the status of persons with human emotions and often the ability to talk, but also with social attributes" (Descola 1992:114). This is widespread

in Mongolia, although it is also fused with a quasi-hierarchical structure of spirit 'owners', 'rulers', and 'masters' which takes on different gradients depending on geographical region (see below). As Humphrey (1995:145) writes:

> Spirits…are termed 'rulers' or 'masters' (*ezen*, or *ejen* pl. *ezed).* The *ezen* of a locality provides generalised well-being, good weather, and fertility, or, if 'angered', drought and pestilence…Careless pronunciation of the name of worshipped mountains is held to be dangerous anywhere in their vicinity…mountains are behaved towards as if they are real presences. Just as 'they' may be annoyed by someone blurting out their names, 'they' take offence if people defy them and dig up wild onions for their slopes. Many stories are told of disasters which were caused in this way. In their presence mountains are called *xairxan* (dear one), and they are offered animals for their herds – not sacrifices, but live animals, which the former owners care for as though they belonged to a powerful human patron.

Now although I subscribe to the notion that not all human beings share the same understandings and experiences about 'what exists', I feel it important to problematise the ways in which the terms 'animism' and 'ontologies' have come to be employed in recent anthropological debates. In order to understand this, as well as how ontological difference can be better approached from the perspective of skilled practice and rendered more open to considerations of change and contestation, it is first necessary to consider these debates in more detail.

Perhaps more than any other the term *animism* can be traced to the very origins of anthropological theory, with E.B. Tylor (1871) famously defining it as the belief that animals, plants, and other entities possess the characteristics of a soul: "the all-embracing doctrine that souls (Latin *animi* or *animae*) exist independently of the material world" (Croll & Parkin 1992:16). Through this Tylor posited animism as the basis of all religious thought, with evolutionists such as Lubbock (1874) later emphasising its position in a unilinear sequence that many 19th Century anthropologists came to accept: from *atheism*, to *fetishism*, *animism,* to *totemism*, *shamanism*, *idolatry*, and finally *theism* (also see Ingold 2000:46; Pedersen 2001). As Nurit Bird-David (1999) remarks, however, such a conception carried with it a number of theoretical miscalculations, for example: was Tylor not reproducing a western teleological schema in his characterisation of religious thought, and could the experiences of peoples living in different parts of the world be uniformly described as 'animist' despite other factors of differentiation? It was not until the work of Irving Hallowell that animism came to be associated with more meaningful anthropological enquiry (Ingold 2000:47). Hallowell (1960) noted that the Ojibwa of south-central Canada conceived human beings to be only one kind of 'person', coexisting alongside others such as 'rock persons', 'eagle persons', and so on. As Hallowell put it:

> All animate beings of the person class are unified conceptually in Ojibwa thinking because they have a similar structure – an inner vital part that is enduring and an outward form [e.g., human, animal, stone, etc.] which can change. Vital personal attributes such as sentience, volition, memory, speech are not dependent on outward appearance, but upon the inner vital essence of being (1960:21).

Following Hallowell's work this came to be documented in subsequent analyses of so-called hunter-gatherer peoples such as the Mbuti of the Ituri forest (Turnbull 2015), the Batek of Malaysia (Endicott 1979), the Nayaka of India's Tamil Nadu (Bird-David 1990), and the Waswanipi Cree of north-eastern Canada (Feit 1973). Here people were observed as attributing degrees of personhood to both human and non-human animals, spirits, agencies, and other non-living things, laying the foundations for a revised conceptualisation of animism based on the notion of nonhuman personhood.

Drawing inspiration from the above works, Philippe Descola developed a refined definition of animism which took as its starting point indigenous conceptualisations: "Animism is a kind of objectification of nature [which] endows natural beings not only with human dispositions, granting them the status of persons with human emotions and often the ability to talk, but also with social attributes" (1992:114). Here animism is expressed as the recognition that personhood is not exclusively a human dimension. To take the Ojibwa, for example, relations between human and animal persons could be said to override the boundaries between humanity as a species: "The world of personal relations in which the Ojibwa live is a world in which vital social relations transcend those which are maintained with human beings" (Hallowell 1960:43). This characterisation was also developed by Viveiros de Castro in his concept of *perspectivism*, the notion "according to which the world is inhabited by different kinds of persons, human and non-human, which perceive reality from distinct points of view" (1998:469). Here perspectivism shares with Descola's definition of animism an inversion of the normal equating of nature with universality and culture with particularity, and in the perspectivist ontology everything is a potential subject, one with "an intentionality formally identical to human consciousness" (Broz 2007:303). The most visible manifestation of this is in the context of hunting, for as Harvey Feit notes in regards to the Cree: "[T]hey say that they only catch an animal when the animal is *given to them*. They say that in winter the north wind and the animals themselves give them what they need to live" (1973:116 my emphasis). Here hunting is not conceived, in the first instance, as a technical appropriation of 'nature' by humans, but as a form of communication between human and non-human persons (Ingold 2000:47). Such a view is diametrically opposed to the so-called naturalist ontology (Descola 1994) characteristic of "Euro-American" cultures, in which a division is drawn between human and animal, a division that, as Ingold points out, informs a series of related dichotomies such as subject and object, reason and instinct, nature and culture (2000:48): "Underwriting such a view is the assumption that personhood is a state reserved for human beings only, rather than to animals and 'non-living' things, and it is for this reason that we are able to conflate the moral condition and the biological taxon (*Homo Sapiens)* under the single rubric of 'humanity'" (ibid).

The relevance of these theoretical debates to the context of Northern and Inner Asia has already been explored, with Pedersen (2001) proposing a north-south distinction characterising northern-north Asia (Siberia, Northern Mongolia) as animist, and southern-north Asia (southern Mongolia, Tibet) as totemic. In a similar vein, Willerslev (2007) has applied such notions to the Yukaghir hunters in Siberia, while Ludek Broz (2007) has uncovered perspectival relations in the Altai, Giovanni da Col (2007) in Tibet, and Caroline Humphrey (2007) in central Mongolia. As Pedersen (2001:497) remarks in summarising the 'new animism', a new way of looking at the relationship between humans and nonhumans has emerged: "The fundamental premise shared by these approaches is that in Amerindian (and North Eurasian) ontologies intentionality and reflexive consciousness are not exclusive attributes of humanity but potentially available to all beings of the cosmos". In other words, animals, plants, gods, and spirits can also be seen as persons who interact and engage with human persons in a variety of ways.

Based on my ethnographic material, it is certainly arguable that Darhad herders and hunters embody an animist ontology, one in which nonhuman animals, agencies, and different aspects of the landscape are endowed with a degree of personhood. Bayarmaa, Batukhan, and Davaadorj all experience the landscape as animated by a variety of nonhuman agencies, which have their own degrees of personhood and with whom people are expected to engage in respectful social relations. I am thus rather partial to the reformulation of animism on the basis

of nonhuman personhood as part of the reconceptualisation of 'ontology' more generally. At the same time, however, I argue that in order for the terms to remain useful they require certain modification, specifically because the 'new animism' misleadingly presents ontological presuppositions – and thus cultural difference - in highly static terms, as if people were forever 'locked' inside a particular ontology of 'what exists' and thus fails to consider the questions of change and contestation. This can be seen most visibly in the work of Descola, who collates alternate ontologies with different 'underlying patterns' organising relations between humans and nonhumans, what he calls *modes of identification*[67] (1992:87). While his model is certainly for mapping the different ontological presuppositions in various ethnographic contexts, its neo-structuralist recourse to the language of 'underlying patterns' and 'mental models' presents different ontologies as operating in isolation from one another and does not account for cases of ontological mixing or cultural change. Questions raised by this are whether and in what ways transformations between ontologies can occur, and whether they require a total shift. In addition, what happens when people embedded in one ontology, such as animism, no longer practice hunting but move to a new context of human-environment relations such as a city; do they automatically become naturalists and, if so, how and in what ways does this occur? Other critical readings of Descola have emphasised the rigidity of his structural scheme and the difficulty of illuminating cases of ontological fluidity (Feuchtwang 2014; Kapferer 2014; Lenclud 2014). Though not explicitly evolutionary, Descola's four schema also coalesce into a quasi-linear trajectory. His scheme not only seems to imply that differing ontologies are somehow incompatible with one another, but that they tend to follow a unilinear transition towards ('Western') naturalism. As Kipnis (2017:2) puts it, Descola's model assumes that "a gestalt-like switch must occur at some point in a history of gradual accumulation of naturalistic assumptions".

Even Pedersen's highly sensitive account of Darhad ontology leaves a number of questions unresolved in the context of the Shishged. For example, what happens when people embedded in two ontologies come together in contexts of culture-contact, such as between the supposedly 'animist' Darhad and 'totemic' Khalkh Mongolians, and even between the animist Darhad and 'analogic' Chinese in contexts of trans-frontier trading along the Mongolian-Chinese border (See Chapter 5)? Similarly, what happens to an ontology when a community undergoes social and cultural change, and in particular, when a person embedded in one ontology moves into a context in which the presuppositions of this ontology are no longer viable, such as a Darhad hunter moving to urban Ulaanbaatar? At a more foundational level, it is also not at all clear how one 'becomes' an animist, totemist, or naturalist in the first place, for few studies of multiple ontologies consider the younger generation and how ontological difference is actually formed?

I argue that it is essential to understand how ontological differences emerge, how they are taught and learnt between the generations, how they intersect with processes of change (and potentially decline), as well as the socially constituted power relations in which they exist, such as, for example, between older and younger generation hunters. Here I see it as anthropologically limiting to draw hard and fast distinctions between multiple ontologies, something similarly noted by Stephen Hugh-Jones who, speaking in regards to his own

[67]According to Descola, animism is a symmetrical inversion of *totemism,* an ontology in which people make use of "empirically observable discontinuities between natural species to organise, conceptually, a segmentary order delimiting social units" (1992:87-88). Descola's third mode of identification is analogism, the assumption that there is discontinuity of interiority and discontinuity of physicality, not only between humans and nonhumans, but across and within all entities in the cosmos. It is said to be indexed in the ontologies and cosmologies of China, parts of inner and south Asia, Polynesia, West Africa, Mesoamerica, and the Andes, as well as Europe during the Middle Ages and Rennaissance. Descola's identification of a fourth ontology, *naturalism,* refers to the belief that nature does exist, that certain things "owe their existence and development to a principle extraneous to chance and human will" (ibid)', an ontology that is prominent in Western lifeworlds.

Amazonian informants, alludes to the fact that ontological differences are not pre-determined but rather relatively flexible and tied to the praxis of everyday life: thus, while on some occasions an Amazonian hunter will adopt the perspective of a jaguar while hunting, bringing to attention his/her animist sensibilities, at other times "he will just shoot the thing dead, considering that it's just a damn jaguar!" (2004). This highlights the often fluid and transformative aspect of ontological difference that is particularly relevant in the context of the Darhad who, as we have seen, are recognised as having both a yellow, Buddhist side and a black, shamanic side; in other words, they embody two apparently distinct ontologies simultaneously. As Broz (2007:306) similarly notes, the application of the terms animism, perspectivism, and ontology to the context of Northern and Inner Asia has been fruitful yet simultaneously problematic, specifically as "it has ignored the over 300 years of Russian, Chinese, and Manchurian influence on conceptualisations of 'what exists'" (also see Pedersen 2001:412). This is something also raised by Viveiros de Castro himself who asks: "whose point of view is dominant, that is, which world is in force when one interacts with other beings?" (1998:88). Similarly, as Kipnis (2017:4) has argued by way of analysing contemporary Chinese cultures of memorialisation - which mix analogic and naturalistic ontologies – there is evidence that humans can hold two or more conflicting (and possibly contradictory) ontologies at once. Here there is an allusion to the fact that ontological differences are never given, but emerge from within the praxis (and power relations) of everyday life, with this interconnectivity, contestation, and generativity deserving to be studied more closely and integrated into the wider theoretical framework (also see Broz 2007:306). I would add that this is also highly relevant in contemporary Mongolia given the dramatic changes associated with the postsocialist transition, such as when herders move from the countryside to the city and as people encounter new ontologies associated with marketisation and urbanisation.

It is with this in mind that I develop an alternate approach to ontological difference based on skilled practice, one that allows for a consideration of change, competing social relations, and contested histories. As I show below, ontological differences can be seen in more processual ways as emerging through different ways of being enskilled and deskilled in articulation with the changing circumstances in which people are situated through time. Here ontology is approached as generative and fundamentally tied to everyday practice, not remaining fixed ('in the mind') but constantly being rearticulated and reimagined and, in particular, by novices through contexts of teaching and learning. This not only shows that a person may shift from one ontology to another but also that ontologies can transform (and even decline) in the face of social change, such as when novices come to learn the existence of nonhuman agencies but feel uncertain about the economic demands of the postsocialist era.

The Ritual Ovoo and the Enskilment of Ontology

As the four of us woke early at the campsite we continued our journey through the taiga. Riding for six hours we crossed streams and rivers, passed through boggy marshes, and traversed dense and at times near impenetrable forests. By early afternoon we had reached deep into the Sayan Mountains and eventually arrived at the base of one of the highest and most sacred mountains in Khövsgöl province, which we had to cross in order to reach Davaadorj's intended hunting ground. Although it was late spring the tip of the mountain was still covered in snow and the remaining parts comprised bare rock with little vegetation. As we rested with our horses before making the ascent Davaadorj offered some advice to a novice rider such as myself: 'This is the highest mountain of our journey; it will take around 3 hours to get to the top and down the other side. *Margash* (the name of my horse) knows the route but you must

lead her as the path is very narrow and the rocks are loose; people have died climbing this mountain so it is important you pay attention".

The mountain itself stands at a height of 4000 metres and even for my experienced companions the climb was slow and difficult, all of our horses forced to scramble up the side as their hooves clunked over the unstable rocks. Like many mountains in the area the path was hardly visible and just wide enough for us to travel in single file. To the left-hand side was a drop of hundreds of metres and my horse lost its footing a couple of times, forcing me to grab my saddle tightly out of fear of falling. Nearing the peak, the gradient increased even further and we yelled '*choo*' to drive our horses forward, the animals heaving heavily as they grudgingly edged their way to the top. Upon arrival, all of us and our horses were totally exhausted. Surrounding us on all sides was bare rock, ice, and snow, with temperatures considerably lower than at any other point in the journey. Situated at the top was a large ovoo – or ritual cairn - consisting of a pile of stones, branches, and broken shards of glass from the many vodka bottles left at the site. Like all ovoo a tall wooden pole stood upright in the centre, with blue scarves tied on all sides ripping in the icy wind. Exhausted, we dismounted and unsaddled our horses to allow them to recuperate and, before descending the other side, prepared to make an offering to the ovoo.



(Figure 48. A ritual ovoo along the route – photo by the author)

An ovoo is a ritual cairn typically indicating a pass between two valleys, or erected at the summit of an important or sacred mountain. Although it is difficult to know the exact number in Mongolia I encountered at least thirty ovoo throughout my time in the Shishged, some of which we passed on a regular basis while out herding and others in only remote areas such as the tops of high mountains. In informal situations, one is expected to stop, circle the cairn three times, and present an offering of either a stone, branch or, if available, a small amount of vodka. In more formal situations, certain ovoo are featured in group rituals to propitiate for entire areas, often hosted by Buddhist monks and shamans from particular communities (Sneath 2000). The term ovoo, Humphrey (1995:146) writes, "is polyfunctional and refers to the cairn, the spirit-master, and the mountain or other entity worshipped. It is 'renewed' by adding new

elements to it, as well as serving as occupation marks in the sense of 'We are here' and orientation points for travellers".

While Batukhan, Hurelbaatar, and I made our way to the ovoo Davaadorj removed a bottle of vodka from one of the saddlebags. Unscrewing the lid, he circled the ovoo three times clockwise and threw generous cupfuls onto the pile. The three of us then followed suit, Batukhan adding a stone while Hurelbaatar and I tied two scarves to the base of the wooden pole. As Davaadorj and Batukhan circled the cairn both stood for a few moments and, holding their hands high above their heads, uttered a short prayer of thanks to *Mongke Tengger* (Eternal Blue Heaven) and the ezed of the mountain. Having completed the ritual, the four of us then walked over to the horses and collapsed onto the floor, Davaadorj then passing around the bottle of vodka so that each of us could have a drink.



(Figure 49. Reaching the top of the sacred mountain – photo by the author)

Like other features of the Shishged landscape the mountain was experienced by my travelling companions as a nonhuman agent, one capable of receiving thanks and administering both good and bad fortune. The eternal blue sky, or Mongke Tengger, was also recognised as an intentional actor, thought to exist alongside other nonhuman agents such as the Masters of the Land and Water (*Lus* and *Savdag),* as well as various spirits and ancestors. People describe how over time many nonhuman agencies come to be dissolved into the landscape and hence become associated with particular sacred places, which explains why in Mongolian 'nature' is translated as *baigal*, meaning 'what is' or 'what exists', and is an idea not distinct from, but includes, the realm of human sociality (Humphrey 1995:136). As Davaadorj put it, nonhuman agencies such as the ovoo are given offerings in order to protect herd animals and one's family from elements of baigal: 'These can be a deadly risk for herders and hunters, just like we saw in the winter dzud last year. Lus and Savdag are also entities like this; that can be dangerous unless properly respected through offerings".

As with the majority of nonhuman agencies propitiation is through offerings and complemented by specific rules of respect, which are often tied to notions of environmental conservation. For example, when one is living near or moving across a part of the landscape thought to be associated with a particular nonhuman agency, one is told not to pollute water, break the branches of trees, or dig the soil, rules which come to be shared among people as moral narratives and which are articulated through particular practices. Many nonhuman agencies are thought to take revenge on human beings who do not follow these rules. As

Sneath (2000:235) describes, ovoos are often thought to be the residences of Lus and Savdag, as are *boo mod*, so-called shaman trees, which are strangely shaped trees said to concentrate energies and inhabited by powerful agencies (also see Purev 1998). Like ovoos, such trees are worshipped with offerings and tied with ceremonial scarves, which serve as physical manifestations of the relationship between human beings and nonhuman agencies[68]. The uttering of prayers is said to call upon the local spirits for protection from adverse conditions and dangers, as well as to ask for long life, increased animal herds, and good fortune. As Sneath writes: "As long ago as the 13th century there is mention of spiritual masters (ezed) and rulers of the land and water, who were able to cause illness of a khan" (2000:235).

Much as with feeding the fire or throwing tea to the four cardinal directions, the act of making an offering to an ovoo acknowledges the personhood of the mountain and demands a respectful relationship on the part of those in attendance (also see Brandisauskas 2007). Situated within this is an embodiment of skill, something that has important implications for understanding how Darhad ontology emerges and comes to be taught and learnt between the generations. Indeed, as can be seen from the above, travelling through the Shishged landscape involves practices and actions that are inherently dangerous such as crossing rivers, climbing mountains and, in the winter months, having to endure harsh conditions such as frigid temperatures and navigating one's way through deep snow, all without ready access to medical care and telecommunications. Given the fact that many ovoos are situated in prominent locations, such as deep in the taiga and on high mountain passes, the act of making an offering is thus closely intertwined with moving through the landscape safely. Here an offering not only serves to give thanks to the ovoo but is also part of safely moving oneself, one's herd animals, and one's horse through the dangers of the landscape itself, with the skills of doing so bound up with those of properly engaging with perceived nonhuman agencies.

Here the relationship between skill, survival, and nonhuman agency is experienced as fundamentally intertwined, with the ability to safely cross the landscape in direct relationship with being aware of, and skilfully dealing with, the nonhuman agencies known to inhabit a particular locale. In this regard, it becomes difficult to separate the skills of a person from their ontological presuppositions; that is to say, to engage in a respectful relationship with nonhuman agencies is at once a 'metaphysical' and a practical action. This is on par with what Willerslev (2004:395) describes in the context of the Siberian Yukaghir as 'spirits as ready-to-hand'. Writing in regards to 'feeding the fire', for example, he notes that hunters do not typically reflect on the wider cosmological meanings of their ritual practice, nor do they consider the nature of the spiritual entities to which they making the sacrifice: they simply feed the fire. "Their attention or concern is directed towards the activity itself: One could say that in the midst of this, the spirits present themselves to hunters with a kind of available being, what Heidegger calls 'readiness-to-hand' (1962:99) and Dreyfus calls 'availability' (1991:60)" (Willerslev 2004:395). In Mongolia, this is what we see when herders sprinkle milk on ritual occasions, throw tea into the fire, and offer vodka to the ovoo, where nonhuman agency is not consciously reflected upon but immanent in the execution of practice itself. Throughout my time with Davaadorj I constantly pressed him to explain the 'meaning' of his actions, but it is clear that without my questions (and indeed my presence) these actions would be executed largely 'without thinking', as embedded within his and other people's taken-for-granted practice. Indeed, for Davaadorj, Batukhan, and Bayarmaa nonhuman agencies are first and foremost experienced from within the domain of everyday practices rather than from a

[68] See Figure 53 showing a sacred tree in the taiga.

reflective stance of contemplation, they are 'ready-to-hand' and embedded within particular practices. Importantly, they are 'ready-to-hand' only because the people engaging in such practices are already proficient in their respective taskscapes – they are enskilled - and it is through achieving a degree of proficiency that such practices (and their correlative agencies) come to be experienced as 'matter-of-fact'. This is precisely why I have chosen to interpret the Darhad lifeworld from the perspective of skilled practice, specifically because it provides a hermeneutic grounded in Darhad ontology itself.

Now to acknowledge this practical dimension of ontology is important not only as it brings us closer to people's own lived-experience of nonhuman agencies, but also because it destabilises the concept of ontology. As we have seen, ontologies are presented in most cases as either existing 'in the mind' of people or as something implicitly fixed; that is, with little consideration given to their emergence and possible transformation under changing conditions. As the example above demonstrates, however, ontologies can also be approached from the perspective of skills that are generated cumulatively through practical experience. Interaction with the ovoo, for example, follows a relatively fixed set of rules and proscriptions, including specific actions and practices which one learns to perform. When one approaches the ovoo it is essential that one circle it three times clockwise, for to do so otherwise ('incorrectly') would be socially and ontologically dangerous, perceived to bring about retaliation from the nonhuman agency in the form of misfortune, and presumably much laughter from one's peers. At the same time, although one may add different items to the ovoo this does not mean that one can add anything; thus, while stones, branches, glass, animal hair, scarves, and matches are acceptable, plastic, metal, and anything resembling 'rubbish' are considered inappropriate (and potentially dangerous). The spirits associated with a given ovoo are also known to have different preferences with respect to offerings, which people have to learn and perform at varying sites. As Sneath (2003:135) notes, for example, "the *chagaan luu* (white dragon), should be offered white foods only, such as dairy products and rice, while meat or alcohol would be considered incorrect. While at ceremonies associated with *har luu* (black dragon spirits) offerings should specifically not include white foods".

It is by considering this educational dimension of the ovoo and of human-nonhuman relations that we can begin to reconceptualise ontology as something not fixed but cumulatively grown (and thus open to both change and contestation - see below). By participating in the ritual, following the 'rules' and the implicit order of practices, younger people and novices not only become enskilled in interacting with such sacred sites but they also become enskilled in the very understandings about 'what exists' – that is, Darhad ontology. Younger people such as Hurelbaatar, for example, learn to follow the regulatory aspects expected of him by 'following the lead' of others and emulating their actions - by entering the taskscape surrounding the ovoo. Here the taskscape is at once a practical and an ontological domain of social learning, for as Hurelbaatar adds a stone to the pile and circles the ovoo clockwise, his actions simultaneously presuppose the existence of nonhuman agencies which he comes to learn embedded within his own enskilment. As Hurelbaatar himself told me, he does not reflect on this for they are just 'how things are done': "I have participated in ovoo rituals since I was young; I know how to circle it and I know what to add or not. I have heard many stories about the sacred mountains. Whenever I pass an ovoo I remember these stories and I know of many people who have suffered ill-fate because they did not propitiate the mountains properly". As with any skill this learning is a cumulative and largely implicit process, one that emerges gradually by growing up in a lifeworld surrounded by other more experienced people interacting (both physically and through narrative) with different ovoos

and their presupposed agencies. Here Hurelbaatar's enskilment into Darhad ontology occurs through an array of practical devices, which mediate, shape, and facilitate his perceptions, expressions, and understandings about 'what exists'. This more flexible and generative approach to ontology is, I argue, particularly relevant in the context of the ovoo, which is in fact a dual shamanic (animist) and Buddhist ritual site. Indeed, while originally the ovoo was a purely shamanic phenomenon it has progressively been taken over by the Buddhist Church. In this regard, they are exemplars of the merging of two distinct ontologies, serving as symbols of the syncretism between shamanism and Buddhism and representative of the malleability of people's ontological presuppositions.

Another fundamental part of the enskilment of ontology is related to the specific relationships between people and the landscape in this part of the world. Indeed, as I myself came to experience, the Shishged landscape is very 'real' in the sense that the mountains are high, the winters are harsh, and the grasslands are vast. This is not to suggest an environmental determinism but to simply emphasise the fact that the Shishged environment inevitably inculcates real and powerful embodied experiences over the course of people's lives, experiences that, as I learnt first-hand, influence people's experiences of the landscape and their understandings about 'what exists'. Thus, a prominent mountain is experienced by many as an intentional actor specifically because it *is* a powerful element in the environment, which is directly felt and experienced in one's body (as cold, wind, snow, ice, rock) and brought into experiential focus through travelling across it and fused with the stories people tell.

The Shishged landscape is particularly specific here, for although across Mongolia the environment is a prominent source of physical and embodied experience, the Shishged is widely recognised as being especially remote, harsh, and extreme. As Batukhan once put it: "We live in the most extreme part of Mongolia; even Mongolians think we live in the wild". As the ethnographic example above helps reveal there is a direct relationship between the regulatory aspects of interacting with the landscape and the harshness of the Shishged landscape, and this is something which adds to people's experiences about 'what exists', especially for those who are born and grow up in the region. Here the ontology of nonhuman agency is learnt and experienced not as a cognitive expression or structural composition in the mind, as Descola would have it, but through one's very real experiences with others and within the landscape itself, which come to be narrated by experienced hunters to less experienced novices over time.



(Figure 50. The power of the Shishged landscape – photo by the author)

This understanding of ontology could also be seen in my own experiences travelling up the mountain. Indeed, by following the practices of my interlocutors I too came to learn how to act and engage properly with the ovoo: as this was not the first time I had visited such a site I was already familiar with the socialised practices of how to circle the cairn three times and make an appropriate offering. In this particular case, however, I not only became enskilled in interacting with the ovoo but also came to experience the nonhuman agencies thought to reside in the mountain itself. Indeed, because of the very 'real' experiences fearing for my life when climbing the mountain, combined with the physicality of the Shishged landscape, I found myself *wanting* to give thanks to the nonhuman agency after arriving safely at the top, something that was not a conscious reflection but driven by my very practical (and fearful) concerns. This serves as an apt example of the potentialities of ethnographic fieldwork, as well as the process by which anthropological knowledge is generated through practical experience. Indeed, by very literally fearing for my life I too came to experience the power of the mountain, and even if only temporarily I felt myself being drawn into an ontology in which such a mountain had agency which deserved proper respect and thanks. As Ingold writes, participant-observation allows the ethnographer "to access other people's ways of perceiving by joining with them in the same currents of practical activity, and by learning to attend to things – as would any novice practitioner – in terms of what they afford in the contexts of what has to be done" (2011:314). Of course, this experience was entirely subjective and I would not suggest that all anthropologists would have experienced the mountain in the same way. As Michael Jackson (2005:12) reminds us, however, subjectivity and objectivity are dialectically related, and although it is a matter of personal choice whether or not to retain the ontological presuppositions of such an experience after fieldwork, the fact is that during the moment my experience was 'real' and generated direct understanding of this aspect of Darhad life.

Perhaps more importantly, however, this example sheds light onto the ways in which ontological difference is not 'fixed' or 'closed' to non-Darhad Mongolians, Chinese traders, or western anthropologists, but open to all because it is generated through practical immersion and experience in a particular landscape and lifeworld. Although non-Darhad individuals might be, for the majority of the time, embedded in a non-Darhad ontology, this does not mean that the two cannot meet. Indeed, the long-debated anthropological notion of 'immersion' can be more usefully seen in terms of enskilment, whereby knowledge of the 'Other' arises from becoming trained to see and experience from the perspective of this Other, where one learns - gradually and over time - to see, feel, and experience the taken-for-granted characteristics of the people with whom one is living. As Kirsten Hastrup puts it: "To 'know' another world, one must associate with the natives, even possibly become one of them, at least temporarily" (1993:174). Of course, this process of 'becoming one of them' is always a temporary and partial experience, hence the particular characterisation of the anthropologist as a person 'in between two worlds'. In any case, if any degree of immersion is to be attained this is not the result of some mystical or imagined process, but a practical embodied experience on the part of the ethnographer.

Approached from this perspective, multiple ontologies are different not because the people within them occupy particular 'webs of significance', as Geertz would have it, or because the mind has been structured in different ways, as Descola might argue (also see Downey 2005), but because they have been enskilled in different contexts of skilled practice within particular environments. As Ingold puts this: "[D]ifferent forms of life are incommensurable, not in an essentialist way *but pragmatically*, i.e., because of the different practices that one needs to embody in order to share those particular bounds of sense" (2011:238). Here skill is the

foundation of both other people's lives and our own anthropological attempt to understand them: thus, just as Hurelbaatar comes to experience nonhuman agency by engaging in practices that incorporate him into a bounded sense of life with other humans and nonhuman agencies, so the anthropologist comes to experience nonhuman agency by engaging in practices which presuppose their existence, and which through direct encounters with a powerful environment and fear (such as my own mortality) become, like for my Darhad interlocutors, *real*. As I show below, to destabilise the concept of ontology in this way has further implications with regards to understanding people's experiences of change, as well as the divergences that exist between individuals and the generations.

Ontological Divergence and the Skills of the Hunt

Batukhan, Davaadorj, Hurelbaatar and I descended the mountain and continued our journey through the taiga. After riding the entire day, we entered a remote area in close proximity to Mongolia's border with the Tuvan Autonomous Republic. In this part of the Shishged the ground comprises a combination of forest and marsh land, out of which grow densely packed larch and birch trees. This makes travelling difficult and slowed us down considerably, with our horses sinking deep into the earth and forced us to dismount many times and lead them on foot. By late afternoon, we finally arrived at Davaadorj's intended hunting ground, which was situated along a fast-flowing stream and surrounded on all sides by mountains and forest.



(Figure 51. Davaadorj making an offering to the fire – photo by the author)

We woke up early the next morning and prepared ourselves for our first day of hunting. Leaving our horses by the campsite we proceeded on foot, Davaadorj leading the way with a rifle swung over his shoulder and Hurelbaatar, Batukhan, and I following closely behind holding two other guns. As it was late spring the forest was already dense with growth and, given that the Shishged features a high amount of rainfall compared with other parts of Mongolia, walking was made difficult in the wet and muddy ground. Within only a few minutes we were up to our thighs in thick mud, forcing us to push through branches and rapidly sinking earth. Of course, the ability to move through this landscape is one of the many skills associated with taiga based hunting, including knowing where to place one's feet, how to avoid getting stuck in the marshes, as well as being able to identify and follow the tracks of different animals. As we continued walking Davaadorj constantly pointed things out including specific trees, tracks of different animals, and broken branches indicating our location in relation to the campsite. As an experienced hunter, he embodied a specific kind of engagement with the forest

in which we moved, his 'knowledge' manifested less through words and more as a practical familiarisation, including knowing where to step and where to avoid, being able to remain completely stationary for extended periods of time, and refraining from making excessive noise that would hinder the hunt. By following him closely less experienced hunters such as Hurelbaatar, Batukhan, and myself learnt by following his example, paying attention to the tracks he pointed out, emulating his movements and postures, and gradually 'getting a feel' for the practice of hunting. Of course, for inexperienced hunters such as myself these informal lessons were relatively short-lived, but for others such as Hurelbaatar, who accompanied his Davaadorj regularly in the taiga, they are the practical substance of his own cumulative enskilment. As Ingold writes, the process of learning is really one of guided rediscovery, and most aptly conveyed by the notion of *showing*: "To show someone something is to cause it to be made present for that person, so that he or she can apprehend it directly, whether by looking, listening or feeling" (2001:21). The instructions the novice hunter receives – to watch out for this, attend to that, and so on – only take on meaning in the context of his/her own enskilment and engagement with the environment. This is precisely why Davaadorj was so adamant that he teach me about hunting *in* the taiga, for just as with navigating the steppe and recognising herd animals, learning how to hunt comes from direct practical experience. As Davaadorj put it: "I cannot teach you how to hunt; you have to spend time hunting yourself. Each animal has a different character; you can only learn by encountering and watching them closely".

After much time Hurelbaatar spotted a number of sable darting through the trees. Kneeling down quickly, he propped his rifle upon his knee and, within a few seconds, fired two shots in quick succession, the animals running for a few metres and one of them then collapsing onto the ground. Walking over to the sable Davaadorj kneeled beside it and began assisting Hurelbaatar with the butchering process: removing the organs, skin, and fur, and wrapping up the flesh so that it could be carried back to the campsite. As they worked Davaadorj told a story about a sable 'animal-master': "A hunter was once out near the Tuvan border and encountered a half-sable. It was an avlin and he told the hunter to leave the body behind otherwise he would encounter death on the way home. The hunter disobeyed the avlin and greedily took the sable without leaving anything; a few days later the man's wife died by falling into a fire". After listening to the story Hurelbaatar carried the organs of the sable a few metres into the taiga and placed them neatly on top of a broken tree. He then uttered a short prayer giving thanks to the animal-master, saying: "This is my offering to you. I give thanks for providing me with this meat which I will use wisely for myself and my family".

The skills of hunting are imparted from expert to novice through a series of practical devices, including visual identification, embodied movements, specific terminology, oral accounts and stories, and even jokes (Pedersen 2011). Some of these, as with the story about Agaya Mountain and the sable animal-master, also serve as narrative devices for the enskilment of Darhad ontology, for embedded within them are moral lessons of local knowledge that link embodied skills concerning human, animal, and mountain persons (also see Flitsch 2008:269). Much as with Davaadorj's story, people's understandings about 'what exists' do not emerge in isolation, but are 'built up' gradually and fused with the practices of hunting and corollary skills surrounding it, such as 'properly' engaging with the animal-master and the regulatory action of placing the organs and fur in an appropriate place. Here Darhad ontology should not be seen as fixed but comes to be 'taught' and 'learnt' through practice and enskilment, with Davaadorj not only teaching the 'proper' way to handle and butcher an animal, but simultaneously the 'proper' way of engaging with the animal-master said to have provided the meat to Hurelbaatar.

The relationship between hunting skills and animist ontological presuppositions is something aptly captured by Paul Nadasdy (2007) in his account of hunting among the Kluane First Nation of the Canadian Yukon. For the Kluane, people are embedded, like the Darhad, in a web of reciprocal relations with the animals on whom they depend, and in the act of hunting, animals are said to 'give themselves' in a manner on par to that described by Hallowell (1960). However, when anthropologists and, importantly in the context of the Kluane First Nation, policymakers, consider such claims, they are often rendered simply part of a wider 'belief system', reproducing, Nadasdy argues, the old Cartesian dualism of culture and nature and, disregarding, in turn, the ontological presuppositions of indigenous thought and practice; "we are forced to regard such claims as either mistaken or metaphorical" (2007:34). As Willerslev (2007) notes, anthropology has been reluctant to take seriously the views of indigenous peoples such as hunters, particularly 'radical' cultural conceptualisations such as that non-human animals (or mountains) are 'persons' or that animals 'give themselves' during the hunt. Indeed, it is an anthropological commonplace to assume that such claims are merely mental representations or cultural and symbolic 'constructions' (Ingold 2000:44). In Edmund Leach's account of Katchin spirits in Highland Burma, for example, the author writes that the various spirits (*nats*) inhabiting the Katchin cosmos "are, in the last analysis, nothing more than ways of describing the formal relationships that exist between real persons and real groups in ordinary human Katchin society" (Willerslev 2007:182). Here the Katchin awareness of spiritual beings is, we are told, 'cultural' (read: metaphorical) rather than 'real', superimposed upon a universal environment of 'nature'. However, as Willerslev points out, "to claim that what the Katchin hold to be literally true about spirits is in actual fact only figuratively true…is to reproduce the very Cartesian dichotomies between society and nature, human and non-human, and true and false knowledge that the indigenous view categorically rejects" (ibid). In a similar vein, Bird-David has proposed that hunter-gatherers such as the Nayaka experience the forest from which they acquire animals and subsistence as a parent feeding its children: "Nayaka hunters look on the forest as they do a mother or father. For them, it is not something 'out there' that responds mechanically or passively but like a parent, it provides food unconditionally to its children" (1990:190). However, despite her appeal for a culture-sensitive account in contradistinction to the ecologism of formative hunter-gatherer anthropology, Bird-David also positions hunter-gatherer ontology in western ontological terms, imposing upon the Nayaka a division which forms no part of local conceptionalisations. As Ingold puts it in assessing Bird-David's account: "Underwriting this division is an assumed separation between two domains: the domain of human persons and social relations, wherein parenting and sharing are matters of everyday, commonsense reality; and the domain of the non-human environment, the forest with its plants and animals, relations with which are understood by drawing, for analogy, on those intrinsic to the first domain" (2000:44).

For Darhad hunters, however, as with other Northern hunting peoples, interaction with nonhuman animals through hunting is not, in the first instance, an encounter between human beings and animals, but between different kinds of persons, represented, in the Darhad case, by animal-masters (ezed). This reveals a different ontological base upon which hunting is experienced, namely, the maintenance of generalised reciprocity typical of Northern hunters. Its foundation is not the Cartesian division of nature and culture, human and animal, but, as Nadasdy writes of the Kluane, an animist *mode of being* of reciprocity between persons: "Northern hunters clearly see themselves as embedded in a web of reciprocal relations with the animals on whom they depend. By accepting the gifts animals make of their own bodies, hunters incur a spiritual debt that they must repay through the observance of a whole series of

different ritual attitudes and practices" (Nadasdy 2007:27). This is where the attention to skill intersects with Darhad ontological presuppositions: it is through learning particular skills - such as identifying which animals *can* and *cannot* be hunted, engaging in respectful relations with animal and mountain-masters (persons), adopting particular modes of bodily comportment (for example, not saying the name of the animal aloud, not shouting, etc.), and performing specific rituals after the hunt (for example, giving thanks through offering the organs as a gift to the animal master) - that Darhad ontology is articulated. Much like at the ritual ovoo, younger people and novices not only become enskilled in interacting with such entities through hunting but they are simultaneously enskilled in the very understandings about 'what exists'. It is by following in the taskscape of the hunt – over time and under the guidance of recognised experts - that younger hunters such as Hurelbaatar learn the meaning and value of these rules and their ontological foundations: in this sense, the skills of hunting *are* the skills which constitute Darhad ontology.

That evening we fell asleep to the sound of bears growling in the forest, something that I remarked was probably due to the fact that it was the mating season. Davaadorj, however, offered an alternate explanation, telling me that the bears were being disturbed by certain nonhuman beings called *badagshin*. These are small dwarf-like creatures thought by Darhad people to live only in the taiga, their characteristic feature being that they typically present themselves to humans as 'half people' – that is – as halved in some way such as with an arm, leg, or other body part missing (also see Pedersen 2009:92-4)[69]. As another hunter once told me, badagshin are incredibly mischievous and often steal food or roam around at night disturbing animals. Like other nonhuman agencies, badagshin are typically only encountered by hunters in the taiga which, as we shall see below, has intersected with new ideas about hunting in the context of postsocialist marketisation.

The next morning, we woke up early and set out once again into the taiga. After walking for an hour Davaadorj picked up the tracks of a deer and, for the next thirty minutes, we followed it closely as it grazed in the forest. Crouching low to the ground Davaadorj rubbed his hand over the muddied markings and, swinging his rifle over his shoulder, began crawling on his hands and knees. A few seconds later Davaadorj told us to lie completely flat on the ground and covered us with broken trees and leaves to conceal our bodies. We remained this way for an hour, sitting silently and covered with thousands of flies and mosquitoes. While Davaadorj occasionally lifted his head to look around Batukhan eventually whispered to his friend that he could see the deer in the distance. Looking up himself Davaadorj loudly exclaimed: 'No, we cannot hunt that one! It is not for us'. Seconds later, another deer darted out from behind a tree and Davaadorj stood up and fired a quick shot, the deer collapsing to the floor. Somewhat confused by the quick succession of events I asked Davaadorj to explain why he had left the first deer and what was it about the animal that meant it was 'not for us': "The first one had signs (*temdeg*) of the spirits. It was too dangerous to hunt. The other deer had no spirit owner (ezen) so it was ok". For Darhad hunters, spirits, demons, and ghosts are thought to wander the forest and which have an effect upon human beings. Lus and Savdag are entities of this kind, thought to take revenge on humans if they are not properly respected. Importantly, Lus and Savdag are able to transform themselves into wild animals or, more precisely, they may take an animal to be a support or vessel for them. As a result, killing such an animal, even by accident, is thought to bring about serious consequences. This is something which connects the skills of

[69] This is something that connects the hunting lore of the Darhad with Siberian indigenous peoples (Bogoraz 1909; Ingold 1986; Hamayon 2003: Willerslev 2004), as well as the neighbouring Duha reindeer herders who also live in the Shishged (see Pedersen 2009).

hunting with Darhad shamanism. As Davaadorj explained: “Some wild animals have spirit masters so they have a soul. If you kill that animal the soul can enter the hunter and he can die”. In other words, while a successful hunt cannot be carried out without the necessary skills required to track game and traverse the landscape, it can also not be carried out without the corollary skills of recognising, and properly interacting with, the nonhuman agencies within the landscape, in this case the spirit owners of the wild deer.



(Figure 52. Taking a rest during the hunt – photo by the author)

Approached from this perspective, Darhad hunting is fundamentally about skills, and it is impossible to draw a distinction between the skills of the hunt and those of recognising and properly interacting with nonhuman agencies. This is similarly noted by Pedersen who describes hunting as an activity that requires the utmost ‘care’: “For the spirits will behave toward you in either a benevolent or a harmful way, depending on whether your interactions with them – or rather with your interactions with the wild animals over which they are ‘masters’ – are sufficiently respectful” (2011:85). It is for this reason why hunting is considered to be a specialist practice on par with shamanism. Like shamanism, it brings human beings in demands particular expertise in order to avoid potentially dangerous encounters.
This has important implications for understanding competing social relations amongst hunters and notions of prestige and respect. Indeed, it is significant to note that while Davaadorj immediately knew which of the deer to avoid, his old school friend, Batukhan, did not. For them, this differentiation is not solely one of hunting but of deeper knowledge and embeddedness within Darhad ontology, which feed into wider attitudes of respect and expertise: it is not simply that Davaadorj recognised the nonhuman agency but that he *could* recognise it while Batukhan *could not*. This is important as it destabilises the notion of a fixed ontology shared by all Darhad and in the same way, revealing different levels of practical experience and expertise within the same ontology, which come to be crystallised through differentiated capabilities of perceived skill.



(Figure 53. Worshipping a sacred tree during the hunt – photo by the author)

This notion of internal differentiation further helps overcome some of the limitations associated with the concept of ontology, as well as lays the foundation for a better understanding of how ontological differences emerge and intersect with broader processes of change. Indeed, as Laidlaw and Heywood (2013:56) write: "[W]hat…happens at the boundaries between these different ontologies, and when things or people cross from one to another? How has this ontological pluralism come about, and do different 'peoples' make their worlds different…or do their different ideas respond to and reflect different pre-existing realities?". These are questions which can at least partly be answered by approaching ontology from the perspective of differing levels of skill. Davaadorj is widely regarded as an expert hunter and thus presupposed to have a heightened ability to see and differentiate between nonhuman agencies. Batukhan, on the other hand, is less experienced in hunting and, by extension, this renders him less capable (in both his and others eyes) in identifying spirit-masters. By looking at the social relations, and uneven scales, between people who adhere to particular understandings about 'what exists', we are better able to reposition ontological difference not as pre-given, but as fluid and generated by people in changing contexts of practical learning and perceived expertise. What makes a hunter such as Davaadorj an expert is precisely his long-term (and ongoing) practical experience *with* nonhuman agencies, which consolidates the perception of him as possessing expertise.

Walking through the forest I noticed that Batukhan appeared quiet since the deer hunting incident and, walking over towards him, I attempted to make conversation by asking what he thought about the hunt. In an almost confessional manner he immediately spoke of his inability to see the animal-master, which was reflective of his inexperience with taiga-based hunting: "I used to be able to recognise the animal-masters, especially when I was younger. But now I do not spend much time in the forest and it has become weaker. To recognise the animal-masters, you need to be an experienced hunter". Here Batukhan's remarks bring to the fore the generative and degenerative characteristics of ontology, for not only do novices learn through enskilment, but equally, people such as Batukhan may 'un-learn' or 'forget' through deskilment. In this regard, people's understandings about 'what exists' are not static over time but can be built up and/or diminished through engagement (or lack thereof). In fact, right from the beginning of our journey Batukhan had remained far more quiet than usual, and I could see that as a herder who rarely ventured into the taiga his familiarisation with the forest was less visible. As he himself described, he used to spend long periods of time hunting in the taiga but gradually became more preoccupied with life on the steppe: "I am not a hunter like Davaadorj;

I do not have the same experience. All Darhad men should learn to hunt so I am happy Hurelbaatar can learn. But I think Davaadorj can teach him better because I have forgotten too much". This acknowledgment of 'forgetting' is what I characterise as deskilment, which is both a question of knowledge and skills. As Batukhan has spent less time in the forest engaging in activities thought to generate expertise, he is not only less skilled in hunting but in being able to see and properly engage with nonhuman agencies as well.

The notions of 'invisibility' and the inability to 'see' ezed are important elements here, as is the role of narrative and storytelling which maintain the prestige of respected hunters such as Davaadorj. Indeed, when traversing the taiga experienced hunters not only teach novices to look out for particular tracks and identify certain animals, but they also generate the experience of nonhuman agency by engaging in practices that presuppose their existence, such as identifying a specific animal owned by a spirit master. Much as we saw in the case of the ovoo, the activity of the hunt is itself a taskscape in which novices learn the ontology of nonhuman agency, an activity that need not 'prove' their existence in order for them to be deemed real by others – 'what exists'.

This is also tied to stories and narratives hunters tell each other and others. Indeed, the enskilment of ontology does not only occur inside the forest but is enmeshed in a broader context of experience with the landscape, social relations between the generations, and what we might call narratives of skill. Darhad people recognise the landscape as animated by nonhuman agencies, including mountains, rivers, trees, and other outstanding locations in the taiga or the steppe. Often, the prominence of such places is explained as the result of shaman's actions in the past, as in the case of the burial places of deceased shamans (*ongod asar*), who apparently decided on these locations before passing away (also see Sneath 2003). Other places are considered prominent due to their connection to historical or unusual events which once occurred. Connected to this, such places and interactions with nonhuman agencies, just like hunting stories, are perpetuated in the stories hunters tell each other, nonhunters, and through rumours and gossip of various hunters[70]. Here the stories, narratives, and experiences of animals and the landscape intersperse with each other to also form part of Darhad ontology. It must be remembered that even prior to entering the forest novices such as Hurelbaatar and other young hunters have already heard these stories and experiences often countless times before. In this way, they serve to instantiate people's ontological presuppositions even while they are not fixed.

This role of story-telling is similarly noted by Pedersen (2009:140), who remarks that "the landscape is subject to an ever-accumulating number of stories; that is, the landscape also takes the form of a narrative. Indeed, the ongoing narration of hunting stories is not only inseparable from what makes a…hunter a good hunter, it is also constitutive for the perception of the environment…for a significant number of people (esp. women), listening to hunting stories is all they will ever experience about certain places in the landscape". This is precisely what we have seen in the above example, whereby Davaadorj's own expertise is intertwined with the stories of the many hunts he has engaged in, as well as the nonhuman agencies he has encountered. Here being able to tell such stories and perpetuate one's fame as an expert hunter is itself a kind of skill, one that is inextricably tied to the skills of hunting and the experience of nonhuman agencies. Of course, this is not to suggest that such stories 'construct' Darhad ontology in a formal and ordered process, but rather, that they are the substance behind the practices which 'pad' people's experiences and entwined with the practical skills of the hunt.

[70] For a comparable discussion of stories and fame amongst shamans see Hangartner (2006).

It is significant in this regard that younger hunters such as Hurelbaatar 'believe' Davaadorj – and thus co-create Darhad ontology - even though he admits to not (yet) having seen any nonhuman agencies himself. In this regard, rather than passing on a static 'mode of identification' in the form of knowledge or 'tradition' reproduced in toto, experienced hunters such as Davaadorj provide the context in which novice hunters such as Hurelbaatar learn and participate in as part of his own enskilment. This context presupposes the existence of nonhuman agencies, which he himself comes to reproduce anew on his own terms through direct experience of hunting and the listening to, and telling of, stories which solidify over time as he continues to engage in more hunting and when he returns home with his own stories and experiences from the taiga.

Ontological Divergence and Generational Change

After spending several days in the taiga, we began making our way back towards the Shishged Depression. Along the way we stopped at a number of known hunting grounds to hunt and camp, eventually arriving back at the first campsite we had stayed at the beginning of our expedition. There we encountered a group of young Darhad men hunting in the taiga, all of whom were aged between sixteen and twenty. Approaching their campsite, Hurelbaatar recognised one of the young men as a former school friend from Ulaan Uul and, after greeting each other and sharing a half-bottle of vodka, the young men suggested we spend the night with them before continuing our journey back home. While I myself supported the suggestion, I noticed that Davaadorj appeared ambivalent, sitting down beside the campsite but remaining relatively quiet. As I came to learn, these young men were known by Davaadorj to hunt frequently in the taiga, often for economic gain: that is, they hunted a variety of wild animals with the intention of selling pelts and other animal parts from key species such as bear and wolf to middlemen in Mörön, who themselves would take them to Ulaanbaatar for sale in the Black Market. After learning this I questioned the young men about their hunting practices and they confidently revealed a number of leather bags into which were stuffed between five or six animal pelts, including foxes, a wolf, and deer. As one of them explained: "With these you can make good money; especially foxes, wolves, and bear. Most families in Mongolia like to have a bear paw in their house because it gives you protection. In Ulaanbaatar, there are many foreign buyers and some of these animal products will end up in China". Enquiring further about their hunting practices, the young men explained that they hunted as often as possible and whenever they had the chance: "If I have time and the season is good I try to hunt. I do not have work so this is my only source of income. But there are less and less animals so it is getting more difficult".

Later in the evening and, following the consumption of more vodka, the conversation turned more heated, as Davaadorj began criticising the young men for their hunting practices. He complained that they were only interested in making money and that there were too few animals left in the forest. During his tirade, he commented that the Mongolian government had recently begun allocating hunting permits to foreign hunters, who paid high fees to the state in order hunt either endangered species (such as Argali sheep) or prized animals such as bears. This, he explained, was ridiculous as in the meantime hunters such as himself could be fined or even arrested for hunting in the same way he has done since young. Adopting an increasingly paternalistic tone, Davanjaam framed his narrative based on his own previous learning to hunt with his father, who is now deceased.

> When I was young we were taught many rules for hunting, such as such never to hunt females during the breeding season, that it is wrong to hunt when the ground is frost-covered, and that one should never disturb an animal in its den. When a larger animal is killed, a good hunter will always thank the animal-master and behave in the proper way. My father showed me that when an animal is killed we should place part of the animal fur in your hat as a sign of respect (the head perceived to be the most honourable part of the body), but nowadays many of these rules are not followed. Many new hunters only hunt to make money. They just go into the forest and take whatever they see. It is dangerous, not just for you but your family as well.

I heard similar comments from other experienced hunters across the Shishged, who complained that the younger generation do not respect formerly accepted rules when hunting. Often this was linked to the increasing management of hunting by the state, with those who hunt for economic gain (i.e. 'excessively') seen as responsible for the tightening and, in some cases, banning of hunting in some areas. Here we can see how debates surrounding hunting intersect with expressions of generational difference and expertise, all within a wider context of increasing state control and shifting policies towards the environment. The attitude of younger hunters, however, is more complex, and this reveals the malleable re-imagining of Darhad ontology. As one commented to Davaadorj: "You are an experienced hunter and everybody knows you well, but we have to survive in the 'Age of the Market'. I have a small child and no *mal* (herd animals); how am I supposed to support my family with no money?". I asked the hunters what they thought about the role of animal-masters in the forest and whether they were fearful of spiritual retaliation. They laughed uncomfortably, until one of them replied: "I have never seen ezed but have heard lots of stories. Once when I was hunting alone I saw two badagshin in the forest. They just appeared in front of me while I was tracking a deer. I was so scared that I ran back to my horse. I know about hunting near Agaya Mountain and I make offerings to the spirits after shooting an animal dead. I also know it is not good to take too many animals and never hunt pregnant females. But I think the ezed understand we only hunt only to survive; we are not greedy like gold traders or corrupt officials. Today in Mongolia everyone is a cheat. There is no morality. But we do this to take care of our families".

This exchange is interesting as it reveals a diversity of attitudes towards hunting and of the nonhuman agencies thought to inhabit the Shishged landscape, which destabilises the notion of a singular and cohesive Darhad ontology. From this example, ontological presuppositions are re-imagined differently by people of different generations, specifically in articulation with the changing circumstances in which they are situated. While for Davaadorj, the younger hunters are disregarding the rules of hunting and inviting potential retribution from dangerous nonhuman agencies, for the young hunters themselves their fears are (at least partially) dampened by their economic need and the perceived 'immorality' associated with the 'Age of the Market'. Interestingly, the younger hunters do not deny or disregard the existence of nonhuman agencies but actually include them in their narrative of justification: not only do they still make offerings while hunting and have had (fearful) encounters with creatures such as badagshin, but the ezed are said to 'understand' that they only hunt to support their families. Here ontological presuppositions continue to provide meaning for both younger and older generations alike, but in particular ways. For the younger hunters, Darhad ontology includes wider dimensions such as the illegality of hunting, postsocialist marketisation, and the need to accumulate capital in uncertain times. For them, hunting is still embedded in accepted ideas and experiences about 'what exists', but framed through new narratives of life and survival in the postsocialist context.

This raises important issues concerning generational difference and the changeable constellation of ideas and experiences which constitute Darhad ontology, something that is better revealed when approaching ontological presuppositions from a polydirectional perspective of enskilment and deskilment. As one of the young hunters put it: "I think it is sad

to think that we are no longer able to see the forest in the same way as our ancestors. I would like to hunt like the old generation but nowadays it is difficult". Here it is ontological presuppositions that frame these younger people's experiences of hunting, but much as with Batukhan they reference their 'loss' and 'inability' to see nonhuman agencies in the same way as their ancestors. This is another apt example of what I call deskilment and must be seen as an important element of Darhad ontology as a partial and 'never complete' aggregation of ideas and experiences. While it does not deny the existence of nonhuman agencies it does acknowledge processes of change and forgetting. This is something similarly noted by Pedersen (2011:85) who describes how experienced hunters "are troubled by the loss of shamanic knowledge (*boogiin medleg*) in the community which took place during the socialist period…both the technical skills and the knowledge about animals and spirits needed to be a good hunter have 'become a secret'. And without such knowledge hunting can be very dangerous". In this regard, Darhad ontology is not fixed but susceptible to both change and forgetting. In fact, this is the reason why many in the Shishged feel themselves to be 'in-between' an 'authentic' animist ontology and a quasi-artificial reconstruction in the face of social change, which is aptly captured by Pedersen's characterisation of the Darhad as 'not quite shamans' (2011:2-3). It is also the reason why the Shishged is thought to be filled with many so-called 'fake shamans', namely, those who practice solely for economic gain (or even perform for tourists). These examples are crucial in order to destabilise the idea of Darhad ontology as something static and thus 'passed on' between the generations in a holistic and formalised way. Instead, ontological presuppositions are constantly re-imagined by people anew, specifically in relation to the transforming contexts in which they are situated.

As the evening drew to an end, another younger hunter offered his own perspective on their hunting practices and their attitudes to the spirits. As he explained, they only sold hunted animals and animal parts to middle-men in Mörön, but it is the latter who take them to Ulaanbaatar for sale in the Black Market (thus raising the price) and possibly even China. In this way, the hunter emphasised, they themselves "avoid making the animal-masters angry because we don't take the animal parts out of the Shishged". This is significant as it correlates with – and reproduces - the view that hunted animals and animal parts may contain 'wild' and dangerous elements (Pedersen 2011:69), but the dangerous part is in taking these away from their source of origin – namely, the taiga. By only selling (or trading) animal parts to middle-men *in* the Shishged, the younger hunters do not see themselves as hunting 'for profit' but for everyday survival, while it is the middle-men who are 'really' making money by taking the animals out of the taiga (and raising the price) and thus risking the wrath of the spirits. This is something I also heard in the context of informal gold mining. As we have seen, ontological presuppositions are such that people are ambivalent about excessively digging the earth or causing damage to the environment, which they consider dangerous as it runs the risk of disrespecting powerful nonhuman agencies and spirit owners such as the Masters of the Land and Water. Of course, people do dig the earth and cause damage to the environment when tapping informal mines to dig for gold. However, people overcome this by only selling gold to middle-men in regional centres, who themselves take the gold to Ulaanbaatar or to the Mongolian-Chinese border. I heard many rumours that such middle-men are "always Chinese", which reflects long-standing cultural attitudes of the Chinese as preoccupied with making money (also see Bille). Much as with hunted animals, the price of gold inevitably rises the further it is removed from the taiga, which allows the miners to claim they only dig gold 'for survival' and not 'for making profit'. Here mining and hunting share comparable dimensions which elucidate a more malleable conceptualisation of Darhad ontology: on the one hand, both

are practiced within a wider context of existing ontological presuppositions acknowledging the existence of powerful and potentially dangerous non-human agencies ('what exists'). At the same time, however, they framed through new narratives about survival in the postsocialist context and connect with the long-standing ambivalence to accumulating capital purely for economic gain (Campi 2006). More broadly, however, these examples capture the ways in which Darhad ontology is reproduced but simultaneously modified. While it continues to serve as the basis for people's ideas and experiences about 'what exists, it is flexibly re-imagined in articulation with changing livelihood practices, new social and economic demands associated with the postsocialist transition, as well as flexible ideas such as non-human agencies 'understand' and 'accept' that people only dig gold or hunt animals for the (morally acceptable) means of supporting their families. In this way, they see themselves as avoiding spiritual retaliation by still adhering to the basic precepts of Darhad ontological presuppositions. This is nowhere more visible than in the context of the specific Darhad hunting objects known as *ongods* which, as I show below, younger hunters such as Hurelbaatar also use and reproduce, but in articulation with new materialities, generational changes, and postsocialist social and economic demands.

Ongods, Material Culture, and Generational Change

Ongods are hunting talismans typically consisting of colour threads, ceremonial scarves, strings, and a mix of different materials, tied together to form a rough bundle. Many of the materials which comprise an ongod are from wild animals, including fur, teeth, bones, claws and beaks (Pedersen 2011:201). Importantly, ongods are kept only by shamans and hunters, and serve as both containers of, and vessels for, attracting different kinds of spirits. This function is reflected in the etymology of the word *ongon*, which refers to both the shamanic spirits themselves and their material forms in certain artefacts, places in the landscape, or bodies of wild animals (Pedersen 2011:201-2). Importantly for our present discussion, ongods are kept by hunters specifically for the purpose of maintaining 'proper' relations with nonhuman agencies. As Davaadorj explained: 'My ongod is like my shield when I am out hunting; it protects me against all the wild things roaming in the forest and other black things. It is the most important thing for any hunter; without your ongod you are open to attack from many sources'.

Darhad ongods are an apt example of the way in which ontology comes to be experienced via skilled practice, as well as the social changes associated with the postsocialist transition. On the one hand, ongods are material manifestations of what we have characterised as Darhad ontology: by being able to attract spirits and serving as containers for them they are representative of the Darhad understanding that nonhuman agencies ('spirits') exist. At the same time, ongods reveal the relationship between the skills of hunting and those of 'properly' interacting with nonhuman agencies. As Davaadorj explained: "I keep my ongod in my ger but when I return from a hunt I offer something that I have collected, maybe some fur or teeth. This way I am feeding the ongod. Also, when I am out hunting my wife will feed my ongod to protect me". Here interaction with one's ongod (and the spirits contained within them) is inextricably linked with the success of the hunt and the skills of safely venturing into the (dangerous) taiga. In this regard, ongods are literally tools through which the skills of the hunt – in both the technical sense of hunting an animal and surviving in the taiga, and in the 'metaphysical' sense of engaging properly with the spirits – is embodied. As Pedersen puts it: "To hunters, hunting vessels are shamanic tools that are just as indispensable as other, ostensibly more practical tools for ensuring a successful hunt, such as guns and traps. They always feed these talismans

fat and milk before hunts just as, more generally households will add new elements to their vessels when significant events occur" (2011:159).

Darhad ongods reveal important insights into the characteristics of material culture and its relationship to ontological presuppositions. There is ample literature on how material objects and persons interact and how sacred objects, in particular, are seen as imbued with vital essences which shape notions of personhood (ter Keurs 2006; Pels 2015). For ter Keurs (2016), for example, the analytic focus is less what an object means and more what an object *does:* here material objects afford an 'action of possibilities', an approach which combines Jean-Pierre Warnier's study of 'containers and surfaces' (2006) with ideas of the 'embodied mind' drawn from cognitive psychology. Connected to this, Peter Pels (2010b) has shown how material objects are bound up with notions of magic and fetishism. In criticising anthropocentric models of material culture, Pels shows the importance of attributing a radical agency to commodities which can directly shape notions of personhood. Approached from this perspective, Darhad ongods can be seen as objects which literally contain agency, and which evidence – due to their particular materiality - the relational character of Mongolian personhood (Pedersen 2011:159). For hunters such as Davaadorj, as well as for younger hunters such as Hurelbaatar (see below), ongods do not represent nonhuman agency in symbolic terms but rather *are* actors in themselves, with their intentionality demanding both material and ideational engagement within a wider network of persons or actants (Latour 2005) which constitute part of Darhad ontology.



(Figure 54. Margash, the author's horse, resting during the hunt– photo by the author)

As I came to learn after returning from the taiga Hurelbaatar has himself begun to 'build' his own ongod, even taking a portion of fur from the recently killed sable to add to it. As he himself remarked: "My ongod is something I will have for my entire life; it is a part of me and I a part of it. One day when I am older my wife will use it to protect me when I am out in the forest". Here the ongod serves as a physical manifestation of the enskilment of Darhad ontology. We see how by adding elements to his ongod Hurelbaatar is not only building a physical hunting tool, but also actively cultivating his experience of nonhuman agencies and Darhad ontology. This is something that again fractures the notion of an 'already-existing' and continuous animist ontology. Instead, it is being actively created and re-imagined by Hurelbaatar himself, despite the fact that as he admits he is yet to 'see' the nonhuman agencies presupposed by the ongod himself.

Inspecting Hurelbaatar's ongod I noticed something unusual hanging amongst the fur, bones, ceremonial scarves, and pieces of wild animals: namely, a set of long, plastic

headphones formerly belonging to a CD player or mobile phone. Upon seeing this I asked Hurelbaatar why he had added this to his ongod: "I found them deep in the taiga one year ago when I was out hunting. It was very far away and I thought that it was unusual to find something like this. They were pressed deep in the mud and so I thought they must be special". For Hurelbaatar, the fact that he found the headphones in an unusual place represented their uniqueness and thus rendered them suitable for his ongod. More specifically, it was their perceived 'modernity' and the unlikelihood of finding such an item deep in the forest that granted the headphones their special status, and which in turn gave them a certain degree of power. A few days later I asked Davaadorj what he thought about Hurelbaatar's ongod, and he replied that an ongod is a highly personal object and should be constructed each according to his own. He also pointed out that the headphones contained metallic elements, which were in his mind an important part of their magical quality. This example is interesting as it captures the flexibility of Darhad ontological presuppositions, which do not exist in isolation but in direct articulation with the changing context of the postsocialist transition, such as the availability of new materials. This is also noted by Pedersen (2011:159) who observed people adding elements to their ongods when significant events occur, such as a daughter moving to Ulaanbaatar to attend university. Here ongods are experienced as fundamentally intertwined with the changes associated with the postsocialist transition. Similarly, for Hurelbaatar, the choice of headphones made practical sense as an object which he deemed to have spiritual power. In this way, he can be seen as developing his own Darhad ontology, which acts as a kind of repertoire through which younger generations can actively cultivate their own experiences of nonhuman agencies. Like other materials, the plastic headphones were considered special *to him*, and thus afforded the protection he feels he needed while hunting.

Conclusion

In this chapter I described the relationship between skills, social change, and the ontological presuppositions of Darhad hunters in the taiga. I described the skills associated with hunting and the ways in which novices come to learn via participation, as well as demonstrating how these skills are intertwined with those of 'properly' relating to nonhuman agencies as manifested in the form of sacred mountains, the ritual ovoo, the taiga forest, as well as certain wild animals. I also described how people's ontological presuppositions have intersected with both the advent of a market economy. Here I problematised what I see to be a teleological undercurrent implicit within the so-called 'new animism', arguing instead for a processual conceptualisation of ontology based on the perspective of skilled practice. In the process, I contributed to the recent theoretical debates concerning the notion of multiple ontologies and the revitalisation of the concept of 'animism' in the context of Northern and Inner Asia, positing that people's experiences and understandings about 'what exists' are not determined 'in the mind' but come to be generated through cumulative processes of enskilment and deskilment. As I showed, approaching Darhad ontology from the perspective allows one to reposition ontological difference as open to transformation, contestation, and re-imagining, as well as forgetting and loss. Here I provided ethnographic examples as manifested in Darhad ontology, including people's inability to 'see' and 'experience' nonhuman agencies, the impact of marketisation on changing ontological presuppositions, as well as variations and contestations between people and the generations. In the process, I showed how the concepts of enskilment and deskilment can add a much-needed element of flexibility to the new animism and conceptualisations of ontology.

5. Informal Traders, Embodiment and Style in the Age of the Market

Introduction

In this chapter I describe the practice and experience of informal trading during the late postsocialist period, specifically as it operates in the Shishged and beyond. Informal traders comprise a burgeoning network of people who spend all or part of their time engaging in trade outside the official regulation of the state, supplementing their livelihoods and facilitating the flow of goods and commodities across the country (Shombodon 1996; Lacaze 2010; Brunn & Odgaard 1996). This is a characteristic feature of many postsocialist contexts, where so-called 'businessmen of the transition' (Hann 2002) emerged as existing infrastructures no longer supplied the basic commodities of everyday life and people sought alternate survival strategies in the face of collapsing state institutions (Humphrey & Sneath 1996; Berdahl 1999; Verdery 1996; Lampland 1995). In Mongolia, informal trade emerged as a direct response to the demise of state socialism and privatisation of the economy, as people turned to trading in the face of diminishing state support and as new opportunities arose as Mongolia entered the so-called 'Age of the Market'.

In Mongolia, there are three types of informal trade, which intersect with one another in a number of ways. The first is the small-scale trade that occurs within localised areas only, where people purchase and sell relatively small quantities of goods themselves – typically animal products and essential commodities – and sell their goods largely within and around regional centres. The second type is the small and medium-sized trade that occurs between regional centres and Ulaanbaatar, where people engage in a specifically two-way trading process: selling wool, cashmere, and other herding products in the city and carrying clothes, electronics, household goods, and other commodities back to regional centres. The third type is that of trans-frontier trade, where people travel to Mongolian border cities in China, Russia, and Kazakhstan to purchase goods and sell back in Ulaanbaatar and in regional centres, typically travelling regularly, covering vast distances, and spending extended periods of time on the road and away from home (Lacaze 2010). Here people take advantage of the liberalisation of travel and the more fluid border restrictions that have emerged since the postsocialist transition to access key border zones where international arrangements support trans-frontier trade and where people travel to multiple times a year, establishing trade links with both international partners and in Ulaanbaatar.

In the Shishged all three types of informal trade exist and serve as important livelihood strategies, undertaken by people from both herding and non-herding households as both a sole and supplementary activity to generate additional income. In this chapter I focus primarily on trans-frontier trade and its articulation with herding life, although as shall be shown the three types are inextricably linked. The chapter begins with an outline of Mongolia's broader informal economy, through which I delineate the specific political-economic context out of which trans-frontier trade has emerged. This is then followed by an ethnographic account of the lives of two trans-frontier traders - Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg – who are from herding households but travel regularly to *Zamyn-Üüd/Erlian* – the busiest trans-frontier point between Mongolia and China – while stopping along the way at *Naram Tuul*, Mongolia's largest market in Ulaanbaatar. I describe the everyday practices of trans-frontier trading, including the long journeys people undertake, the role of new transportation networks in facilitating such trade, social relationships with settled retailers in both Mongolia and China, as well as the difficulties associated with navigating the 'Age of the Market'. As shall be shown, trans-frontier trade has not only afforded people new opportunities in the late postsocialist era and generated new kinds of informal 'work' and associated lifestyles, but has simultaneously demanded the embodiment of new skills on the part of traders themselves, including the flexible transposition of pre-existing skills into what is a new and highly volatile yet opportunistic context. This includes, among other things, the organisation of travel arrangements and withstanding difficult conditions, engaging in trade, managing one's trade relations, and developing multiple retail networks in domestic and international commodity markets, as well as adopting new forms of embodied 'style' when moving between rural and urban areas and at state centres of authority at the Mongolian-Chinese border. Here I show how a consideration of skilled practice allows one to prioritise the lived-experience of trans-frontier trading as a form of practical coping with the postsocialist transition, as well as how enskilment and deskilment intersect with changing economic conditions, patterns of mobility, and constructions of gender. In the process, I demonstrate how people actively and creatively respond to the political-economic changes associated with the emergence of trans-frontier trade and problematise the notion of a unilinear economic 'collapse' following the end of state socialism, providing insight into the new forms of rural/urban lifestyles characteristic of the late postsocialist era.

Also in this chapter I consider the broader implications of informal trading in relation to Mongolia's rapidly transforming economy, something which intersects with another of the major teleological metanarratives of change: namely, the transition from a pre-capitalist (or socialist) to a capitalist economy. It is impossible to understand how people experience informal trading in terms of a linear transition, for while increasing numbers of people are engaging in trade and the 'Age of the Market' provides new opportunities and livelihood strategies, people's economic decisions do not always operate according to the 'logic' of the market and the purportedly universalist goals of capital maximisation, nor are they disentangled from presocialist and socialist histories, social relations, and experiences. Instead, they remain fundamentally tied to specifically non-economic factors such as maintaining social obligations (*hariutslaga*), ontological presuppositions and experiences of the soul (*suld*), as well as culturally-specific understandings of wealth and capital. This suggests an alternate experience of marketisation outside the official neoliberal narrative, which lies at the very heart of economic anthropology and the long-established debate between the so-called substantivist and formalist positions (Gudeman 1986; Polanyi 1944). While emphasising the relevance of these positions in the context of postsocialist Mongolia, and highlighting the 'embeddedness' of people's economic practices within culturally-specific contexts, I show how the substantivist-formalist dichotomy reproduces a teleological narrative which is not necessarily experienced by all traders themselves, presupposing as it does a linear transition from a pre-capitalist to a capitalist economy as traders come to be 'incorporated' into the market economy via the expansion of global capitalism. Here I demonstrate how a focus on individual skills can allow one to step outside this dichotomy and prioritise the polydirectional experiences of traders themselves, emphasising both the cultural embeddedness of their economic practices while simultaneously recognising the concrete - and often difficult - transformations brought about by marketisation.

Mongolia's Informal Economy

Ethnographic studies have long described how people unable to find wage work within the formal sector generate income by engaging in activities not formally regulated by the state (Hart 1973; Castells 2011; Chen 2006; Cross 1997; Meng 2001; Parry 2012; Cross 1997). Prior to this, privilege had generally been given to those economic practices subject to state authority, and anthropologists rightly criticised the common practice of labeling people who earned so-called 'informal' incomes as 'unemployed' or 'underemployed'. Keith Hart (1973), for example, demonstrated how despite being marginalised from national statistics and macro-economic models, informal workers in Ghana actually often earned substantial incomes, whilst simultaneously achieving a degree of flexibility that was impossible within the formal sector (also see Parry 2012; Elyachar 2003; Ferguson 1999). Through much ingenuity and skill, such people adapted to the transforming social and economic context in which they found themselves by alternating between different kinds of 'work' and lifestyle, which Hart proposed be contrasted with the so-called 'formal' economy of the state and organised capitalism, defining these as 'informal income opportunities': "When half of the urban labour force falls outside the organised labour market, how can we continue to be satisfied with indicators of economic performance which ignore their productive activities?' (Hart 1973:88).

Twenty years after its publication Hart (1992) critically re-evaluated his work and argued that in the process of identifying an autonomous 'informal sector', he implicitly reproduced the ideology of a frozen opposition between the state and the market (ibid: 216; also see Chen 2012; Bolormaa & Clark 1998). A differentiated 'informal economy', he argued, reified this

opposition and defined the 'informal' purely in terms of its divergence from the 'formal' (Hart 1992). Certainly, this was an important self-critique, for not only do the state and market intersect in various ways but actors also often move between 'formal' an 'informal' sectors and operate in both simultaneously. Julia Elyachar (2003), for example, has shown how so-called 'illegal' workers in Egypt often move between formal and informal sectors by circumventing the legal-illegal dichotomy itself. Similarly, in the context of Mongolia, the line between the formal and the informal is often blurred as people engage in different kinds of work and activities – often at different times of the year - and operate both within and outside the official regulation of the state (Chen 2012). Settled traders in Ulaanbaatar, for example, officially pay taxes to local government even while they find ways to minimise or circumvent this, such as through personal ties. Indeed, as I will show below the ability to traverse the formal-informal is a fundamental aspect of Mongolia's new market economy, which both demands and perpetuates the creative and flexible transposition of skills.

Now while it is important to emphasise the fluidity between the formal and informal sectors it is arguable that the 'informal economy' and the category of an 'informal worker' continue to be useful analytic tools, particularly in postsocialist Mongolia. They allow us to focus attention on those people who work, to a greater or lesser degree, outside the official regulation of the state (Castells 2011), and who – while perhaps moving flexibly from one sector to another – nevertheless remain largely embedded within the informal economy and are officially classified as 'unemployed' in national statistics (Chen 2012; Bolormaa & Clark 1998). While in the past little effort was made to collect official data on informal activities, specifically as they were considered to be a mere transient phenomenon that would eventually dwindle as jobs were created through growth, it has become increasingly clear that neoliberal policies, continued high rates of urbanisation, and population pressures have all led to the expansion of the informal sector, not only in Mongolia (Meng 2001) but in many parts of the world (Morris 2001; Cross 1997; Meng 2001). In some countries, for example, it has been the informal sector alone which has absorbed the large majority of the national labour force, while formal sectors producing goods for the international market have actually suffered as a result of the recent global financial crisis (World Bank 2011). According to various estimates, the informal sector now accounts for up to 40, 55, and 70% of total urban or non-agricultural employment in Latin America, Asia, and Africa respectively, and while its contribution to official GDP is lower, it remains too high to be deemed negligible (Morris 2001). Thus, there is strong reason to believe that a large and most likely increasing segment of the global labour force will continue to be engaged in informal employment in the future.

In Mongolia, it is estimated that approximately 30-35% of the population are engaged in some kind of informal work, although unofficial statistics put this figure considerably higher (ILO 2000). Since the postsocialist transition, informal sector employment has become a necessary survival strategy for large segments of the population, as people were left without the social safety net (especially in the public sector) formerly provided by the socialist state, and with older generations not able to cover the costs of everyday life from their limited pensions. In 2008 Mongolia's informal economy was estimated to be equal to half of the volume of the country's national economy (World Bank 2011; Bikale & Khurelbaatar 2000; Bolormaa & Clark 1998). As an International Labour Organisation report put it:

> People [in Mongolia] have entered the informal economy out of necessity rather than choice, either as a supplement to meager earnings and pension payments eroded by inflation or as the sole source of income for people and their households. The greater part of the informal sector consists of subsistence-level production units and activities, motivated by the need for survival and characterized by low levels of income, productivity, skills, technology and capital, and weak linkages with the rest of the economy (ILO 2008).

Importantly, the rise of the informal economy has not only absorbed redundant workers from the former collectives and the perpetually unemployed, but has also generated entirely new forms of work and lifestyle (Bikale & Khurelbaatar 2000; Meng 2001). As we shall see below, this has important implications for understanding the relationship between skill and social change, specifically in terms of what I call the transposition of skills as people move between different forms of livelihood. Indeed, one of my main arguments in this chapter is that a processual conceptualisation of enskilment, transposition, and deskilment is essential in order to capture the adaptability of skills, the learning of new skills in the face of radical change, as well as the transformation of existing skills as people move – or are forced - into new social and economic contexts, such as in Ulaanbaatar and Mongolian-Chinese border towns. This is most notable in the context of Mongolia's herding population who often move between 'herding' and 'non-herding' employment at different times of the year, as well as the middle-aged men and women from rural areas who have returned to work out of necessity after a long absence. As Bolormaa and Clark (1998:26) write: "Informal traders show a remarkable ability to survive in a market economy. They have developed strategies to deal with risk and uncertainty…(and) have been able to organise resources and to market products that meet the changing demands of a transition economy".

There are a diverse range of activities in Mongolia associated with the informal sector, including driving taxis, trucks, and mini-buses, performing electronic and mechanical repairs, working in the building and construction industries, collecting scrap and recycled materials, practicing traditional forms of medicine, performing currency exchange, clothing and shoe cleaning and repair, craft and souvenir production, and many others (Meng 2001). Trans-frontier trading, as well as other kinds of trade, lies at the heart of the informal economy, not only as it affords new opportunities for survival, but also because it directly connects with other informal strategies by facilitating the flow of commodities across the country, and between Mongolia and its international neighbours. As economic liberalisation resulted in the opening up of Mongolia to new markets, trans-frontier traders have capitalised on the availability of new low-cost products in China and other parts of the world, as well as shifting consumption patterns in Mongolia itself (Rossabi 2005). Today, trans-frontier traders include a range of people such as herders earning supplementary income, former negdel workers now unemployed, older people looking to complement their meagre pensions, as well as younger people looking for work for the first time. As I describe below, this has demanded entirely new forms of skill and the flexible transposition of existing skills between contexts, resulting in broader changes in social and cultural life, impacting gender relations, and influencing patterns of mobility.

Traders and Long Distance Travellers

At the beginning of my fieldwork I spent a couple of days in the national capital to organise my transportation to the Shishged. There are two ways to travel the approximately 1000 kilometres from Ulaanbaatar to Khövsgöl's provincial capital, Mörön, each of which reveals significant insights into the informal trading economy. The first is to travel by air, with Mongolia's national airline, *MIAT*, servicing the route five times per week and the journey taking two and a half hours. Of course, this is by far the most convenient way to travel, although as ticket prices cost more than the average monthly income of an Ulaanbaatar resident, and well beyond that of a rural household in the Shishged, this remains out of reach

for the large majority of the population[71]. Mongolia's air industry is an apt example of the inequalities associated with the postsocialist transition, where air travel exists largely for the country's new elites and small yet emerging middle-class, such as government officials, business people, employees of mining companies and, during the summer months, international tourists. The second and far more common way to travel is by long-distance mini-bus, with tickets costing just a fraction of the price of air travel[72]. Since the collapse of state socialism private driving companies have emerged servicing routes between Ulaanbaatar and regional centres across the country, serving as an important channel for both the formal and informal trading economy. Long distance buses are, in actuality, not buses at all, but Russian-made military vehicles designed to withstand the harsh driving conditions characteristic of the Mongolian countryside. Typically, driving companies will either import these vehicles directly from Russia or purchase already existing vehicles locally, recognising them as an important resource in the long-distance transportation network. While there are also some companies using less hardy Chinese-made vehicles, it is interesting to note that the cost of travelling by these is even cheaper, specifically because of the greater frequency they encounter mechanical difficulties and increased travel time.

In Mongolia, long-distance buses facilitate connections that would otherwise be difficult or even impossible to maintain, such as visiting friends and family members in distant provinces, travelling to the capital city for medical care, engaging in trade, and migrating to the ger-districts of Ulaanbaatar (see Chapter 6). From this perspective, the long-distance mini-bus network should be seen not simply as a manifestation of the market economy and a new opportunity for driving companies, but as something that exists at the very centre of people's livelihood strategies in the postsocialist era, as well as playing a fundamental role in shifting patterns of mobility (and sedentarisation) in relation to the burgeoning informal economy. Having decided to travel to Khövsgöl by long distance bus I made my way to one of Ulaanbaatar's numerous bus stations, which comprised little more than a dusty plot of land in the centre of town. Walking over to the three or four buses parked in the corner I passed by dozens of informal traders either arriving or departing the city, all of whom were surrounded by hundreds of boxes, bags, crates, and luggage. As an important transit point between Ulaanbaatar, regional centres, and Mongolia's border-cities, these stations are a central node in the informal trading economy, facilitating the flow of both people and goods. After purchasing a ticket, I arrived early the next morning and placed my belongings inside the vehicle. Exchanging greetings with my fellow passengers I learnt that all were residents of Khövsgöl province, the majority heading home after visiting friends and family members and engaging in some kind of informal trade. While some had been travelling for many months - visiting the Chinese border and even reaching Beijing - others had spent only a few days in the capital city, specifically to shuttle small quantities of goods back to the regional centre. As one of the passengers described, he travelled regularly by mini-bus whenever a potential trade emerged: "I travel to Ulaanbaatar five or six times a year. But it depends; if I have something to sell or if I know of a good deal in the city then I will just pick up and go. Sometimes I spend only a few days away while other times I am travelling for the entire month. Last month I was trying to sell gold to some Chinese traders by the border, but this time I only had a small amount of cashmere to sell".

[71] In 2012-13, the exchange rate was 1£ = 3370 tugrik (MNT). The average price for a one-way ticket from Ulaanbaatar to Mörön on both MIAT and EZNIS, Mongolia's second major airline, was 240,000 tugrik, or £71. The average monthly income in 2012 for people with official employment was 150,000 tugrik (£44), while for informal workers no official data exists.
[72] In 2012, a one-way bus ticket from Ulaanbaatar to Mörön cost 25,000 tugrik, or £7.4.



(Figure 55. A Russian-made "mashiin" (4x4) used by driving companies – photo by the author)

As other passengers began to arrive and take their seats, our vehicle soon filled beyond its official capacity, eventually having twelve people sitting in what was a vehicle designed for six (excluding the two drivers). Across Mongolia long-distance buses are notorious for being over-filled, with drivers purposely compacting the passengers and their belongings to maximise space. While a lucky few managed to sit on the relatively comfortable, albeit cramped, seats others were forced to spread themselves across the floor and throughout the back of the vehicle, squeezing between bags, boxes, and other human bodies to carve out a space. It must be remembered that most journeys on long-distance buses are extremely long, and it is not uncommon to spend two or even three days travelling in the same vehicle. The number of passengers willing to travel is a reflection of not only the importance of the transportation network but also the scale of people's movements. Indeed, in 2012 there were five vehicles travelling from Ulaanbaatar to Mörön twice a day, and by 2013 this had increased to eight.

After leaving the bus station behind we drove towards the Northern part of Ulaanbaatar, passing rows of socialist-era apartment blocks and ger-districts. Thirty minutes later, we reached the very outskirts of the city and, just before exiting, our vehicle was pulled over at a police check-point. As one of the passengers remarked, this was a regular occurrence every time they travelled as the city authorities have sought to control the number of passengers travelling in each individual bus, erecting check-points to remove passengers should the vehicle be considered over-filled, occasionally also issuing fines to driving companies. These check-points were moved around different parts of the city to stay one step ahead of the driving companies. Following a brief exchange between our driver and the police officers, we were told that four passengers would have to be removed for safety reasons. Although no fine was issued the driver quietly obliged and asked four young men sitting at the back to step out. As the driving companies operate their service on a daily basis they have not only come to know the police check-points well but have also developed specific ways of navigating the new restrictions. Thus, after exiting the outer perimeter of Ulaanbaatar, our vehicle pulled over to the side of the road and, following a quick phone call, the recently ejected passengers arrived in another regular car from behind, who then re-joined our vehicle and once again took their seats. As one of the drivers commented: "Ulaanbaatar is getting bigger everyday so it is easy to find a place to pick up the passengers. There are ger-districts all around the city so we just call our company and they come and drop them off. Two or four additional passengers makes a big difference for our business and if they are happy to travel then what is the problem?". As one of

the ejected passengers himself pointed out, the entire process is itself a kind of ritual between the police officers and the driving companies, and that the check-points are largely symbolic.

Driving on the Grasslands

The journey from Ulaanbaatar to Ulaan Uul is a grueling two days of non-stop driving, travelling both during the day and through the night. The 1000km is covered slowly and arduously: although typically taking two days, passengers told me that it is not uncommon to take three days if encountering adverse weather conditions or serious mechanical failure. During the journey, the vehicle fluctuated between moments of relatively smooth driving to periods of virtual stand-still, such as when having to slow down to avoid bumps and holes in the ground. Stopping only a few times and, given the remote conditions, our vehicle covered vast stretches of open steppe, occasionally interrupted by the sight of a few ger scattered in the distance or when passing another long-distance bus or regional centre.

As with other long-distance buses our vehicle had two drivers - Dendev and Delger - who alternated shifts of between ten and twelve hours each. In fact, the drivers slept very little as they spent much of their time assisting one another in navigating the route, including checking that we were heading in the right direction and assessing the difficult and dangerous conditions. It must be remembered that there are only approximately 100km of paved road when leaving Ulaanbaatar and heading northwest towards Khövsgöl province. As a result, the large majority of the journey involves driving on the open grasslands, although the repeated journeys over time have come to be physically etched into the ground and thus create an informal 'road' in the form of a dirt track.



(Figure 56. An informal 'road' on the grasslands – photo by the author)

Of course, the emergence of a long-distance transportation network has not only facilitated movement for people travelling between different parts of Mongolia, but has also generated entirely new forms of work for drivers themselves. Remarkably little research has been carried out on the anthropology of driving (but see Pedersen 2012), particularly in communities which lack formalised road and traffic systems, but where access to vehicles is fast becoming an important means of transport and an important livelihood strategy. In Mongolia, driving has emerged as an essential form of informal employment for many urban and rural people and, given the specific driving conditions and extremely long distances, it has come to take on a very particular form. Although drivers were an official category of employment during the socialist period, including those that worked for the negdels in rural regions, the emergence of informal

and part-time driving for private companies is a relatively new phenomenon. While most companies are officially registered and thus integrated into the formal economy, many drivers work informally and in combination with other forms of employment. Young men, in particular, are drawn to driving as a complementary source of income, alternating with other forms of work at different times of the year. In the Shishged, I found that increasing numbers of young men worked as part time drivers, usually during the summer months when there is less herding work to be done. Given that many households only have a small number of herd animals, driving was seen as an appropriate complementary strategy, particularly for younger men who explicitly stated that they liked both the adventure of driving and the opportunity to travel and earn additional income. As I show below, this is something which has important implications for understanding the enskilment of new drivers and the transposition of skills between contexts, as well as how drivers experience the postsocialist transition.

Dendev and Delger were characteristic examples of the new young drivers I encountered in Northern Mongolia. Dendev was a 24-year-old who lived in a herding household for approximately half the year, then spent the remaining time working as a driver for two or three driving companies based in Ulaanbaatar but operating routes to and from the Shishged. Dendev purposely selected the Ulaanbaatar-Mörön route, viewing this as an ideal way of earning income while still remaining close to his family and typically returning home every three or four days. As he explained, it was in 2008 that he decided to seek out informal work to complement his household's limited herding production. His family had a small number of animals and he himself had recently married. With a new child on the way and, concerned that he would not be able to meet the additional costs, he approached a driving company in Mörön, who informed him that in order to work he would first have to acquire an official license. Like many informal drivers, Dendev had never actually driven a vehicle and thus had to register himself with the local authority and take an examination, although as he explained there was no official minimum number of hours he had to drive before taking the test. To this end, Dendev contacted a friend living in the regional centre who had access to an old Russian vehicle from the former collective, which he used to practice and build up his skills by driving on the grasslands. As Dendev explained, the whole process took two months, after which he was suitably confident to take and successfully passed the test. After acquiring his license Dendev returned to the driving company and they employed him on an informal basis, first driving from Mörön to Bulgan, a town approximately 350km away and, after a few months, more distant routes such as to the capital city.

As we have seen, the study of skilled practice has been limited by the fact that research has generally explored cases of social learning in isolation from the broader social, economic, and political context in which skills come to be taught and learnt. Thus, a considerable amount of work has focused on enskilment in highly formalised settings, such as apprenticeships in art and craft production or workers in industrial contexts (Coy 1989). While these are important, what is required of the anthropology of skill today are analyses of everyday enskilment within contexts of social change, including the learning of entirely new skills in seemingly ordinary situations such as driving, for it is here that many people experience – and engage with – the manifestations of such change. In this way, we move the focus to people learning everyday skills while making their way through the world (also see Grasseni 2004) and, in the process, skills come to be seen as the creative and imaginative capacity through which human beings actively engage with the changing constituents of their environments. Thus, as the postsocialist transition has afforded Dendev a new constituent of his environment in the form of the long-distance transportation network – and which includes a whole series of new human-object and

human-human relations – he actively engages with these by learning both entirely new skills (such as driving, navigating) and, as we shall see below, transposing existing skills into a new context. As Harris writes, human beings may move from one context to another, "but the kinds of relations they have, the type of environment they inhabit and the tools (they) use produce a shift in the quality of their experience. This shift is less a displacement and more a reorganisation of perception and skill" (2005:199).

While the process of learning to drive, acquiring a license, and gradually taking on more driving routes might appear as a relatively minor aspect of the postsocialist transition, I argue that it is precisely within such everyday contexts that people such as Dendev experience the 'change' associated with the postsocialist transition. Indeed, for Dendev himself, postsocialist change is not something that has occurred 'out there' as part of some broader macro political-economic process, but rather, at the level of his own everyday practical engagement. Thus, it is by learning the new skills of driving that he has experienced the advent of marketisation and the emergence of private driving companies. As Dendev himself put it: "I like driving. For me it is like an adventure; like going hunting or gold mining. I like being out in the countryside and travelling long distances. I think driving and herding are the only two jobs I could do. One day I would like to start my own company and buy my own vehicles". This example shows how learning the skills of driving have not only channeled his experience of the postsocialist transition but have fused with his own expectations of the future. From this perspective, the learning of skills can be seen as an example of what Bourdieu (1977) termed the social economy of being, whereby people actively invest in their lives by, for example, seeking out education, improving their job opportunities, or learning a new skill. Here skill is a social investment in direct relation to a changing social and economic context, and by following the course of people's enskilment over time we gain insight into their own creative articulation with the changes that they experience. In this regard, a consideration of how people learn new skills is essential in order to capture the active responses of people in the face of social change, and looking at how these skills come to be perceived is key to understanding their own personal intentions and aspirations.

Now of course new skills are never generated in isolation but come to be accumulated in articulation with previous skills that people have learnt over the course of their lives. As we have already seen, it is impossible to draw a hard and fast distinction between 'new' and 'old' skills for in fact they are built upon one another and influence each other in various and often imperceptible ways. Indeed, many of the skills associated with long-distance driving have actually been transposed from a herding and rural context, or at least have been shaped and articulated in direct relation to it. After all, given the specific driving conditions in Mongolia, working as a long-distance driver demands skills that would not necessarily be required in an urban or paved context. Thus, as there are no roads, lights, electricity, or mobile phone reception, drivers are expected to cope with not only difficult, dangerous, and uncomfortable conditions, but have to drive incredibly long-distances, have extremely good eye sight, and remain awake for extended periods of time. These are all things which are explicitly recognised by both Delger and Dendev as being characteristic features of herding life and have played a major role in their becoming successful drivers. As Dendev himself put it: "I think herders make good drivers. They already know their way across the landscape and do not get stressed if they get lost. It is also important to handle difficult conditions. Sometimes you have to sleep outside if your vehicle breaks down, and it is common to drive for ten or twelve hours in one day: I think a city person could never do this. When I am with my family I wake up early every

morning and work hard with the animals, and since I work as driver in the summer months I am always at home for winter when the work is most difficult".

Of course, many of these skills are of a largely implicit and taken-for-granted kind, manifesting in the very modes of embodiment and comportment of the drivers/herders themselves. For example, at point during the journey we were driving on the open steppe and, after having not seeing another vehicle for over six hours, Dendev slowed down to ensure that we were not lost. Both he and Delger then stepped out of the vehicle and stood on the roof to ascertain our heading: straining their eyes and scanning the landscape, Dendev spotted a small billow of dust far in the distance, something which no one else in the vehicle could see, but which he confirmed indicated another vehicle and thus our intended route. After returning to the vehicle I told Dendev that I was amazed how good his eye-sight was, and he replied that this was simply down to his experience as a herder: "All herders have good eyesight. If you spend all day looking on a computer, then of course your eyes will not be trained. But us herders are outside all the time looking for their animals and the changing weather". Here there is an explicit recognition that herders make good drivers on the basis of their pre-existing skills which are deemed applicable to the new context of driving, and especially the particular type of driving in rural Mongolia. It is significant to note that a large proportion of long-distance drivers are directly connected to the herding lifestyle, either working as herders themselves for part of the year, having grown up as herders, or having herding family members. This suggests a degree of transposability of skills between the two contexts, and indeed I found a widespread perception that herders make very good drivers.

Another apt example of this is how drivers and herders perceive and understand the landscape, specifically in terms of avoiding potential hazards. As we have seen, the ability to know the landscape is a fundamental skill in herding life, generated out of long-term engagement while herding and moving across the grasslands. Herders are able to differentiate between various parts of the landscape in a highly detailed way, as well as locate 'good' and 'bad' areas for different purposes such as riding, walking, or grazing animals. This comes to influence how drivers maneuver their vehicles, including where best to drive and where to avoid, as well as using the same references to 'good' and 'bad' areas of grassland. Throughout the journey both Dendev and Delger scanned the landscape continually and made quick decisions on how to maneuver the vehicle to avoid bumps, holes, and other dangerous features. As I described it in my field notes, long-distance drivers worked in unison on a par with rally-car driving, where one gives information on the route and upcoming conditions. Dendev and Delger would typically refer to the landscape in similar terms as I had heard herders while out on the steppe, such as commenting on the conditions of the grasslands, whether a particular area was flat or undulating, or whether there was an abundance of rocks and stones. All of this came to be manifested in their actual driving skills, such as knowing where to maneuver the vehicle, when to speed up, when to slow down, etc.

Connected to this was the fact that both Dendev and Delger were already highly familiar with the landscape through which they drove, specifically because they had already spent most of their lives living on the grasslands and moving between pastures. Thus, throughout the journey both Dendev and Delger would refer to the route in highly personalised terms, including referencing particular features of the landscape on the basis of their own previous engagements, including when they were young. On one occasion, for example, we made a stop at a nearby hill approximately 250km from Mörön and, as Delger and Dendev planned the route ahead, they both spoke about specific areas which were already known: "We are heading northwest now and will follow this for two more hours. (Pointing ahead) Soon we will reach

the wooded area where I leave the herd in spring, and then after crossing the river we will arrive close to Batbaayar's (a friend) summer encampment. There are some winter corrals in the east belonging to my uncle there and some grave stones at the base of mountain. Then we will see Algan (a town) to the north before entering Bulgan (a province)".

This raises the important issue of the flexibility and 'moveability' of skills, specifically as skills themselves are 'carried' by human beings within their own bodies and which thus have the potential to be transposed between contexts. Writing in regards to Italian dairy farmers Grasseni similarly remarks on the inherent ability of skills to be moved around and thus afford new options for change: "Skill amounts to the capacity to see, to learn and to act. As an embodied endowment of the individual it is movable and exportable. The availability of roads and vans means that…Carpenters, upholsters, builders and woodmen export their skills and leave the products of their labour elsewhere…their trade stays with them and travels with them" (2007:202). This could be seen in the case of Delger, who explicitly recognised that he had not only transported skills from his herding practices, but also newer skills that he had learnt since the postsocialist transition. Thus, having spent a number of years riding a motorcycle, both in regional centres and out on the grasslands was, according to him, something which afforded good practical experience for understanding the landscape and the problems associated with maneuvering a vehicle across it: "If you have ridden a motorcycle then you know which parts of the grasslands to avoid or when to speed up and slow down. It is not easy but eventually you get better".

This was also visible in the case of Dendev who besides working as a herder and driver, also spent two to three months working in a mechanical repair centre. In fact, this is the reason which attracted him to the job: "I have spent the last five years learning how to repair motorcycles and vehicles. I got a job there when I was only 18 and left my (herding) household. When I heard there was a chance to work as a driver I took it because I already knew a lot about these kinds of vehicles". Of course, long-distance drivers must not only be able to handle and maneuver challenging vehicles and routes, but also effectuate mechanical repairs when encountering technical difficulties, something which occurs frequently. From this perspective, we can see how observing the transformation and transposition of skills gives insight into the experience of social change, as skills emerge in relation to the broader social, economic, political and technological conditions in which they are situated. "Specialised skills", Michael Coy writes, "can be viewed as human capital and, like material property, (they) can be possessed and transferred" (1989:4). It is interesting to speculate here on the potential implications of the movement of skills from rural areas to the capital city and other urban centres, specifically as Mongolia's road network expands and the travel time between regions comes to be diminished. Indeed, by 'following skills' one could arguably approach the very process of so-called rural 'development' (roads, transport, air travel, electrification, etc.) from the perspective of the transposition and transformation of everyday skills, something which would better ground these processes in people's everyday lives and problematise the teleological presumptions associated with them.

Social Traders

Given the cramped conditions inside the vehicle the journey to Mörön was a highly social event, with passengers talking with one another, sharing food, listening to music, and singing songs. Coupled with this was the fact that many of the passengers had actually travelled together before at other times during the year or when crossing paths in the regional centre. As a result, conversations included all people inside the vehicle, including the drivers, and covered

a range of topics such as government corruption, the newest mining projects under consideration, as well as the ongoing problems associated with life in the "Age of the Market".

Sitting beside me were Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg, two middle-aged women who specialised in trans-frontier trade. Having both worked for one of the negdels in Mörön, fifty-year-old Sarangerel and forty-seven-year-old Oyunchimeg earned a stable salary for much of their lives and were able to build homes with their husbands on the outskirts of the centre. Following the collapse of the negdel, however, the women became unemployed and, after their husbands died in 2008 and 2009, they turned to trans-frontier trade as an alternative survival strategy. As Oyunchimeg explained: "Although we receive pensions from the state they are not enough to survive, and when our husbands died things became very difficult. We knew some people who worked as traders in Kazakhstan and saw that they could support themselves. Now we have been working together for three years".

Like many informal traders Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg alternate between different kinds of employment and lifestyle depending on the season and the composition of their households. Both spend approximately half the year living in and around Mörön, moving between their own homes and those of family members. During this time, they are officially 'unemployed', although in practice they worked in a variety of settings and earned a small income: Sarangerel, for example, worked as a seamstress with her sister; Oyunchimeg prepared white foods and other herding products for sale in Mörön; while both looked after family members and assisted them in preparing foods during the long winter months. Towards the start of spring, the women each travelled to their respective herding family members out on the grasslands, with Sarangerel moving just outside Mörön and Oyunchimeg slightly further away around Khatgal, where they lived until the end of summer before returning to the centre. Then, between the middle of summer and the start of the new year, Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg met up again and worked as trans-frontier traders, travelling from Mörön approximately 5000km to the Mongolian-Chinese border, specifically to acquire commodities which they then transported and sold back in Ulaanbaatar and Mörön. During the course of a single trading season, the women travelled multiple times back and forth between the Chinese border and Ulaanbaatar, often spending considerable periods of time on the road and away from home. As Oyunchimeg explained: "Trading is good business at the border. At first it was very difficult but after a few years we have built up good contacts. We have bought many things this time - clothes, electronics, Chinese food. I don't think I would like to do it forever, however, as it is hard work. It is a long way to travel and you can only make enough money if you do it many times a year. It is hard to be away from your family, but I have to support many people, not just myself".

Officially opened in 1949 with the aim of transporting freight between Russia and Mongolia, the railway connecting Moscow to Beijing via Ulaanbaatar was later extended to the Chinese-Mongolian border in 1956 after the Chinese government recognised Mongolia as an independent state. As commercial relations between the two countries increased, large numbers of trans-frontier traders - or 'suitcase traders' - began using the route to engage in informal trade, crossing the Chinese border to purchase products and commodities, which they would then sell back in Mongolia. This was disrupted at the beginning of the 1960s when China closed the southern part of the railway due to political tensions. In 1992, however, it was again reopened at the new border of *Zamyn-Üüd* (in Mongolia) and *Erlian* (in China), which has since become the busiest trans-frontier point between the two countries (Lacaze 2010). Since then, thirteen other entry-points have been established between China and Mongolia, all of which have come to play a fundamental role in the livelihood of trans-frontier traders, as well as the

broader Mongolian economy (ibid:153). Indeed, it is estimated that up to 80% of all products and commodities enter Mongolia from China via these border zones, the large majority carried by informal traders (ibid). While Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg have engaged in trade in multiple regions over the years, Erlian/Zamyn-Üüd has become their preferred choice, where they have established trade links with settled retailers and becoming highly familiar with the transportation network and process of crossing the Mongolian-Chinese border.

During the 1990s a visa was not required for Mongolian citizens to enter China or Russia. In 2002, China and Russia implemented a new regulated system only allowing for short-stays of 30 days in all trans-frontier zones (Lacaze 2010:192). This effectively eliminated opportunities for Mongolian traders to acquire longer-term visas in either country and created a new institutional framework for trans-frontier trade. As we shall see below this gives trans-frontier trade a unique form and experience, as traders enter border zones and engage in as much trade as possible over a short period of time, something which has important implications for the flexibility and transposition of skills.

The status of Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg as trans-frontier traders was immediately noticeable by the way they dressed. Unlike local traders in regional centres who, like the majority of rural Mongolians, wore their deels for much of the time, Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg dressed in specifically urban attire, including items not easily available in the countryside such as counterfeit 'brand' clothing, handbags, and sunglasses. As we shall come to see, the role of clothing is not simply a matter of personal preference but an important aspect of their enskilment as trans-frontier traders, specifically with regards to the ability to embody appropriate forms of style when moving from the countryside to the city, as well as when crossing the Mongolian-Chinese border. As Sarangerel, Oyunchimeg and I arrived in Mörön following our long journey, we organised to meet again next time they returned to Ulaanbaatar and Erlian/Zamyn-Üüd, where I would travel with them and observe the entire trans-frontier trading process from start to finish.

From the Shishged to Ulaanbaatar

During the summer, I met up with Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg just before they began their new trading season. Joining them in Sarangerel's house in the centre of Mörön, I assisted the pair in packing their many belongings before departure. As with other trans-frontier traders, the women not only transport goods from the Mongolian-Chinese border to Ulaanbaatar, but also take herding products from the countryside to the city. Of course, this makes practical sense as many traders have direct contact with the herding economy through family members and are in a suitable position to obtain good quality products at relatively low cost. Together, Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg carried two medium-sized suitcases, three large plastic sacks, and a couple of cardboard boxes, all of which were filled with cashmere and wool, in addition to their own personal belongings. These products fetch the highest price in Ulaanbaatar and the two women earned approximately one quarter of their annual income from their sale.

As with other informal traders Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg not only take herding products to sell for themselves, but also on behalf of their kin relations. In the case of Sarangerel, for example, she sells her brother's cashmere to several settled retailers, giving him the entire profit and serving as an important channel for his own livelihood strategies. In return, she receives meat and white foods throughout much of the year, which allowed her to save a considerable amount of her income. This is important in remote areas such as the Shishged where herders are at a disadvantage when marketing their goods, often having to rely on middle-men which inevitably increases costs. However, by harnessing social relations between

family members, herders are able to facilitate trade directly to the Ulaanbaatar market, with informal traders playing an important role in rendering permeable the relationship between the settled and mobile economies, as well as creating new networks of support.

On the day of our departure Sarangerel, Oyunchimeg and I made our way to Mörön's central bus station and located our vehicle, then began the arduous task of loading our many belongings. Upon arrival, Sarangerel spoke with one of the drivers and negotiated the price of our journey; it should come as no surprise that traders who travel regularly are able to receive a discount, specifically as a result of the frequent business they bring to the driving companies. Indeed, as multiple driving companies service the route between Mörön and Ulaanbaatar, they themselves are in competition with one another and for whom regular traders are an important source of income. By the same token, it is in the interest of informal traders to have good relations with the driving companies, specifically in terms of transporting their trade items. Indeed, given the limited amount of space in each vehicle, there is often a conflict between traders to transport their items and having good relations with the drivers means one is better able to get preferential treatment.

After packing our vehicle, a small group of Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg's family members chatted to the women before departure, this being the last time they would see each other for the next two months. Travelling long distances is a regular experience for trans-frontier traders, as well as many rural Mongolians. As a result, there is little emotional display and instead Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg stand with a notebook taking down last-minute requests to bring back key items from across the Mongolian border. As we shall come to see, this has important implications for understanding the relationship between trade and maintaining social obligations, including both the opportunities and restrictions that they afford.

As with our previous journey, the time inside the vehicle was a mixture of socialising and discomfort: passengers talked with one another, shared food, and attempted to get some rest. As before, conditions were cramped and uncomfortable, and I personally found it impossible to sleep, with my body aching all over. Observing me from the other side of the vehicle Sarangerel raised the issue of my discomfort and explained it specifically in terms of our different bodily experiences: "I think your body is not used to this kind of travelling. Your legs are too long and you cannot bend them enough. Look at me, even though I am fat I can get comfortable and sleep. When I travelled to Ulaanbaatar the first time I couldn't believe how far away it was and it was very hard. But over time I got more used to it. If you travel like this five or six times a year your body will change and you will be able to sleep anywhere". Sarangerel's comments were picked up by other people in the vehicle and soon everyone had a discussion about my body's unsuitability for long-distance travel, as well as the specific kinds of embodied skills demanded of trans-frontier traders.

Now the ability to withstand difficult and uncomfortable travel conditions might appear as a relatively minor aspect of how people experience the new trading economy. However, it is precisely within these small moments that people experience the broader political-economic changes to have occurred since the postsocialist transition. Indeed, for Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg, the emergence of the new informal economy is thoroughly intertwined with their own practical engagements with the changing constituents of their environments. Thus, learning how to adjust ones' body and 'get used to' the conditions of long-distance travel are, for the traders themselves, the embodied manifestations of their cumulative practical experience. Although of course this is not a formalised skill in the sense of a conscious, practical execution, it is instead an implicit skill that emerges within the body over an extended period of time, and one that is no less important than the other skills such as engaging in trade

or harnessing one's social relations. Indeed, although many skills might remain 'inarticulable', it is the task of ethnographers to try and bring these into a framework of common appreciation, specifically as they are experienced by our interlocutors in their everyday lives and revealing in turn people's bodily responses to social change (also see Harris 2005). From this perspective, the skills of travelling can be seen on par with what Mauss (1973) called techniques of the body, informal and largely unconscious bodily 'doings' specific to a certain context. Indeed, Mauss argued that all modes of 'bodily doing' - such as walking, standing, sitting, swimming, speaking, eating, and dancing - reveal significant insights into the everyday experience of social and cultural life, specifically as each are 'done' differently in different parts of the world, at different times in history, and between different groups within a single society. The 'use' of the body, in other words, is as much social as is it physiological, and how one uses one's body depends upon one's social, economic, and cultural position in the world. As Mauss put it: "The body is man's first and most natural instrument. Or more accurately, not to speak of instruments, man's first and most natural technical object, and at the same time technical means, is his body" (1973:104).

Now one of the problems with Mauss's characterisation is that the body is reduced to the locus of mechanical affect, isolated from both the (disembodied) agency that puts it to work and from the environment in which it operates (Ingold 2000:252). A phenomenological approach to bodily enskilment, however, overcomes this by situating the body-person within a broader field of relations, including with other human beings, material objects (such as a vehicle), the environment, and the changing social and economic context in which they are situated. Approached from this perspective, Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg can be seen as not simply reacting in a passive way to the new context of long-distance travelling - as an external effect on their bodies - but as actively experiencing the change through their bodies as they enter into new forms of engagement with constituents of their changing environment – including other actors, the Russian-made military vehicles, the landscape, as well as other aspects of the new driving network. As Merleau-Ponty reminds us, "our bodies are not given to us as objects, but rather, we are our bodies and they are our very way of being-in-the-world" (1962:139). In other words, human behavior is not an outcome of thinking in the mind that is then executed by the body but is felt in the body which is inseparable from our experience. Long-distance travelling demands and inculcates specific kinds of inarticulable bodily skills tied to social change, and which, by travelling regularly and over an extended period of time, traders such as Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg come to embody through practical experience and learning. These eventually manifest in largely implicit ways, such as being able to 'get comfortable', 'knowing how to sit', and finding space to put one's legs: expressed in the words of Sarangerel, to "be able to sleep anywhere".

This is where the anthropology of skill affords insight into the everyday experience of change. Thus, while it is essential to describe and account for the broader political-economic transformations associated with the emergence of the informal economy, a focus on skill also affords insight into the subjective and (often unconscious) effects of such change, as well as how they are experienced in everyday terms. From this perspective, the skills of bodily adjustment are the existential locus of change itself, with traders developing new skills as they enter into new constitutive relations with the new affordances of the transition. In the context of trans-frontier traders, the human body has come to be embedded within a new field of relations, including with vehicles, roads, and the landscape, and skills have been generated through people's practical coping within this new field of relations. These skills are quite literally pressed into the body, manifesting in informal and largely taken-for-granted ways

such as being able to sit, stand, and sleep anywhere. The result is a bodily experience of change that is not felt 'outside' oneself, not in terms of the linear conceptualisations constructed in academia or international development discourse, but in everyday terms as part and parcel of the livelihood strategies with which people experience and adjust to their unfolding lives.

Skill and Survival in Ulaanbaatar's Black Market

After arriving in Ulaanbaatar and unloading our belongings, Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg spoke with the driver to organise their return journey, setting an approximate date and confirming a price. Standing together on the side of the road, one is immediately struck by the vast differences between Ulaanbaatar and the Mongolian countryside. Informally known as Mongolia's 'only' city, Ulaanbaatar is filled with cars, buses, paved roads, socialist-style apartment blocks and, increasingly, new metal and glass skyscrapers and luxury apartments. Although still relatively small as compared with other major capital cities in Asia, Ulaanbaatar experiences many things not seen elsewhere in the country, including air and light pollution, large crowds of people, and police officers directing heavy traffic. Although they had visited Ulaanbaatar frequently over the years, Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg explained that they were always shocked upon returning to the city, specifically to see the dramatic transformations to have occurred over a short period of time. As Oyunchimeg described it: "Everything is different in Ulaanbaatar. The air is polluted, there are cars everywhere and everything costs more. Every year there are new buildings, larger ger-districts, and new restrictions and laws. It is good to have family members in the city because this place can be difficult and dangerous, especially for traders. In some of the poorer areas there is crime and alcohol problems, and many people do not like traders because they think you are only out to cheat them and make money".

Like all informal traders either arriving or passing through Ulaanbaatar, the first stop for Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg was the city's infamous *Naram Tuul* market. Colloquially known as *Khar Zakh*, or 'Black Market', Naram Tuul is the largest market in Mongolia and one of the biggest in Asia, literally encompassing an entire neighborhood and remaining open 365 days a year. Situated in the eastern part of town and attracting some 60,000 people a day, the market is at the very centre of both the formal and informal trading economies, bringing together traders from across the country and overseeing the movement of a substantial quantity of products and commodities (Hojer 2012).



(Figure 57. Entrance to Naram Tuul market, Ulaanbaatar – photo by the author)

Naram Tuul has been operating in Ulaanbaatar since the socialist period, although it is only over the last two decades that it has grown to such an extent. While the market is an established feature of the local economy and formally regulated by the state, its ownership and management is the subject of some debate. A single Mongolian millionaire is said to own all of the land upon which the market sits, something he apparently acquired 'informally' at the time of the postsocialist transition. Widely regarded as an underworld figure, this man pays taxes to the city government while each retailer inside the market pays him a monthly fee: multiplied by the number of retailers this makes him one of the wealthiest people in the country. As Sarangerel remarked, however, people's perceptions of this man are not negative as he is recognised as making it possible for people to trade and work: "Without the market many people would not survive". The owner of the market also provides basic organisation and management, including parking services, security, and recreation in the form of food stalls and an outdoor pool hall beside the car park.

Entering the gates of Naram Tuul Sarangerel, Oyunchimeg, and I walked passed thousands of people, surrounded on all sides by rows upon rows of stalls divided by long aisles stretching off into the distance. Due to it immense scale, the market is formally divided into different zones, specifically depending on the kinds of items being sold. Although it would be impossible to provide an exhaustive list, the market features a range of goods and commodities, including clothing, household goods, fresh and packaged food (including meat and vegetables), antiques, weapons, mechanical parts, motors, tires (the latter three sold from inside disused shipping containers), electronic products, new technologies, and home appliances, religious statues, artifacts, as well as socialist memorabilia. Of course, the market also sells a huge array of herding products, including wool, cashmere, leather, milk, and white foods. At the same time, it features all of those items essential for herding households, including horse harnesses, saddles, gers and furniture for gers, deels, ropes, and milking equipment.



(Figure 58. Rows of stalls inside Naram Tuul market – photo by the author)

Having visited the market regularly over a number years Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg adapt quickly to the new surroundings. Despite the fact that the market grows in size every year and with new sub-districts constantly being added, the women navigate through the stalls and head directly towards the area where they intend to sell their products. Along the way, Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg stop to greet and exchange news with various settled retailers, including people with whom they have traded in the past and to who they intend to sell their products after returning from the Mongolian-Chinese border. Although spending not more than a few

minutes at each stall, these short visits are important as they allow the women to re-affirm relations with particular retailers, as well as to gauge the current market prices for specific items. At one point, we stop at a stall specialising in small-scale electronics, such as DVD players and mobile phones. As Sarangerel explained, these were the items that they intended to purchase in China and to sell at Naram Tuul. As a result, it was important to see the current prices on offer and talk with the retailer about purchasing their goods. Prices for electronics do not vary to the same extent as herding products, which are more dependent on weather condition and quality. Nevertheless, by meeting with one's trading partners one is able to gain a sense of exactly how many of each item would be appropriate to buy and what would be the anticipated turnover. To this end, Sarangerel asked the retailer how business was doing, which particular models of phones were selling best, as well as negotiating possible prices for a certain number of units. During this time, she jotted down notes in a notebook and ensured that the retailer had her most recent mobile number. After informally striking a deal, the pair shook hands and Sarangerel confirmed the date of her return, arranging for them to meet to off-load the items.

Although the entire conversation lasted not more than a couple of minutes, after which Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg moved on to another retailer, the exchange revealed considerable insight into the new kinds of skills demanded of trans-frontier traders, as well as the flexible transposition of skills between contexts. Indeed, both Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg have only been working as traders for the past three years and, as a result, they have had to familiarise themselves with new economic practices in a relatively short period of time. Not only must they be aware of market prices and fluctuations, but also maintain good social relations with key retailers along the supply chain. Here there is an important element of flexibility in the case of Sarangerel, in particular, who regularly used her notebook to jot down prices, names, and phone numbers. As she herself explained, this is something she carried over from working in the former negdel, where she was employed as an office worker providing records on livestock numbers. Indeed, Sarangerel felt herself to be rather good at maths, which she emphasised has been useful in the new trading economy. Oyunchimeg, by contrast, was employed by the negdel as a cook and regularly emphasised her inability to remember numbers and calculate market prices, typically relying on Sarangerel instead. However, Oyunchimeg was described by both of the women as being the 'strong' one of the pair, something recognised as particularly useful when dealing with hard-nosed retailers. Here we see how people in Mongolia have not simply reacted to the postsocialist transition in passive ways but actively engage with new opportunities by learning entirely new skills, as well as flexibly adapting skills from one context to another. As Sarangerel described it: "Being a good trader depends on many things. You need to be good with numbers and confident in making a deal. You should also have a big network of people who you buy and sell from. You also need to behave different with different retailers; if you are friends for a long time then you can try to help each other out and give a good deal or get something in return. But if it is a new retailer or perhaps someone very rich then you have to show that you are just a small trader trying to survive". Also, while walking through the market Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg met a number of fellow traders, some of whom were themselves just arriving in the city from other parts of Mongolia, as well as the Mongolian-Chinese border. This provided the women with a good opportunity to catch up on the latest news from the border itself, to gauge market prices in China, as well as whether any new regulations had been put in place at the crossing.

After confirming a number of orders and organising to meet key retailers upon their return, Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg made their way to another area of the market specialising in

animal products. Stretching over a hundred of metres, this area featured rows of retailers selling a diverse range of goods, including leather, pelts, cashmere, wool, and horse-hair ropes. Within a few minutes, the pair located their long-time friend and trading partner, Batbaayar, a wholesaler retailer who had leased a space inside the market for a number of years. Batbaayar was by far Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg's most important trading partner, specifically as he regularly purchased their wool and cashmere every time they passed through Ulaanbaatar.

There are two distinct categories of traders in Mongolia, namely merchant retailers, or *najmaacid* (singular. *najmaacin*), and speculative wholesalers, or *canzuud* (never used in the singular) (Lacaze 2010). Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg are both najmaacin, purchasing and selling products themselves, or through relatives. Batbaayar, on the other hand, is a canzuud, who buys larger quantities of goods and resells them to other (larger) retailers. The word najmaacin originates from the Chinese word for commerce, or *maimai*, while the word canzuud originates from the English word for 'change', and means persons earning their income via exchange (ibid:193). This nomenclature is important as it reveals two rather different experience of trade and economic activity (ibid); thus, while the najmaacin is an isolated 'suitcase trader' travelling with his/her goods alone, much as Chinese traders did until the beginning of the twentieth century, the *canzuud* is a newer kind of trader to have emerged only since the postsocialist transition, exchanging goods for economic profit (Campi 2006).

Of course, these two distinct forms of trade are not only characterised by their own context-specific practices but simultaneously demand specific kinds of skills, which intersects with the previous discussion concerning the relationship between the formal and informal economies. Indeed, because canzuud are settled retailers who pay tax to the local authorities and rent to the market owner, they are to a large extent integrated into the formal economy of Ulaanbaatar, which demands that they learn new and appropriate skills such as paying tax, adhering to the laws of both the local government and the market itself, as well as managing various levels of state regulation. As Batbaayar himself described, many of these things were not necessary for canzuud during the early years of the postsocialist transition, but have become increasingly important with the emergence of the new market economy:

> I remember when I first started trading in Naram Tuul there were almost no rules. Anyone could arrive in the market and set up a stall, so long as you paid the right person. In the 1990s the market was just like the rest of the economy; it was like anarchy and you had to work everything out yourself. Of course, it was difficult and you had little protection, but it was a free time. Nowadays everything is different. I have to deal with many new things like taxes, government regulations, health checks, and security guards. I have to fill in documents every year to keep my stall, show records of my sales to the local authorities, and also negotiate with my neighbouring retailers on the level of trade. Najmaacin never have to do these kinds of things. They are free to trade wherever they want and without any paperwork. For them it is still like anarchy.

Here we can see a clear recognition of the perceived differences between the two kinds of trade and relationship to corollary skills. For *canzuud* such as Batbaayar, learning how to navigate the increasing levels of bureaucracy are entirely new skills that he would never have encountered in the past, and thus are fundamentally tied to his own experience of the changing postsocialist context. Indeed, one even detects a sense of nostalgia in his words for the early days of the transition, when apparently regulation and laws were more relaxed and people felt it easier to engage in ('free') trade. This is something that emerged throughout my time with Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg as I observed many canzuud complaining about the increased levels of bureaucracy, in many cases using najmaacin as an example of 'how things used to be'. Of course, in reality this opposition is more complicated, for while canzuud have to deal with state regulation they are also granted a certain degree of security not afforded to lone traders. As Sarangerel herself remarked: "Najmaacin and canzuud need different skills. Najmaacin need

to be fast and good with numbers, as well as be able to move and meet lots of different retailers. Canzuud can take their time and build up contacts over a long period, but they have other problems such as control from the government, taxes, and criminal issues. Whereas najmaacin are usually traders for survival, canzuud are there to make money". This is something confirmed by Signe Gutersen (2012) in her account of Naram Tuul. In particular, she underlines the structural organisation of Naram Tuul and its links to the different kinds of trade. Thus, the najmaacin is preoccupied with locating the newest, best, and cheapest goods while having a relatively negative status in the eyes of the majority of the population. By contrast, canzuud enjoy a certain level of security by accumulating larger quantities of goods, although they often contract debts while awaiting a large sale, and the perception of them as 'rich' is often complicated. There is also a significant difference in terms of the temporality of their trade, for while canzuud are more stable and accumulate goods over an extended period of time – investing in the future and for the long-term – najmaacin are focused on the here and now. Connected to this, the najmaacin are entirely reliant on their own individual skills, while canzuud are able to extend their skills outwards across broader national and international networks along diverse circulatory paths.

Now this variability between different kinds and experiences of trade connects to the earlier discussion concerning the relationship between the formal and informal economies. At first glance, it would appear that while the najmaacin is to a large extent outside the formal sector – not having to pay tax on their purchases or sales and typically moving beyond the official regulation of the state – canzuud have increasingly been incorporated into the formal sector. Certainly, this is true to some extent, for traders such as Batbaayar do indeed have to negotiate with formal regulations that Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg are able to avoid. In practice, however, the formal-informal dichotomy is rather fluid, and while settled retailers complain about the increasing organisation of the trading economy, they simultaneously find ways through which to circumvent the authorities. For example, it is common knowledge that canzuud pay bribes to the local authorities in order to avoid paying tax on all of their transactions, which essentially leaves a portion of their trade within the 'informal' (i.e. non-state regulated) sector. Similarly, canzuud are able to avoid certain regulations by acquiring some of their goods directly from najmaacin (such as Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg), typically taking smaller quantities than when dealing with established retailers and thus not drawing attention to themselves and again avoiding tax. At the same time, Batbaayar explained that some retailers have very close ties to the 'criminal' organisation of the market itself, through which they are able to pay bribes and receive preferential treatment. For example, one trader was found to be selling out-of-date meat and, while the city authorities wanted to close his stall down, the trader was able to draw upon his connections to remain open and avoid persecution. Now this ability to bypass the official regulation of the state not only problematises the formal-informal dichotomy, but also the teleological assumption that informal sector trade will 'inevitably' be incorporated into the formal sector. Indeed, this is the official narrative of government and non-government organisations working in Ulaanbaatar, who suggest that increasing regulation will result in a fairer and more legally-binding local economy. In actuality, however, the informal sector looks likely to remain in direct articulation with the formal economy, even while it intersects with it in various ways. By focusing on the everyday skills and strategies of different kinds of traders we are able to step outside this dichotomy and consider how people navigate the increasing bureaucracy of the state and operate fluidly between the formal/informal boundary, as well as to some extent the legal and the illegal.

While Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg spent only a short while talking with other retailers they took their time with Batbaayar, who invited us to sit down and drink tea behind his stall. Given that the three had known each other for a number of years and, as Batbaayar's own son had married Sarangerel's niece, the trading relationship between the two was clearly intertwined with personal and filial relations. Almost immediately, the conversation turned to the personal ties between the three traders, with Batbaayar asking about various family members who he himself knew. At the same time, Sarangerel herself asked Batbaayar whether his wife had recovered from falling ill only a few weeks earlier, telling him that her prayers were with him and that she intended to visit the temple in the centre of town to pray on her behalf.
Now the link between social relations and informal trade is not simply a cultural frill or eccentricity of Mongolian life, but actually determines people's economic relations and comes to be actively harnessed by traders themselves. This is something that came to the fore almost immediately as Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg began to discuss with Batbaayar the sale of their products. As Sarangerel explained: "The grasslands are excellent at the moment. Because of the recent dzud and the loss of many animals, there has been very little overgrazing. We have also had a lot of rain during the summer, much more than in the rest of the country". Of course, by telling Batbaayar the condition of the grasslands she indirectly informs him of the good quality of their products, inadvertently suggesting that they should fetch a higher price. Reaching into one of their bags, Sarangerel removed a large bundle of cashmere and placed it on the table, while Oyunchimeg did the same with some of the wool. Immediately, the two women began describing the high quality of their products, taking Bataar's hand and making him feel for himself: 'It is some of the best we have had. The cashmere is from households using additional pastures in the summer. It is certainly much better than cashmere from here (in central Mongolia)'.



(Figure 59. Herding goods for sale in Naram Tuul market – photo by the author)

Since the postsocialist transition, the herding economy has shifted in central Mongolia towards the Ulaanbaatar market (Sneath 1999; Rossabi 2005; Byambadorj et al. 2011), with herders migrating closer to the city and using pastures immediately on the outskirts of the city to graze their herds. Viewing the ever-expanding urban population as a viable market for survival, herders attempt to sell surplus products by sitting along the roads entering and exiting Ulaanbaatar. Here family members sit beside large piles of wool, cashmere, and other animal products and wait for informal traders to arrive and purchase their goods. While some

wealthier Ulaanbaatar-based canzuud use vehicles to drive out to these locations and purchase products in bulk, other retailers such as Batbaayar are more dependent on najmaacid to bring them into the city. With over twenty different najmaacid within his network, Batbaayar is relatively successful and has been able to diversify his stock. As he explained: "I used to only sell electronics but now I do different things. I know animal products well and can see whether something is good quality. I have an eye for cashmere especially. I also sell cashmere now because the market is good". Working as trans-frontier traders, Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg are largely outside the central Mongolian market and are at an advantage in being able to obtain high quality products that fetch a higher price. As Oyunchimeg explained: "The markets are very different. When we come from the Shishged we only bring things that will fetch a higher price in the city (Ulaanbaatar). It makes no sense to try and compete with the Ulaanbaatar market because it is so big. So we have to be flexible; if the season has been good in Khövsgöl then we take cashmere and wool. If it has been a bad season, then we take white foods or even small amounts of berries and herbs". After perusing the cashmere and wool, Batbaayar proposed a price to the two traders, to which Sarangerel immediately rejected and the three traders began to bargain: "That is too low for us! You know we are just small traders supporting our families; we do not make lots of money like you in Ulaanbaatar. You know we helped your wife every time she comes to Mörön. She stays with us and we also help her trade". Here Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg actively draw upon their cultural capital as middle-aged, widowed, rural women and emphasise their difference to Ulaanbaatar traders. As Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg know Batbaayar well, they also integrate into their bargaining strategies references to their personal and filial ties to Batbaayar and his family. Of course, Batbaayar is aware that his economic relationship with the two traders is fused with personal affiliations, and his response was visibly measured: "Yes, yes, I know. You are always good customers to me. But I have new taxes to pay all the time. They make market conditions very difficult and I have to keep my costs realistic". Eventually, Batbaayar gave in and agreed on a price accepted by the two women. Later in the day Sarangerel commented to me that in fact it was an excellent price, virtually double what they would receive in Mörön and far higher than most other retailers would offer in Naram Tuul. As such an example makes clear, informal trading is not only facilitated by the practical skills of dealing with settled retailers, negotiating over price, and effectuating sales, but also the strategic harnessing of social relations and obligations characteristic of Mongolian cultural life. By actively referencing their relationships when negotiating over price, as well as recognising their relative poverty as compared with more established retailers such as himself, Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg were able to raise their social-economic status.

It is significant to note that there is a gendered distinction to the different kinds of trade. Thus, while 80% of najmaacin are women, the majority of settled retailers are men (also see Lacaze 2010). This is something which suggests a correlation between gender and the embodiment of skills specific to different kinds of trade (Anderson 2005). As Sarangerel described it: "In Mongolian society women always play a strong role, especially in the countryside. Women work hard and families would not survive without them. During the socialist period, too, women were hard workers. I think this is what makes women such good najmaacin: because they are smart and work hard". This is something that female traders come to actively identify with themselves in giving meaning to their experiences of the new trading economy. As could be seen throughout my time with Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg, najmaacin make up a new category of female actors in postsocialist Mongolia, sharing common experiences and often travelling in groups. Here the skills demanded on najmaacin are

intentionally used to give meaning to the gender constructions of the postsocialist period such as by emphasising the value of female-specific skills and their role in allowing female traders to be successful. As Sarangerel remarked: "I think women make much better traders than men. They are smarter, better with numbers, and don't get into trouble. Men spend money on wasteful things like alcohol". As an ILO report describes: 'The majority of traders in Mongolia are thirty to forty years old and women. The reason women dominate this type of business is that not many of the men are capable. They are easily addicted to alcohol or gambling and lose everything. Many traders were formerly school teachers, medical doctors, or army staff, although others are from pastoral households. Popular wisdom is that women have advantages over men. Women traders generally are better at overcoming language barriers, as well as having better managerial and communication skills" (UNDP 2003).

Here the new trading economy has led to the embodiment of new skills, tacit-knowledge, and embodied style specifically as part of postsocialist gender relations. As with new informal traders, the learning of skills is such that they eventually become a fundamental part of self-identity, coming to define people's experience of the world and their gender constructions. Indeed, certain female traders are also becoming recognised as new kinds of political leaders in some regions, specifically on account of their trading skills (Pedersen 2011). This is something that has important political implications for the future, as well as broader gender relations. As Grasseni writes, "Once acquired, skill is an essential aspect, and element of practice, a taste and a meaning-making attitude, that is developed and applied throughout everyday life, thus amounting to a sense of identification or emplacement" (2009:10).

Of course, this link between economic practices and social relations is something that is impossible to disentangle entirely, and much of the negotiation surrounding price was actually of a rather informal type, embedded within Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg's relationship with Batbaayar and the broader social network of which he – and they – were both a part. This is something that came to the fore throughout my time in Ulaanbaatar as the two women continued to draw upon their social network to contact other retailers with whom they intended to work, as well as to obtain more informal advice such as on market prices. At one point, Oyunchimeg announced that she needed to find a mobile phone shop in order to top-up her SIM card. This was essential, she explained, in order to contact one of her family members who lived in Ulaanbaatar, and who she regularly met every time she passed through the city. After finding a shop and topping-up her card, Oyunchimeg called her family member and arranged for them to meet us for lunch. As I later come to learn, part of this lunch was to ask the family member whether they could also offer us accommodation for the night.

Skills and the Embodiment of Urban Style

The new skills demanded in the informal trading economy are not only those that are consciously learnt and performed by traders themselves, but also more implicit skills accumulated within the body. Indeed, while it is imperative for traders to organise their travel, develop multiple retail networks, and harness their social relations, they must also be able to embody an air of confidence when engaging in a sale or negotiating with retailers, as well as when encountering problems such as being harassed by drunk individuals in the street. Connected to this, traders come to learn certain kinds of embodied 'style' and 'urban capital' (Ferguson 1999) when moving between rural and urban areas.

This came to the fore within minutes of our arrival in Ulaanbaatar, as I noticed both Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg 'adjust' the way they walked, spoke, and more generally comported themselves. While in Mörön the women always appeared relaxed, rather

extroverted, and spoke with a noticeable Darhad accent, in the city they behaved more quietly, kept their heads low and towards the ground, walked through the streets more quickly, and generally avoided any unnecessary attention. At the same time, they clearly adjusted their speaking voices when interacting with Ulaanbaatar-based retailers, in an attempt to mask the unique intonations of Darhad speech. This was only partially recognised by the two women themselves, who reacted with some surprise when I commented to them the differences that I had noticed. After some time, however, both Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg acknowledged that in fact they did 'behave' somewhat differently in Ulaanbaatar, particularly as compared with their home town. These differences, the women explained, were the result of the extreme variations between life in the countryside and the capital city, as well as the perceived attitude to traders in some sections of Ulaanbaatar society. As Oyunchimeg described it: "Some new traders who come from the countryside are lost in the city – everything is different and you need to learn new things very quickly. When I first came here in 1999 I couldn't believe my eyes. People used to try and cheat me because they thought I was a countryside person. But now I know how to work in the city. I dress differently, walk differently, and also talk differently. It is just small things here and there, such as not revealing too much information about your background, or speaking in a more neutral accent so that people do not know you have travelled from the north". As Sarangerel added, it is also important to present oneself in a certain way, specifically to avoid being considered a newcomer to the city which inevitably raises unnecessary attention and diminishes one's chances of engaging in successful trade: "Life is different in Ulaanbaatar than Mörön. You have to adjust yourself from the minute that you arrive. Walking down the street is different, speaking with other people is different, bargaining over prices is different. I learnt that it is helpful to dress less like a countryside person and more like someone from the city. I try to wear brand clothing so that I appear more successful and people take me seriously. You cannot be a good trader if you wear a deel!". Connected to this is the issue of how one carries oneself when interacting with particular retailers, specifically those that one is less familiar with and who might attempt to cheat oneself or press for a better bargain. This is something I myself noticed, for while with long-term trading partners such as Batbaayar, Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg appeared relaxed and spoke freely, with others they appeared far more reserved, clearly self-monitoring their behavior so as not to give away too much information about themselves which, they believed, could limit their capacity to trade. As Sarangerel described it:

> If you are meeting a retailer for the first time you need to be careful. You want to appear successful but not too rich either; I think the most important thing is to act confident, stand up straight, and try to appear as an honest person. Nowadays in Ulaanbaatar everybody is afraid of being cheated by someone else, so it is a constant fight to try and appear honest. If the retailer is from Ulaanbaatar he will usually think people like us are stupid because we are from the countryside. People are always looking to cheat you. If you look like a countryside person then they will just want more money. So you need to present yourself as a city person with good connections. I think I look like a city person now, or at least very close.

In his analysis of the changes to have occurred in the Zambian Copperbelt Ferguson describes the way in which workers adopt new forms of embodied 'style' as they move between the countryside and the city. When speaking with rural age-mates, for example, new migrant workers adopt a range of body-techniques which signify their 'rural capital', such as walking and dressing in a manner entirely different to that when they are seeking work in the city, actively cultivating context-specific styles and dressing differently. Importantly, this process of cultivation is, as Ferguson notes, both partly conscious and unconscious, "neither simply received nor simply adopted: it is cultivated, through a complex and only partly conscious activity over time" (1999:101). This has close parallels with the description of Sarangerel and

Oyunchimeg above. Indeed, much as with workers in the Zambian Copperbelt rural traders in Mongolia actively and unconsciously adopt modes of bodily comportment specific to the urban context, dressing in certain ways so as to appear more 'urban', walking appropriately to exude confidence and thus better facilitate their trade with urban retailers, as well as self-monitoring their verbal articulations and even their accents to accentuate their urban capital. Of course, while much of this is generated in an unconscious way, it is also actively cultivated, such as when Sarangerel noted that she purposely wore 'branded' clothing while in the city, when Oyunchimeg refused to give too much information away about herself, or when the pair masked their Darhad accents so as to 'hide' their rural background. From this perspective, the cultivation of a distinctly urban 'style' can be seen as a form of practical enskilment, something that people learn to do through cumulative experience. This is similarly alluded to by Ferguson himself, who writes that the ability to 'do' a cultural style, and to 'bring it off' successfully, is an achieved performative competence (1999:221).

Now the cultivation of a distinctly urban style also has important implications for understanding people's experience of social change. In the Zambian Copperbelt cultural differences in Africa have insistently been tied to an idea of transition between two types of society, one traditional and rural, the other modern and urban (ibid). The concept of style is designed to explicitly fracture such divisions and prioritise the ways in which people move in-between the rural and the urban context, deconstructing the teleological narrative of African modernisation as a linear and permanent process. "The idea of style", Ferguson remarks, "as a cultivated competence implies an active process, spread across historical and biographical time, situated within a political-economic context and within an individual life course" (ibid). This has much relevance with regards to informal trading in Mongolia. Indeed, Mongolia's postsocialist transition has been described in very much the same terms as Ferguson notes of Africa, as a 'developing' country moving along a linear path from the traditional to the modern, and from the rural (and herding) to the urban. As we have seen in the above ethnographic account, however, such divisions are rendered permeable by informal traders themselves, who not only move between them in terms of work and lifestyle, but also facilitate new connections such as those within the informal trading economy. Here a consideration of style as something that is skillfully cultivated helps to capture this movement and permeability, with people developing skills and adopting styles so as to flexibly move between the countryside and the city, and thus deconstructs the teleological assumption that the two are diametrically opposed. Just as with rural residents who work as drivers for part of the year, traders such as Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg alternate between different kinds of rural and urban life by transposing skills from one context to another, as well as flexibly adopting appropriate forms of embodied style in both a conscious and unconscious way.

Here a focus on style as cultivated skill presents informal traders as, first and foremost, human beings seeking to practically cope with the world as they move from one domain to another. In the process, this serves to emphasise the existential locus of social change, moving beyond the teleology of normative conceptualisations such as urbanisation (or rural flight) and recognising instead people's mutual co-existence between these oppositions. While focusing on skills per se allows us to observe a change in ability from one point in time to another, we would do well to focus on the person embodying the skill as well: "If we focus on the person we attend to the multiplicity of their skills and changes in life course" (Harris 2005:207-8). Here Harris alludes to the importance of grounding skill within the context of individual lifeworlds, as well as the broader socioeconomic and political context in which they find themselves. For traders such as Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg, for example, the postsocialist transition is not

experienced in terms of the dichotomies between the rural and the urban, the traditional and the modern. Instead, it is experienced in largely practical terms, as part of the very ways in which they cope with the transition. Here the everyday experience of social change is entangled with the transformation of skilled-practice. Person and skill are inseparable because of the never-ending cycle of the need to learn new skills and locate oneself in new conditions. As Harris puts it: "The emphasis on changing skills as a person grows older also reveals a flexibility…by focusing on this we see how different skills entail different experiences of learning and have their own histories" (ibid: 208).

It is important to recognise, however, the limitations associated with this level of flexibility, for not all people are necessarily able to 'pull off' a style to the same extent. Indeed, throughout my time with Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg they would often point out particular traders who they could identify as 'countryside people', something which implied their un-familiarity (or lack of skills) within urban Ulaanbaatar. Not only does this capture the variability between different levels of skill in terms of adopting particular styles, but also, the use of the rural-urban dichotomy by the women as a means of differentiating themselves from other, less experienced, traders. Connected to this, while the boundary between the 'rural' and the 'urban' might be rendered permeable in various ways, it clearly still exists as an existential division for traders such as Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg, who very much feel the need to adopt a perceived 'urban' style in order to be successful. In this regard, the division between the rural and the urban is a matter of skill itself, for the ability to flexibly move between contexts is dependent on one's ability to 'look urban', just as it is essential to adopt a 'rural' style for Zambian youth when returning back from the city. As both Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg themselves emphasise, clothing is a fundamental aspect of this: "People dress differently in Ulaanbaatar. Although you see some people walking in deels it is not like in the countryside. It is especially important for trans-frontier traders who meet with border officials and Chinese retailers. Dressing well makes you appear more professional, especially for women of our age". As Sarangerel remarked: "It is easy to spot different kinds of traders, just from the way they look. (Pointing at one young man outside) You can see he is from the countryside; you can tell from his clothes. I'm sure he is a new trader. You see how we dress, very much like city people. This is important when you are a trader; you want to move through the city quickly and without problems".

Skill and State Power at the Mongolian-Chinese Border

After spending two days in Ulaanbaatar and selling all of their cashmere Sarangerel, Oyunchimeg, and I continued our journey to the Mongolian-Chinese border. Trans-frontier traders travel the approximately 800 kilometres from Ulaanbaatar to China by one of two ways: by long-distance mini-bus or by connecting to the national railway network. Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg alternate between bus and train travel, and this particular season they had elected to go by train. Mongolia's railway network is a product of the socialist period, constructed specifically to connect the country to the trans-Siberian railway and the former Soviet Union. First built in 1947, the railway has remained largely unchanged since its construction, servicing the same routes from Russia, China, and Mongolia and even using many of the same trains from the period. There are two trains from Ulaanbaatar to Zamyn-Üüd/Erlian (and on to Beijing) each day, and throughout the year both are filled to capacity. A large proportion of the passengers are trans-frontier traders, who generally occupy the cheapest, third-class seating compartment and for whom the railway serves as a fundamental link in the new trading economy. Indeed, it is estimated that between 50-80% of all informal

trade in Mongolia operates through the Zamyn-Üüd/Erlian, with a considerable portion of this carried by najmaacin such as Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg.



(Figure 60. Arriving at Zamyn-Üüd/Erlian train station – photo by the author)

After purchasing our tickets, we boarded the train and made our way into the third-class seating compartment which, despite being filled to capacity, was relatively comfortable and far more spacious than the long-distance bus. Passengers were able to move about and socialise with friends and trading partners. Once the train began to depart, it left the urban centre of Ulaanbaatar and passed through vast neighborhoods of ger-districts on the outskirts of town, which eventually gave way to large sections of overgrazed pastures surrounding the city. After yet more time, the train headed out onto the open steppe and reached the grasslands of southern-central Mongolia. Along the way passengers slept, talked with one another, and played cards, passing the time in relative comfort. Occasionally, the train stopped at a number of small, nondescript towns to pick up additional passengers, the majority of whom were trans-frontier traders. Eventually, we left the grasslands of central Mongolia and entered the sparse, desert-steppe region of the south, indicating our passage through the Gobi and towards the Chinese border.

The following morning our train arrived at Zamyn-Üüd, a name which translates as 'Roads Gate'. Consisting of just 11,000 permanent residents, Zamyn-Üüd is the busiest of all Mongolia's trans-frontier borders, seeing more than 1 million people cross through each year. As the train pulled in at the station, passengers were required to disembark and make their way through customs. As noted above, China and Russia implemented a new regulated system in 2002, only allowing for short-stays in the various trans-frontier zones. As a result, Mongolian citizens may enter China without a visa and stay for a maximum of thirty days, but they are required to pass through border control. At the same time, Mongolian traders have been restricted to carrying 18kg from Beijing railway station, but they may carry as much merchandise as they want from other stations, and from smaller stations such as along the Chinese-Mongolian border (Lacaze 2010). The implications of this is that border guards check the documents of all travellers and assess whether they are carrying goods beyond their official weight.

As Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg remarked the border is viewed by the majority of traders in negative terms, specifically as associated with the institutional authority of the nation-state(s). While there are officially no restrictions for najmaacin except should they wish to remain permanently in China, the border still has the potential to limit one's movement in and out of China, as well as enforcing upon traders' specific kinds of bodily control (Lacaze 2010). As

Oyunchimeg explained: "I don't like the border. It involves standing in line, filling in paperwork, and producing documents. I don't like having to come through here and show everything about your life; they ask you where you are from, where you are heading, are you married, all kinds of things. The Chinese border guards also often make trouble with traders because they think you might be trying to migrate or export too much. You can be denied entry if you don't have the right documents or if you are suspected of anything". This reaction is not at all surprising given that najmaacin usually operate outside the official bureaucratic regulation of the state. Of course, this example shows the limitations and blockages to informal trade as the border emerges as a space of state authority within the informal trading economy, which also draws to attention the intersection between the state and the market.

Moving through the border to reach Erlian is a highly formalised and ritualised affair[73], one that demands specific kinds of practical embodiment and skills, and which comes to be cumulatively learnt by experienced traders over time. This came to the fore as Sarangerel, Oyunchimeg and I joined the queue leading into the main customs building. Initially we stood outside the building and all of the traders appeared relaxed, talking with one another and even sitting on the floor while waiting. Upon entering the building, however, the traders adjusted their behaviour by standing upright in line, no longer sitting on the floor, talking quietly, and avoiding attracting any attention. As they moved closer towards the border the institutional authority of the state came to be increasingly felt and demanded that traders responded in specific ways, such as following the painted markers directing the flow of visitors, following the orders of the security officers (who would tell traders to 'stand still' and 'follow the line'), as well as observe the multi-lingual posters delineating a barrage of rules and possible fines (also see Lacaze 2010). Here different traders responded in different ways on account of their practical experience: in the case of more experienced traders such as Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg, for example, they stood quietly in line, checked over their travel documents, and adjusted their clothing. Having passed through the border countless times before, the women not only knew the ritual well, but have also sedimented the regulation of the space as a series of taken-for-granted embodied responses, adjusting their postures or gestures in a largely implicit way and generally avoiding conflict. As Oyunchimeg put it: "It is better to just stand quietly and do as they ask. As long as you are organised with your documents you are fine". This was not the case for all trans-frontier traders, for some people visibly stood out and appeared unfamiliar with the regulated space of the border. Just before it was our turn to produce our documents we saw a number of young Mongolian men who appeared drunk. When one of the security guards asked them to move along one of the men began shouting loudly and was taken away to an office for questioning. Sarangerel told me that the man would be released but would almost certainly not be allowed to cross the border, commenting on his visible inexperience: "He will have trouble now if he wants to return for trade. The police will keep a record of him and maybe stop him working. I would never behave in the way that he did; if you come here drunk or make problems you cannot work as a trader. You will never be successful. I think it also because he is a man. Men are always getting drunk and you can't do that if you are trading".

After successfully making our way through customs Sarangerel, Oyunchimeg and I exited the building and officially entered the People's Republic of China. Like all informal traders the first and most important task for the women is to reach the retail district of Erlian. For this we followed the hundreds of other traders heading towards the many taxis and mini-buses lined-

[73] For a comparable discussion of the Zamyn-Üüd/Erlian border crossing see Lacaze (2010).

up outside, which strategically arrive to pick up Mongolian traders as the train crosses from Zamyn-Üüd. While some traders take the less expensive mini-buses and spend the rest of the day walking between shops, supermarkets, and retail outlets, others such as Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg hire a single taxi for the entire day. This is seen as better ensuring the success of one's trading, specifically as having a vehicle at all times means that one is able to travel efficiently between retailers and access better deals. At the same time, it allows one to more easily transport all of one's goods when travelling around the city and when heading back to the Mongolian border. Upon arrival Sarangerel took out her mobile phone and switched to a Chinese sim-card, which she uses specifically in Erlian. Then she called one of the two or three taxi drivers whom the pair worked with regularly while visiting the city and who would accompany us for the next few days.



(Figure 61. Making a trade in Erlian – photo by the author)

While Zamyn-Üüd is a small, nondescript border town, Erlian is a large city situated in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and characteristic of expanding cities across China. When the Chinese authorities opened the region to international trade in 1992, Erlian underwent a dramatic transformation, growing in population from approximately 8,000 people to an estimated 100,000 people by 2012 (Lacaze 2010). Of course, the population swells even further with the regular arrival of traders and walking through the city one sees people of both Chinese and Mongolian ethnicity, as well as large numbers of migrant workers who arrive daily from across the border. In 2000, Zamyn-Üüd/Erlian was officially designated a free-trade zone by a Chinese-Mongolian agreement. Since then, the Chinese city has grown in direct articulation with the trading economy, something that has come to be mapped onto the physical geography of the city itself. Indeed, Erlian is differentiated between various neighborhoods selling particular categories of goods and commodities, including a 'clothing district', an 'electronics district', etc. This is also manifested in the supermarkets of the city, which are particularly popular amongst smaller-scale najmaacin. This is also visible when looking at a map of the city, where the physical composition of Erlian has expanded in direct relation to people's trading activities and related services: thus, one sees industrial products, open markets or supermarkets, travel services (such as help for railway transportation), accommodation (hostels), and restaurants. In addition, the city has installed a number of Mongolian (*Cyrillic*[74]) road signs to further cater for the Mongolian visitors and traders.

[74] In China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, the official languages are Chinese and Mongolian, though the latter is written only in traditional script (*Mongol bichig*).

Of course, the main economic activity of Erlian is the exchange of goods, services and funds, and the city is essentially one large marketplace specialising in trade and human transportation. Indeed, it is the trading economy – and the activities of both najmaacin and canzuud – which structures virtually all life in Erlian. Almost half of all permanent residents are officially employed either directly, or indirectly, with some aspect of the trading economy, including as retailers, drivers of cars, mini-buses, as well as customs officers or policeman. It must also be remembered that a substantial number of Zamyn-Üüd (Mongolian) citizens cross into Erlian every day, where they work and/or engage in trade as regular migrant workers. This gives the city a distinct border-identity, as well as a certain degree of energy characterised by the perpetual movement of people (Lacaze 2010). The transportation network of the city is clearly set up for cross-border trade, as well as the formal/informal practices around it. On any single day, approximately 1500 people enter Erlian to engage in trade and, in addition to this, approximately 200 cars and trucks drive through the border carrying goods and commodities. Both najmaacin and canzuud generally travel throughout the entire year, although during the summer this number peaks.

Many najmaacin typically spend only a few days across the border, seeking to catch mini-buses or trains back to Zamyn-Üüd or Ulaanbaatar and sell their goods. This is fundamentally tied to the kind of trade they practice and the limitations associated with it. Thus, because they work independently and are unable to carry large quantities of goods, najmaacin make profit by moving small amounts of commodities frequently over time. Thus, while some traders might stay in Zamyn-Üüd for months at a time, interspersed with regular trips across the border every few days, Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg travel between the border and Ulaanbaatar, staying not more than a few days across the border but returning frequently to Erlian (from Ulaanbaatar) during the course of their two or three-month trading season.

Now the frequent and regular movement of traders across the border is something that gives najmaacin trading a fast and ephemeral quality (Lacaze 2010), with virtually all time spent shuttling back and forth between retailers in different parts of the city, as well as in and out of Mongolia. There is also a highly competitive dimension to najmaacin trade, specifically as traders feel themselves to be in direct competition with one another, seeking to acquire the best deals, carry the most amount of goods, and harness the best retail connections. This could be seen as Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg travelled by taxi to the first of many retail stops of the day. Upon our arrival, the women literally started to run everywhere they went: out of the taxi, towards and through the retail district, and into a variety of shops and supermarkets. Here speed was considered to be of vital importance, moving between points as quickly as possible and collecting as many goods as one they were able to carry. As Sarangerel explained: “We must work quickly in Erlian. Everything is fast and chaotic; traders are running across the city to meet retailers and buy products. The faster you can move the better deals you will get and the more profit you will make”. Using their taxi, they directed the driver to key locations in the city where they knew they could meet specific retailers and/or get good deals. At the same time, we would also stop off at particular shops or supermarkets which advertised items on sale.

Here the speed at which traders operated can be seen as a specific kind of skill, one that is learnt cumulatively over time and with experience. Indeed, as najmaacin work alone (or in pairs), their relative success is largely dependent on their personal skills alone. These included travelling to and collecting goods and commodities - which need to correspond to effective

turnover of stock - looking out for good deals and the most fashionable or sought-after items, as well as knowing their way around the city in order to save time. Occasionally our taxi driver would make recommendations which the two women considered but with a critical ear. As Sarangerel remarked: "To be successful you need to know your way around the city and travel quickly. We always used to use maps and it took much longer but now we are very familiar with the place. Knowing a good taxi driver is very important as some taxis are better than others and you can waste a lot of time driving around".

The skills of conducting trade in China were also of paramount concern: "When it is your first time in China, you have to learn quickly. Chinese businessmen are very aggressive and like to cheat Mongolians. Many people think it is better to trade with Mongolians living in China but if you make good contacts then the best deals are with Chinese". Here Sarangerel's remarks reveal the importance of skillfully navigating the specific ethnic relations of life in Erlian. This came to the fore as our taxi made a stop at a retail district known as a centre of electronics, with two roads of shops selling a range of different products. Electronics are one of the preferred items to buy for trans-frontier traders and a number of traders could be seen walking through the district. As Oyunchimeg remarked, electronics are popular for practical reasons as they are light-weight and relatively small in size. As they are increasing in demand across Mongolia, they are considered relatively easy to trade and, if one can get a good enough deal, it is possible to get a high turnover. "DVD players, mobile phones, these are the things we always try to buy; they make up about three-quarters of our purchases. Mongolian people's tastes are changing fast; 10 years ago, it was not common for Mongolians to have mobile phones, televisions, or DVD players, but today many people have three or four phones and DVD players are very cheap; it has changed very fast".



(Figure 62. Buying and selling at an indoor market in Erlian – photo by the author)

After locating a shop at the end of the road Sarangerel introduced me to Xiao Yang, a Chinese man born in Erlian and owner of a local electronics shop. Speaking to the man in broken Chinese, Sarangerel enquired how is family were doing, as well as walking to the back of the shop to greet his elderly mother: "And you *Lao Taitai*? (Old lady) Are you well too? How is your health? Here (Taking some Mongolian herbs out of her bag), this is for you, straight from the pure Mongolian countryside". As ethnic Darhads, Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg are aware of the differences between ethnic groups in Erlian, and have made efforts to learn enough Chinese to ensure they can relate to local traders and ensure they do not get ripped off. Xiao Yang is one of only two Chinese retailers Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg see regularly, and it is through him that

they learnt to speak basic Chinese, while he speaks enough Mongolian from his interactions with ethnic Mongols living in Erlian. After welcoming us inside and sitting down to drink tea, Xiao Yang left to fetch a large package of electronics, mostly DVD players. He opened one of the boxes to show and explained that they were more expensive than before, specifically on account of the Chinese market. Xiao Yang acquires all of his products from the coastal provinces of southeast China, having opened his shop ten years ago: 'The markets in the southeast are slowing down. Everyone has to adjust their prices". Sarangerel decried the suggestion and commented on their long-term trading relationship: "We travel such a long way just to see you, all the way from Siberia! We are not local traders from Zamyn-Üüd. We know each other for a long time". Switching constantly between Chinese and Mongolian, Oyunchimeg commented on the vast differences between China and Mongolia, and the implications for their relative trade: "Mongolians experience poverty much more than in China. Life is hard for us! Look, we are only two old women, no husbands or work. We are just trying to survive". Listening to the women, the Chinese trader eventually agreed on a slightly better price and Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg purchased around fifty DVD players. Mongolian najmaacid and canzuud have relationships with several categories of local traders, including Chinese and Mongolians from Erlian, as well as people from other cities. As Sarangerel emphasised after making the trade: "I think many Mongolians prefer to trade with Mongolians because they think Chinese are very hard or even cheats. Trading is different in China. It is good to be friendly with the whole family, and we know his wife and mother for many years". Here trans-frontier traders can be seen as developing new skills such as navigating the ethnic composition of Erlian. By speaking a small amount of Chinese, Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg differentiate themselves from other trans-frontier traders who generally traded solely with Mongolians. As noted above, it makes practical sense to develop trade relations with local Chinese and this demands of traders that they develop specific skills in turn.

Informal Trading and the Transition from Socialism to Capitalism

In the final sections of this chapter I move to consider the implications of informal trading for Mongolia's broader transforming economy, something which intersects with another of the major teleological metanarratives of change: namely, the transition from a pre-capitalist (or socialist) to a capitalist economy. At the same time, I describe the final stages of Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg's trans-frontier journey, including their return to the Shishged and their distribution of goods to friends, family members, and other people within their wider network of social relations.

As we have seen the postsocialist transition not only marked the collapse of state socialism but a shift towards neoliberal marketisation as well (Rossabi 2005). This inevitably came to shape the emergence of informal trade and the normative perception of it as part of the wider economy. Indeed, informal trade is characterised as evidence for the country's ('positive') transition to a market economy, something epitomised in the everyday discourse of international finance and development organisations, the media, investors, and various sectors of the Mongolian government. As a recent international report on the informal economy puts it: "The informal sector in Mongolia provides an optimistic depiction of people following market signals and addressing society's needs" (Anderson 1998*:*1; also see Bikale & Khurelbaatar 2000). Another report (ILO 2008) notes that informal traders in particular are characterised as a source of entrepreneurialism and economic growth, demonstrating energy and an ability to 'economise' on bottlenecks and bureaucracy.

Such characterisations are based on a series of taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of 'the economy', as well as the practice and experience of informal trade as rooted in a neoliberal economic model. Here the underlying assumption is that despite the ongoing limitations associated with the transition to market capitalism, informal traders are operating in the new economy as 'rational' actors according to the 'logic' of the neoliberal market, making economic decisions based on calculated selection of means in order to reach given ends and driven by the purportedly 'universal' goal of capital maximisation. This is part of a much broader teleological metanarrative concerning economic change: namely, that Mongolia has moved – or is moving - along a linear trajectory from a socialist economic past to a capitalist/market-driven future. From this perspective, informal traders are seen as a burgeoning class of entrepreneurs within the new market economy, serving as manifestations of Mongolian capitalism itself.

Now such a characterisation is certainly true to some extent, for the informal economy has indeed granted people new opportunities for generating income since the postsocialist transition. As we have seen in the examples above, the informal sector has generated entirely new forms of work and lifestyle, as well as facilitated the flow of products and commodities that otherwise would be impossible to obtain. It is arguable, in fact, that the informal economy has been partly responsible for the reduction in poverty over the last two decades, as well as providing people with work who would otherwise be unemployed (also see Brenner 2003). Connected to this, informal traders themselves can be seen as individuals who calculate risk, make rational decisions, and seek economic profit. Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg, for example, have turned to informal trading specifically to improve their economic situation, while settled retailers seek maximisation within the transition to market capitalism.

At the same time, however, it would be misleading to present the informal economy as if it operated according to some universalist logic of an idealised neoliberal market outside of the social and cultural context in which it was situated within. Indeed, it is impossible to understand how people experience informal trading simply in terms of a linear transition from a socialist to a capitalist economy. As I show below, while increasing numbers of people are engaging in informal trade and the emerging market is providing new opportunities, people's economic decisions are not solely based on the goals of capital maximisation and 'rational' decision-making. Instead, they remain fundamentally intertwined with specifically non-economic factors which have their roots in the presocialist and socialist past, including maintaining social obligations (*hariutslaga*), ontological presuppositions and experiences of the soul (*suld*), as well as culturally-specific understandings of wealth and capital.

This is something which lies at the very heart of economic anthropology and the long-established debate between the so-called substantivist and formalist positions (Gudeman 1986; Polanyi 1957; Hart 1992). The formalist position is closely aligned to the neoliberal model and based on the study of utility maximisation under conditions of scarcity. From this perspective, all societies are said to consist of 'rational' choice-making individuals, whose actions involve conscious or unconscious selections to reach culturally-defined goals (Burling 1962; Prattis 1982:207). By contrast the substantivist position argues that in the context of non-capitalist, pre-industrial, pre-capitalist, or so-called 'traditional' societies such assumptions are complicated: unlike their western-capitalist counterparts, the livelihoods of such people are said to be based not on market exchange but on redistribution and reciprocity. Here economic decision-making is driven less by individual choice and more on people's 'embeddedness' (Polanyi 1957) within existing networks of social relations, and intersecting with cultural values, moral concerns, politics, and religion. While the formalist position

assumes a universal mode of economic behaviour shared by all human beings, the substantivist emphasises the cultural-historical relativity of economic practices and how certain aspects of social life actually 'undercut' so-called 'rational' economic decision-making: "Neo-classical theory emphasises the singular importance of rational behaviour, but ethnographic studies show that material behaviour is often characterised by pragmatic practices, such as adjusting, coping, tempering, and accommodating" (Gudeman 1986:108). In other words, any analysis of economic behaviour as isolated from its social, cultural, and political context is inevitably deemed to be flawed. By contrast, a substantivist analysis considers the various social institutions upon which people's economic livelihoods are based. As Karl Polanyi describes it, the market is only one amongst many such institutions that determine the nature of economic transactions (1957:126).

Now while the formalist-substantivist debate has been usefully applied (and re-applied) to innumerable ethnographic contexts, and while anthropologists generally tend to favour a more contextualised and substantivist position, it is arguable that the division itself misleadingly presents the situation as an either/or scenario. That is to say, every community or society is classified as being either driven by rational decision-making based on market principles or as culturally-embedded concerns based on social relations. Implicit within this is a linear, teleological conceptualisation of change, for the underlying assumption is that as people in so-called 'traditional', 'non-western', or 'pre-capitalist' societies come to be integrated into capitalist modes of production and consumption via the expansion of global capitalism - processes typically glossed as 'economic globalisation' or 'marketisation' - they will inevitably move (or be 'forced') from economic decision-making based on social relationships, cultural values, reciprocity, and redistribution to ones of individual choice based on market exchange. This is the assumption behind Karl Polanyi's 'Great Transformation', which refers specifically to the divide between so-called modern, market-dominated societies and non-western, non-capitalist, or pre-industrial societies. Indeed, while Polanyi rightly problematised the universalist assumptions of neoliberal economics and emphasised situating economic practices within specific cultural-historical contexts, he nevertheless reproduced the teleology by reifying the divide between the pre-capitalist and the capitalist, the traditional and the modern, presupposing that market exchange was the inevitable 'end point' as societies based on redistribution and reciprocity are superseded in the face of global capitalism (Plattner 1982).

A strict opposition between the formal economy of 'the market' and the 'cultural' embeddedness of economic practices fails to capture the full spectrum of co-existing variations as they are experienced by people in Mongolia, and informal traders in particular. As I show below, for traders such as Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg economic decisions are experienced in more complicated, variegated, and polydirectional ways, as simultaneously tied to desires for maximisation and non-economic factors such as social obligations (hariutslaga), ontological presuppositions and experiences of the soul (*suld*), refracted through new economic uncertainties brought about by marketisation. A consideration of people's changing skills allows one to step outside this dichotomy and emphasises both the cultural relativity of economic practices and their embeddedness within cultural contexts, while still recognising the concrete – and often difficult – transformations in people's lives with the transition to capitalism. In the process, I show how informal trading is experienced less as a form of 'employment' and more as a means of practical coping in the late postsocialist context, problematising the notion of a unilinear change from socialism to capitalism and emphasising both the variability of people's experiences and the mutual co-existence between continuity and change.

Back to Ulaanbaatar: Trading, Existential Unease, and Fear of the Soul

Having met with four separate retailers and acquired as many goods as possible, Oyunchimeg and Sarangerel ended their day in Erlian. For the two women, the most important thing after completing their purchases is to catch the last train back to Ulaanbaatar, which at the time of my fieldwork departed the Chinese border every evening at 8pm. Although the pair would occasionally stay in Erlian overnight, particularly if they had failed to meet a key retailer during their trading run, they generally preferred to return to Mongolia as soon as possible. It must be remembered that najmaacin earn their livelihoods by moving relatively small quantities of goods back and forth. As a result, it is important that they off-load their goods quickly so that they can make a profit and return to the border to repeat the trading cycle later in the season. If indeed the women happened to miss the late train they would be forced to spend the night in either Erlian or Zamyn-Üüd, which as Sarangerel explained would simply be an unnecessary cost. Oyunchimeg typically arranged for the pair to stay with one of her family members in Ulaanbaatar free of charge, specifically in an apartment close to the central market.



(Figure 63. Market life in Ulaanbaatar – photo by the author)

After returning to Ulaanbaatar Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg immediately set about selling their goods, returning to Naram Tuul to meet established retailers and complete the deals they had arranged prior to departure. During one of these sales I accompanied the women as they headed towards a retailer whom I had not yet met. Along the way I noticed Sarangerel becoming visibly nervous, telling Oyunchimeg that she did not want to accompany her and that she would rather her go alone. After enquiring whether anything was wrong Sarangerel explained that she was feeling anxious about visiting the retailer who is a distant family member from the Shishged. As she explained she was not concerned about meeting the retailer himself, but rather, his mother, who was known to be a powerful *zurhaich*, or astrologer. As Sarangerel described she started consulting the astrologer after hearing of her reputation for solving personal problems and soon became a devoted client, visiting her every time she passed through Ulaanbaatar, as well as occasionally when the astrologer herself visited the Shishged.

Much as with shamans and other ritual specialists, astrologers have become increasingly popular for people since the postsocialist transition, visited by both rural and urban Mongolians. Astrologers are consulted to solicit solutions to a variety of personal problems and more general concerns, the large majority of which are related to the new uncertainties associated with the postsocialist era, including poverty, unemployment, or family troubles (Hojer & Pedersen 2008). As Sarangerel explained: "The consultations were to help me cope

with my problems: I lost my job at the negdel and after my husband died I was feeling lost. I tried to get help from many specialists including shamans and astrologers. When I heard that this woman was very powerful I decided to visit her. She said many accurate things the first time we met and promised to help make my fortune rise (*hiimor sergh*) and give me better luck". Initially, Sarangerel was happy with the astrologer and visited her regularly over a period of a few years. When she last visited, however, she was given what she considered to be some rather unsettling advice concerning her position as a trans-frontier trader. In particular, she was told to refrain from the 'excessive' trading she had apparently been doing, specifically as it was said to be negatively impacting her 'soul' or 'life force' (suld): "She told me that my suld was becoming changed forever from too much trading. She said I was becoming too greedy and only interested in making money; if I continued then my soul would be thrown off course completely. I have always felt that trading is a bad way to make a living; it is not a good job and it can be dangerous for your soul. After I heard this I became very scared". Oyunchimeg, however, who was far more skeptical about such things, suspected that Sarangerel feared retribution from the woman. Indeed, as Oyunchimeg privately told me, Sarangerel had apparently spread rumours that the astrologer was a charlatan and, given that they had family connections in the Shishged, this caused a variety of problems back home. While I initially treated Sarangerel's apprehension as a personal eccentricity, it became clear that for her it was something of extreme concern. Indeed, only a few minutes before reaching the stall Sarangerel turned around and told Oyunchimeg and I that she simply could not go any further. Heading off in the opposite direction Oyunchimeg yelled at Sarangerel and told her that she was simply being 'superstitious' and, more importantly, that without her presence they would not be able to complete a good sale. Ignoring her call Sarangerel continued waking and Oyunchimeg and I had little choice but to follow.

The Mongolian term 'suld' can generally be translated as 'soul', though as Hojer and Pedersen (2008) point out, it has also become associated with a more specific, postsocialist meaning since the transition. Indeed, many people in Mongolia speak of their suld has having become split or detached since the transition: I have heard people in various contexts describing themselves as having their souls 'broken', 'torn away', or 'split in two', for example as a result of cheating in both family life and in business, as well as from excessive drinking. This is particularly illuminating given that the Mongolian term for 'soul' does not only refer to the inner essence of an individual's life as in the Christian tradition, but rather, as the totality of one's human existence in the world. As Humphrey describes it, suld denotes "an overarching concept of the self that implies a human existence both in and beyond the confines of the body" (1996:213). In this regard, when people describe their souls as being torn away or broken they are not referring to a metaphoric or supernatural entity but as a concrete aspect of their embodied self-experience. Even in examples where there was little connection to postsocialist uncertainties, people often made indirect references to their soul in relation to the 'new times' and how 'things are more difficult now than before'. In the context of the Shishged, specifically, I also heard people using the image of the split soul to characterise so-called *agsan* people, who are widely regarded as being to some extent 'crazy' and who have become more numerous since the collapse of state socialism (Pedersen 2011:5). In the case of Sarangerel her anxieties were directly related to the postsocialist transition, whose visit to the astrologer raised what were obviously long-standing doubts about what she considered the immorality of trading, as well as its potential implications upon her own spiritual and existential well-being.

On the one hand this is an apt example demonstrating the complex ways in which the informal trading economy intersects with specifically non-economic factors. Indeed, while with

other retailers Sarangerel sought the best possible deals for both herself and often bargained hard with prospective customers, on this occasion her economic decisions were determined by a more ambivalent attitude, fused with her own ontological presuppositions concerning the existential impact of trading. This is something I encountered throughout my time in Mongolia as I observed traders base their economic decisions on the advice of astrologers and other ritual specialists. For example, I accompanied a friend on a visit to an astrologer in Mörön to obtain advice on the general direction of his life. As my friend worked as a trader dealing in higher-value goods such as gold, the discussion quickly turned to the subject of trading. My friend asked the astrologer explicit questions about how he could go about increasing his trade, seeking advice on building better connections in the city and negotiating with Chinese middle-men. While the astrologer offered some advice she also castigated my friend for his apparent greed, once again framing this in terms of the loss of his soul. Following their encounter, my friend was visibly upset and had clearly taken her words seriously. As a result, he organised to visit a prominent shaman in the region to, as he put it, 'cleanse his soul'. On another occasion while sitting in the train travelling to Erlian, I ended up talking with a group of najmaacin surrounding a Mongolian newspaper. I asked one of the traders what they were reading who explained that they were checking their horoscopes for tips on which kinds of commodities they should seek in relation to their particular animal-sign and particular day. Many Mongolian newspapers feature multiple pages of highly detailed horoscopes from well-known astrologers and Buddhist ritual specialists, who print advice on the basis of one's date of birth, animal sign, and how this fluctuates according to the days, weeks, and months of the year. As we have seen, many Mongolians relate their own experiences of luck and fortune to a calendar system of perceived auspiciousness. Although of course the commentary of the horoscopes did not directly reference specific commodities, the traders were able to glean information from them to make decisions about what they should seek to purchase and when. Significantly, one of the traders specifically emphasised the importance of consulting the horoscope so as to avoid any potential 'bad trade' which could harm one's life direction.

In all of these examples we see how for many traders themselves the decisions they make are not based on purely economic reasons alone, but rather, are in articulation with their broader existential and spiritual concerns such as the direction of their lives, notions of luck and fortune, as well as ontological presuppositions concerning the inherent dangers of trading. From this perspective, the informal economy is fundamentally intertwined with cultural dimensions that, although not connected to 'the economy' in the formalist sense of the term, nevertheless determine people's economic decisions (Bolormaa & Clark 1998). In this regard, the examples would appear to confirm the substantivist position that economic decisions cannot be understood simply in terms of market exchange, but rather, on people's 'embeddedness' within specific cultural-historical contexts. In postsocialist Mongolia, phenomena such as shamanism, astrology, and conceptualisations of the soul are an irreducible part of how (most, if not all) people experience – and respond – to the transition.

This has direct parallels to other ethnographic settings such as in southern African where experiences of economic change have been articulated through the lens of witchcraft. For example, as Peter Geschiere has shown in the context of postcolonial Cameroon, "witchcraft (*djambe*) serves as a vital element in the discourses surrounding economic liberalisation, 'despite modern processes of change (or perhaps because of them)" (1997:7-8). In a similar vein, Harry West (2005:126) has shown how witchcraft serves as a language for people in Mozambique to help make sense of their changing world. Thus, "expressions through sorcery are not metaphors but direct commentaries on the social, political, and economic

transformations they experience" (ibid) (also see Comaroff & Comaroff 1999). Here the perception of 'the economy' is far broader than the normative neoliberal category, not opposed to non-economic aspects of social and cultural life but embedded within – and often articulated through – attitudes and experiences which to some extent predate marketisation. Similarly, in the context of Mongolia what might appear as a characteristic example of 'pure' and 'wild capitalism', trading is in fact intertwined with pre-socialist and socialist perceptions and history. As Lars Hojer (2007:261) has pointed out, contemporary articulations with the market-economy in Mongolia "have a genealogy that reaches further than the present market economy", which problematises the very notion of a unilinear experience of 'postsocialism', 'marketisation', and 'capitalism'.

It is useful to consider in more detail the issue of ambivalence towards trade, as well as what it reveals about the specificity of the broader Mongolian economy. Indeed, there is a widespread perception in Mongolia that so-called excessive trading or accumulating capital for its own sake has the potential to be 'dangerous', something which might negatively affect both your life and indeed your soul. This arguably has its roots in Mongolia's presocialist and socialist past, and it is interesting to examine how this intersects - and conflicts - with people's attitudes today. Indeed, domestic trade within Mongolia has historically always been rather limited. As Bawden (1968) remarks, no indigenous trade markets developed in Mongolia until permanent religious institutions came into existence. Similarly, as Alicia Campi (2006) points out, there was no indigenous merchant class in Mongolia. The relative aversion to trade as a formal category of employment was reified by the fact that wealth accumulation in Mongolia was generally held in livestock. As with many other herding communities around the world, the Mongolian form of subsistence was traditionally immediate-consumption orientated, with products (including livestock) consumed as required and with little need to accumulate large quantities (ibid). This aversion to traders was certainly also compounded by the fact that the majority of traders who the Mongols encountered were Chinese merchants, and given their long-standing conflict with the sedentary Chinese this would have only reified that perception.

Although during the socialist period Mongolia became connected to new international commodity markets via the USSR, this did not fundamentally alter many people's attitudes to trade, especially in rural areas (Campi 2006; Rossabi 2005). As we have seen, everyday life under socialism was characterised by a highly managed state economy, with goods and services made available through collective institutions such as the negdels, and with the economy refracted through a socialist-specific metanarrative of production and development. Coupled with the historical lack of a domestic trade market, this came to further influence people's negative perceptions. As Campi describes it: "The traditional lack of interest in acquiring consumer goods and luxuries even by urban Mongols is unique to this economy. In the past, all moneylenders were considered usurious and evil and many Mongols still believe it is intrinsically dishonorable to lend money on a personal basis and then charge interest" (2006:126).

Now while this goes some way to contextualising the cultural-historical roots of people's attitudes to trade, this has not simply been reproduced by people *in toto*, but rather, articulates with the new social, economic, and political context in which people are situated. In order words, rather than viewing people's ambivalence to trade as somehow driven from the presocialist or socialist past, we would do well to treat it as a contemporary phenomenon in relation to the new uncertainties associated with the transition to a market economy. From this, we would do well to consider the variability of people's experiences and responses to marketisation, problematising any attempt to reify some universal Mongolian experience.

Indeed, many informal traders do not experience the new market economy in such terms at all. I met many people who clearly were engaging in trade to earn as much money as possible with little (obvious) fear of retribution. While Campi's comments are certainly true to some extent, we have also seen clear examples of people engaging in trade purely to make profit. I observed people throughout my time in Mongolia brokering deals, bargaining over prices, seeking out the greatest profit, and engaging in 'wild' capitalism. Here we would do well not to dichotomise the formalist-substantivist argument and present Mongolian traders as somehow universally embedded in 'culture', while western economic practices are intrinsically capitalist and thus dissembedded ('rational'). It is instructive to note, in this regard, that Oyunchimeg never expressed concern about the same issues as Sarangerel, and even to some extent poked fun at her for being 'superstitious'. This variability is important to emphasise in order to step outside the familiar teleology that change occurs in a unilinear way, or that it is experienced by all people in the same terms. In other words, the formalist-substantivist should not be seen as fixed categories but rather moveable poles around which people co-ordinate their economic practices in relation to their own individual and collective histories. Here it is also significant to note that such experiences are not static over time, something that could be seen in the case of Sarangerel herself. Indeed, later during my fieldwork I met Sarangerel again and happened to ask whether she had encountered the astrologer again. Interestingly, she explained that apparently hearing from a friend that she was in fact a charlatan: "I heard that she is a cheat; charging money to give fake advice. There are many fake shamans and astrologers in Mongolia now, so you always have to be careful" (also see Hangartner 2009). However, after returning home following my fieldwork I heard from a mutual friend that Sarangerel had still not returned to consulting the astrologer.

These examples have important implications for understanding the experience of informal trade, as well as the very nature of the informal economy. In fact, the large majority of people with whom I travelled perceived trading not as a form of 'work' but of practical coping with the postsocialist transition, something which problematised the familiar category of 'employment' and of the 'market economy'. As a World Bank (2003) report notes, 80% of informal traders do not consider themselves 'employed', but rather as perpetually 'in transition'. Given that as many as 30% of Mongolia's working-age population participate in informal activities, this has important implications with regards to understanding people's attitudes and experiences of the informal economy, specifically in terms of the experiential gap between the way informal trading is perceived (and presented) and the way it is experienced by traders themselves. As Hojer and Pedersen describe it:

> If we by the term 'crisis' understand a situation where everything solid has melted into air…then crisis has indeed become context for many people in Mongolia. Leaving aside the tiny minority of politicians, business tycoons and media stars who make up the country's new elite…it is clear that the great majority find themselves in a situation of permanent uncertainty. Like many places in the postsocialist world…large numbers of Mongolians for a period of more than 15 years have not known whether they would still have a job the next day. Nor have they had access to reliable information about what their salary could buy them a year, a month or even a week…For the great majority everyday life in the '"Age of the Market"' involves a daily scramble to secure food, water, and energy (2008:73-74).

Indeed, for many traders such as Sarangerel informal trading is not seen as a form of employment or work at all, but rather, as a flexible response to the late postsocialist context. For these people, trading is less a matter of earning large quantities of money and more about everyday survival, and thus for whom earlier experiences of, for example, the soul, remain fundamentally embedded in their conceptualisations of the market economy. In other words,

for traders, change is experienced as both market and non-market at the same time, and the non-market intersects with the market in various ways. Thus, the formal division between the two is not helpful, and instead we should focus on individual people and their everyday practical strategies, elucidating in the process the existential basis of economic decisions.

Hariutslaga and the Pull of Social Obligations

After spending approximately two months travelling between Erlian and Ulaanbaatar, Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg were finally ready to return home. Although they had no fixed schedule to their trading practice, the women generally tried to be back in the Shishged by early winter, which in northern Mongolia already begins at the end of October. As we have seen, Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg alternate between different kinds of work and lifestyle depending on the season and the movements and composition of their respective households. Thus, upon their return Sarangerel would spend the next few weeks living in her home in Mörön, after which she would move in with her younger sister to work as a seamstress. Meanwhile, Oyunchimeg would leave Sarangerel and assist her own family in Ulaan Uul, specifically to help prepare white foods and other animal products for sale in Mörön market.

By now the women had purchased and sold a considerable quantity of goods, earning what they considered to be a suitable profit. Given that the pair had mostly specialised in electronics, they recorded that they had shifted approximately 200 DVD players and the same number of mobile phones, as well as various quantities of lower-cost items such as clothing, handbags, and sunglasses. Together the women had earned 2.3 million tugrik (£680), which would make up an important part of their respective annual incomes. As Sarangerel explained, the pair sub-divided their incomes between themselves, specifically as a collaborative strategy and regardless if one of the women had sold more than the other: "We share everything between ourselves - right down the middle. Working as a trader is very uncertain. You never know how much you will make and if you can survive that year. We do not trade to make money but to survive. This is why we work together. If I make a sale then I help Oyunchimeg, and if Oyunchimeg makes a sale then she helps me".

After heading to the long-distance bus-station in central Ulaanbaatar, Sarangerel organised our return journey with the now familiar driving company. As before, we spent a considerable period of time packing the vehicle prior to departure, specifically attempting to fit the many items the pair had bought back to their home province. It must be remembered that Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg not only sell goods and commodities in Ulaanbaatar, but also in the provincial capital of Mörön, as well as in smaller regional centres such as Ulaan Uul. At the same time, they also transport a substantial number of goods specifically to give away as 'gifts' to their various friends and family members, as well as other people in their broader network of social relations. In fact, Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg estimated that approximately one quarter of all their goods made their way into the hands of friends and family members in the Shishged, without receiving any formal (cash) payment in return. As I show below, this is having important implications for understanding the informal trading economy and its wider position within Mongolian social life, as well as how it is experienced by traders in relation to the emergence of market capitalism.

Upon our arrival in Mörön Sarangerel arranged for someone in her family to assist us in carrying their goods back to her home. Once there, she and Oyunchimeg set about separating the items into various piles, placing some of the goods in the corner of her room and others in different places around the house. As Sarangerel explained, this was to organise the goods according to different categories of social relations, from which they would be distributed over

the coming days, weeks, and months. A number of goods, for example, were officially designated for settled retailers in Mörön, with whom the women worked regularly and who themselves sold the goods in the local market. Another pile was for a specific retailer in Ulaan Uul, who owned a small shop in the centre of town and who occasionally – depending on his own economic situation – purchased small quantities of goods from Oyunchimeg, who was also a family relation. There were also a number of piles scattered around the house which the women explained were 'gifts' (*beleg*), although these too were separated into different groups according to social relations, including close friends and family members and what Sarangerel described as 'business' (*biznis*) gifts.



(Figure 64. Trading with shops in Mörön – photo by the author)

Now this process of separating goods on the basis of social relations reveals important insights into how Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg experience the informal economy. Firstly, the goods designated for the settled retailers can be seen in very much the same terms as with the canzuud in Ulaanbaatar: namely, people within the women's' trading networks and with whom they have a 'formal' economic relationship, where goods are exchanged for cash according to local market prices. The goods designated for the owner of the shop in Ulaan Uul were similar but slightly more complicated: as the retailer was related to Oyunchimeg and was known to be experiencing financial hardship, she attempted – and felt obligated – to assist him and his family, including selling goods at what at a discounted price. Later during my fieldwork, I met this man and spoke with him about his relationship to Oyunchimeg. As he explained, while he did indeed purchase goods from her whenever possible, he could not afford to do so that particular year. However, Oyunchimeg nevertheless gave him a number of items free of charge for him to sell, specifically lower-cost goods such as clothing and shampoo which had a high turnover in his shop. From this perspective, the closer social ties between the man and Oyunchimeg rendered their economic relationship more personalised, although they simultaneously engaged in more formal (i.e. monetary) trade throughout my time in the region as well.

Connected to this but further along the social spectrum, goods designated as 'gifts' were of a different category. On the one hand, those gifts intended for what Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg described as 'business' can be seen as transcending the division between the formal and informal sectors of the market. For example, Oyunchimeg gave away a high-quality DVD player to a government official who was also involved in the management of Mörön market. As she explained, this was intended to ensure 'good relations' between her family and the place where

they worked. As I later came to learn, the DVD was in fact a gift of 'thanks' because the family had been unable to pay the fee to maintain their stall in the market for a number of consecutive months, but the government official had continued to allow them to work in the meantime. I also observed Sarangerel give similar gifts of this kind to a range of people with whom she had semi-formal, non-filial relations, including a doctor in the local health clinic and the school teacher of her nephew. Although in these cases there was no element of expected reciprocity in terms of monetary payment, there was nevertheless an implied reciprocation in terms of social relations, specifically as a recognition for some kind of previous or future support – financial or other.

Finally, there were those items designated as gifts intended for close friends and family members, and which were given away without any reciprocation of monetary payment. Over the course of the following days and weeks, Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg gave away large numbers of goods to various friends and family members, including new and relatively expensive products such as DVD players and mobile phones, as well as more basic household goods such as clothing, shampoo, tea, medicine, or anything else they had happened to acquire. As Oyunchimeg described it: "Once we return home we distribute many things to our friends and family. Usually they know when we are coming back and are expecting that we bring gifts. We make a long list of different people who we will give things to; this way we try not to forget anyone important".

First of all, these examples capture the way in which informal trading is experienced by Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg as fundamentally embedded in a web of social relations (and obligations - see below), including not only with their retail partners, but also with friends and family members, as well as with people whom they have what could best be described as informal working relations. This has implications for how we understand the informal economy and its position in Mongolian social life, specifically as it problematises the formalist assumption of a universal goal of capital maximisation. Indeed, for traders such Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg while some goods are sold purely for economic ends, others are distributed in terms of their positioning within networks of support and obligation, and which are not 'economic' in the formal sense of the term. Still others are driven by a combination of economic and non-economic factors, such as Oyunchimeg's relation with the government official, while others are driven solely by the cultural expectation of giving support to friends and family. Here we can imagine a sliding scale of intimacy upon which different kinds of exchange are positioned: while on one extreme there is the 'pure' economic relation between trader and retailer, on the other end there is the 'pure' gift between friends and family members, with multiple transactions in-between. Of course, the conventional anthropological analysis of this would be in terms of different kinds of economic exchange. Thus, while the first example of trader-retailer relations would be classed as market exchange (Polanyi 1957), the others would be seen in terms of different kinds of reciprocity, taken to mean the non-commercial transfer of goods and services between friends and relatives. More specifically, Sahlins' (1972) notion of 'generalised reciprocity' would appear to capture the distribution of 'pure gifts' as they were given by Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg where there was no expectation of monetary reciprocation (also see Graeber 2001), although even within this there is some element of assumed reciprocation, even if it is not in monetary form.

The exchange of goods and services in Mongolia is of a very particular kind, one in which reciprocity is determined by the specific social relationships between people. As we have seen, while there is a symmetry in the relationship between people of approximately the same age, this is not the case with relations between people of different ages. As Sneath (1998:140)

writes: “In the case of elders, for example, the obligations of the relationship may be quite unequal, as well as different in kind. In general, younger people are expected to provide physical support to their elders, while elder kin are generally expected to provide assistance such as advice, material goods, or money to their younger family members, of whom they feel to have a certain responsibility for”. As we have seen in Chapter 3, while reciprocity is important in Mongolia, it is the form of social relationship that determines reciprocity. From this perspective, social relations in Mongolia are best seen as the mechanism which channels particular kinds of reciprocity on the basis of culturally defined expectations of obligation - what Sneath defines as the “social relations of obligation” (ibid). This again has important implications for understanding the specificity of the informal trading economy, as it is the particular relations between people – such as determined by age and status – that dictate the flow of goods and commodities, and not the logic of the market alone.

This came to the fore as I followed Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg in distributing gifts over the course of the following weeks. In fact, I was rather struck not only by the relatively large quantity of items that were ‘given away’, but also, the visible expectation of receiving gifts on the part of friends and family members. As Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg were middle-aged women, both of whom were considered ‘successful’ traders in the eyes of their friends and relatives, the obligation to give away goods was highly entrenched in their everyday social relations with a broad range of people. As Oyunchimeg remarked: “My family expect me to give them things. They know that by going to China you get good deals and they know I will help them. It is a matter of *hariutslaga*”. This is a term literally translated as ‘responsibility’, but it can be more precisely defined as the obligation to respond (Sneath 2008, 2006). Here economic relations are embedded in notions of social obligation, obligations which inevitably come to structure the ways in which informal trading is experienced.



(Figure 65. Local shops in Mörön – photo by author)

Now the relationship between exchange and social obligations has a specific dynamic in Mongolia, particularly in rural regions. As Sneath (1998:192) points out, rural households have long supplied each other with goods and services ranging from small-scale items such as tobacco and alcohol, to more expensive goods such as clothing and electronics, as well as herd animals, fuel, and motorised transport. At the same time, households offer support to one another in various ways and at different times during the year, including in the form of labour when working with herd animals, or when organising transportation. Between close friends

and family members such exchanges would never require monetary payment; in fact, to do so would be considered culturally inappropriate (ibid). Importantly, this link between social relations and obligations does not just exist at the level of kin, but rather, extends out to include personal friends as well. As Sneath describes, "One is typically expected to offer support – whether it be advice, money, or commodities – to one's close friends. Thus, school-mates will often have a relationship as close as many family members, just as individuals who share a particular experience - such as having worked together in the negdel or completing military service – will have a similarly close relationship" (1998:192). Of course, there are significant advantages in being able to draw upon one's social relations in various aspects of everyday life. As we have already seen, Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg harness their social relations to gain various kinds of support, including acquiring better deals on products and commodities, access to accommodation while in Ulaanbaatar, as well as transportation to carry their goods back home. Here gift-giving is an important aspect of maintaining such relations, as well as ensuring that one can continue to draw upon these relations in the future.

It should come as little surprise that with the collapse of state socialism and the return to a subsistence economy in many parts of Mongolia households have come to rely on their social relations to acquire goods and support. Particularly as collective institutions came to be eroded households essentially fell back on their pre-existing networks of support and obligation. As Sneath describes it: "Because of the increased reliance on individually produced and procured goods, and upon personalised relations for the distribution, the economy seems to have become more, not less, 'embedded' in the opening years of the 'Age of the Market'" (1998:194). While this is certainly true to some extent, it is important to recognise that notions of social obligation are not reproduced by people in a static way, but rather, are rearticulated in relation to the changing social, economic, and political context in which they are situated. Indeed, I found that as new forms of economic relations have emerged – such as with the expansion of the market economy - the social obligations of reciprocity and gift-giving are increasingly felt by people in problematic ways, as a burden which they themselves 'need' to maintain, but which is sometimes difficult in the face of new market demands. This is the case, in particular, for informal traders who by definition must operate simultaneously in-between the economic demands of 'the market' and the personalised obligations of 'social relations'. Indeed, while during the early stages of the postsocialist transition rural areas of Mongolia were less directly affected by the increasing amount of market exchange (Sneath 1998:192), in more recent years this has become increasingly more present with the expansion of the market economy.

This is something I came to see in the case of Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg, for whom it was clearly difficult to match the demands of both 'the economy' (making enough profit to survive) and those of the social relations of obligation. Indeed, after a period of a few weeks and the women had distributed all of their gifts to friends and family members, the flow of people who arrived expecting some kind of support continued. At one point, Sarangerel suggested that we 'hide' by taking the horses and head to Ulaan Uul for a couple of days. As she explained, her friends and family did not understand how much work was involved in collecting these goods from the Chinese-Mongolian border, and that she just wanted to 'get away' from all her obligations. As Sarangerel described it: "(W)hen you get close to people they start to expect things from you and such expectations cause problems when they cannot be met. Sometimes I cannot afford to give things to everyone who I know, even if I would like to. When it comes to relatives, this is even more difficult. You are obliged to help relatives but sometimes you cannot. In the 'Age of the Market' you still have to have money to survive. If I give away all of my profit then I will struggle myself". In articulating this Sarangerel referred to a well-known

Mongolian proverb: "Better stay close to mountains, better stay far away from kin" This captures the dual nature of the social relations of obligation, for while they facilitate support in the uncertain postsocialist era they are nevertheless a strain on one's personal experiences, and are felt by people such as Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg as being more difficult – or perhaps even incompatible – with the market economy. From this perspective, while hariutslaga provides an ideal image of how social relations 'should' be enacted, this does not mean that they are an unchanging aspect of Mongolian social life. Instead, the social relations of obligation intersect - and occasionally conflict – with the new demands of market exchange, highlighting the combination of formalist and substantivist positions within peoples' everyday experiences of the market economy.

This is something that Oyunchimeg herself alluded to when describing the complexities involved in maintaining a certain level of distance with regards to her family members: 'I am one of the only people in my family to make money; all of the others are pastoralists and live by herding. They do not use cash in the same way as in Ulaanbaatar or China: they are able to trade easily and actually have a lot of wealth in the form of herd animals and products. This was always the Mongolian economy: animals are money. Even though I am a trader I am part of this system: if I have electronics then I give them away, maybe for milk or meat or just to help out relatives. If I have a good sale I will give money to my family, many of whom are very poor'. Here the pull of social obligations is recognised as being potentially problematic, particularly in contexts of economic hardship such as that which characterises life for many people in rural Mongolia. As Sarangerel put it: "All Mongolians are embedded in social obligations. You need to help your family members at different times and in different ways. But as a trader you are also expected to be strong and make money. These two things are not easy to do at the same time".

Such examples suggest that the demands of market exchange are to some extent problematising the social relations of obligation, placing new constraints on people as they come to be further incorporated into the market economy. Here we might argue that traders such as Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg are to some extent becoming 'dissembedded' from the social relations in their home provinces, specifically as they increasingly engage in more formalised economic relations in Ulaanbaatar and along the Chinese-Mongolia border (and could also explain Sarangerel's apprehensions about trading negatively affecting her soul). It is important, however, not to characterise this as a teleological process whereby the social relations of rural life are somehow being replaced by pure 'market' relations. Indeed, while important changes in people's economic exchanges are taking place, for traders themselves the problematic of meeting the demands of both the market and one's social obligations are thoroughly intertwined, and it is through the prism of social relations and obligations that people navigate and adjust to the new economic circumstances. Here I would argue that we approach this process from the perspective of people's everyday practices and skills, specifically as traders manage the demands of hariutslaga in articulation with demands of the new market economy. This comes to manifest in the decisions people make in maintaining certain key relations more than others, depending on their personal ties and affiliations. Thus, I saw Sarangerel and Oyunchimeg strategically decide who they will and will not give gifts to, who will receive the 'best' gifts, and who will receive gifts before others. This points to their own practical ways of coping with the contradiction, as well as the interpenetration of the formalist and substantivist positions within their everyday experiences within the late postsocialist context.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have describe the practice and experience of informal trading as it operates in the Shishged and beyond. I have shown how informal trade has emerged as a direct response to the demise of state socialism and privatisation of the economy, as people turned to trading in the face of diminishing state support and as new opportunities arose as Mongolia entered the 'Age of the Market'. Also in the chapter I considered the broader implications of informal trading in relation to Mongolia's rapidly transforming economy, which intersects with another of the major teleological metanarratives of change: namely, the transition from a pre-capitalist (or socialist) to a capitalist economy. I showed how it is impossible to understand how people experience informal trading in terms of a linear transition, for while increasing numbers of people are engaging in trade and the 'Age of the Market' provides new opportunities and livelihood strategies, people's economic decisions do not always operate according to the 'logic' of the market and the purportedly universalist goals of capital maximisation, nor are they disentangled from presocialist and socialist histories, social relations, and experiences. Instead, they remain fundamentally tied to specifically non-economic factors such as maintaining social obligations (hariutslaga), ontological presuppositions and experiences of the soul (suld), as well as culturally-specific understandings of wealth and capital. This suggests an alternate experience of marketisation outside the official neoliberal narrative, which lies at the very heart of economic anthropology and the long-established debate between the so-called substantivist and formalist positions (Gudeman 1986; Polanyi 1957).

6. In-Between the Rural and the Urban in Ulaanbaatar's Ger-Districts

Introduction

In this chapter I describe what is arguably the most significant yet neglected aspect of herding life in late postsocialist Mongolia, namely, the movement of rural households from the countryside to the capital city. Since the collapse of state socialism, the number of herders that have migrated to Ulaanbaatar has increased exponentially: it is estimated that between 5000 and 10,000 new people enter Ulaanbaatar each year in search of employment, education, and alternate livelihood strategies, as well as a direct result of poverty and/or inability to survive via animal herding alone (also see Brunn & Li 2006; Humphrey & Sneath 1999; Brunn & Odgaard 1996; Brenner 2003). As households migrate the large majority end up living in one of Ulaanbaatar's so-called 'ger-districts', which are rapidly expanding neighbourhoods engulfing the city on all sides, and comprising rows of stationary gers - as well as rudimentary wooden houses – most without running water, electricity, or access to basic services. In 2010 Mongolia officially became a predominantly 'urban' society for the first time, with more than 50% of the population living in Ulaanbaatar (Byambadorj et al. 2011; Chinbat et al. 2006). It is estimated, however, that approximately 70% of these live in the city's ger-districts (Meng 2001), which as

I will show below problematises the category of the 'urban' and suggests a particular form of urbanism and urbanisation in Mongolia.

While the Shishged was one of the few regions in Mongolia not to have experienced significant out-migration following the collapse of state socialism (Pedersen 2011), by 2012 there was a net increase of people moving to Ulaanbaatar[75]. This was not only the result of new opportunities – both real and imagined - emerging in the capital city, but because of the extremely severe dzud. Indeed, as described in the Introduction my arrival in Mongolia coincided with one of the worst dzud in living memory, where an estimated ten to fifteen million animals perished and with households losing between 20% and 100% of their herds, forcing many to move to the capital city and seek alternate forms of livelihood.

The ethnographic material in this chapter is presented through the prism of one particular household who lost most of their herd animals following the recent dzud. During the time of my fieldwork Baatar, his wife Gogi, and their two children – seventeen-year-old Chuluun and nine-year-old Narantuya - migrated from the Shishged to Ulaanbaatar, and I describe their process of rural to urban migration as I followed the household to the capital city. I describe their various preparations required before departure, the 1000km journey itself, their arrival in the ger-districts, as well as finding an appropriate plot of land upon which to erect their ger and begin their new lives. I also describe the everyday experiences of life in the ger-districts over the course of the subsequent months, including acquiring food, water, and household supplies, moving across the city in seeking out informal work, as well as negotiating with local government and international development organisations. Here I show how for many new migrants, survival in the ger-districts is fundamentally intertwined with the learning of new skills and the transposition of existing skills into a radically different context. For example, I describe how Gogi gradually came to learn how to navigate the city by utilising the transportation system and successfully finding informal employment as a cleaner. I show how she flexibly adjusted her pre-existing skills to the context of the ger-districts, and describe the implications of this upon gender relations and wider social life, including preparing and storing food in the now stationary dwelling, collecting water from a communal pump provided by an NGO, as well as tending to the fire in the central stove without access to a ready supply of fuel. In the process, I reflect on the broader relationship between skill and social change, including what it means for people to actively re-embody, re-invent, and re-imagine skills as they move from one context to another.

Also in this chapter I consider some of the more problematic aspects associated with life in the ger-districts and how they come to manifest at the level of skilled practice. Indeed, while some migrants successfully adapt to the new urban context by learning new skills and generating alternate forms of work and livelihood, for others migration is experienced as an existential dislocation, one which results in alcohol abuse, physical violence, and crime. Here I show how for these people life in the ger-districts can be understood as an inability to learn new skills, as a process of deskilment, as well as the failure to take meaningful pre-existing skills and apply them in the alternative city environment. Thus, I describe how Baatar struggled in Ulaanbaatar as the skills which he had learnt and which had given meaning to his social existence were no longer relevant in the new urban context. Here I push the anthropology of skill further to reveal the relationship between skills and people's own sense of existential security, elucidating the implications of losing one's skills or finding that one's skills are no longer applicable in the face of radical change. This has parallels with parts of

[75] Khövsgöl Statistical Yearbook 2012.

Africa where the rise of neoliberalism has resulted in new constitutions of the subject characterised by perceived insecurity and uncertainty (Mbembe & Roitman 1995: 197). I show how skills should not be seen simply as practices which one comes to learn, lose, or forget but as deeply meaningful embodied expressions of self. In this way, I extend the interpretative framework towards what might be called a political-economy of skill, whereby social, economic, and political changes are tracked and traced at the level of human embodiment and experience, and which has important implications for our wider understanding of social and cultural change.

The Rural and the Urban in Mongolia

Although Mongolia conjures up images of wide open spaces, vast grasslands, and mobile herding communities, urban settlements have been a feature of Mongolian society throughout history. Archaeological evidence shows that towns and cities were present since at least the 13th Century, the majority situated along the Silk Road. Karakorum, the former capital city of the Mongol Empire, was connected to major cities across the world via the Silk Road, and comprised a walled city, paved roads, as well as different kinds of religious buildings and structures (Sneath 2000:140; Campi 2006). The most significant urban centres existing today have their origins in the Qing dynasty (1644-1919), when the Mongolian elite adopted Buddhism and came under the influence of the Chinese (Manchu) Qing state (Jagchid & Hyer 1979).

Ulaanbaatar, formerly known as *Ikh Khuree* and later *Urga*, was founded in 1639. Initially the city was a mobile monastic centre and was moved frequently over subsequent decades. Eventually it was established as a permanent centre attached to the monastic core (Campi 2006). Importantly, a 'ger-district' existed in Ulaanbaatar throughout much of its early history, specifically housing the city's new and expanding 'sedentary' population. This is significant as it demonstrates how the ger – as the archetypal dwelling of herding mobility– has also had a long history as a sedentary dwelling within the city and beyond (Byambadorj et el. 2011; also see Evans & Humphrey 2002), something that should be considered when discussing the apparently 'new' forms of urbanism in Ulaanbaatar today.



(Figure 66. Ulaanbaatar in 2012 – photo by the author)

Despite the fact that urban settlements were a fundamental feature of Mongolian society throughout history this does not imply that the relationship between the rural and the urban

was unproblematic. Indeed, herding Mongolians have long had (and, in some cases, continue to have) an antagonistic relationship to urban centres, specifically perceiving their own lifeworld to be in opposition to that of both urban and sedentary (usually agricultural) life. As we shall come to see below, this antipathy continues to frame some people's perception of urban life today, particularly male herders such as Baatar struggling to adapt to life in Ulaanbaatar. As Sneath describes, we would do well to characterise Mongolian social life as having inherited two divergent sets of overlapping attitudes: "towards the rural, local, and domestic, on the one hand, and to urban centres, elites, and political structures, on the other (2000:56: also see Brunn & Li 2006). Of course, these orientations have not remained static but have intersected with broader social, economic, and political changes over time. Certainly, during the socialist period Mongolia was characterised by large-scale investment and expansion of urban and industrial centres, as well as the rapid urbanisation and sedentarisation of large segments of the population.

While the collapse of state socialism resulted in a process of de-urbanisation as people returned to the countryside and sought security in animal herding, in more recent years the pendulum has swung back in the direction of the urban. Today, increasing numbers of people move not only to Ulaanbaatar but to other expanding cities as well, notably Erdenet, Darhan, and provincial regional centres. By the year 2000 the proportion of Mongolia's population living in urban areas was 57.1%[76]. Despite a net outflow to rural areas and herding activities during the early 1990s, it is estimated that 30 per cent of those located in rural areas and smaller regional centres have now migrated to Ulaanbaatar during the transition period[77]. Several factors have contributed to this. Firstly, the closure of the negdels encouraged herders to move closer to urban centres such as Ulaanbaatar in order to access new markets. Secondly, the collapse of state services meant that health care and educational facilities for rural communities became limited. Thirdly, growing unemployment in regional centres themselves have further attracted migrants to the city. As Bruun et al. (2000:19) describe it: "[T]he massive influx of people is due to a combination of improved opportunities for employment in urban areas and a serious breakdown of services in outer regions and deteriorating terms of trade for animal products". Internal migration was formerly controlled by a citizen passport system based on locality, though this has since been relaxed, and changes in the privatisation of housing markets have also increased rural-urban mobility. As Brunn & Li (2006:162) describe:

> (F)rom a policy of decentralised social and economic development under Soviet dependency to one of resolute urban prioritisation under native Mongolian government, despite a comparable dependency on foreign aid. Evident, a massive population movement towards the central parts of the country was set in motion by structural problems in agriculture already in the mid-1990s. In particular, pastoral people were squeezed out of their native areas by the diminishing value of their produce when measured against their production costs and consumption needs. Some packed up and drove their animals towards pastures better connected with urban markets; others left animal husbandry altogether and headed for urban areas, primarily the greater Ulaanbaatar area, in search of another livelihood.

Now according to conventional wisdom urbanisation occurs when people seek out new opportunities for work, education, housing, and transportation, severing their links with the rural countryside and moving into urban centres. Life in urban centres is said to offer new opportunities associated with greater proximity to markets. Cities are known as places where money, services, and wealth are centralised, and thus many rural residents move to the city for

[76] United Nations (2001:16).
[77] NSOM (2012)

livelihood strategies. Businesses, which provide jobs and exchange capital, are also more concentrated in urban areas and (Eames & Goode 1977). Of course, economic opportunities are just one reason people move. So-called 'rural flight' is another contributing factor, as people living in rural areas find it difficult to access goods and services and perceive the overall quality of life in cities as superior (ibid). Life in rural areas is more prone to environmental conditions and in times of drought or, increasingly, climate change survival may become problematised. More broadly, the commonplace assumption is that urbanisation is not only a transition from the rural to the urban, but from the 'traditional' to the 'modern' as well, and indeed urbanisation for many is not just seen as a physical move across space but an existential and lifestyle change as well (Eames & Goode 1977; Byambadorj et al. 2011).

As I show below, rural-urban migration in Ulaanbaatar has taken on a very specific form which problematises the normative conceptualisation of urbanisation as a linear process and the binary opposition between the 'rural' and the 'urban'. Indeed, despite the fact that large numbers of people are moving from the countryside to the city, seeking out new opportunities and livelihood strategies, this cannot be understood simply in terms of a linear and irreversible process of 'urbanisation'. As I show the term 'urbanisation' is a teleological category which not only fails to explain the unique form of urbanism emerging in Ulaanbaatar, but also fails to capture the particular experiences of urban life among new migrants. As the large majority of new migrants end up living in Ulaanbaatar's ger-districts - which are themselves quasi-rural areas on the outskirts of the city where people continue living in their now stationary dwellings (and often keep herd animals) - the division between the rural and the urban is highly blurred. Connected to this, for many herders and ex-herders, moving to Ulaanbaatar is seen as one among many flexible options in regards to the postsocialist context and not necessarily a fixed decision, with some moving back after a period of time and many others keeping their options open by retaining ties with rural areas. This has parallels with certain parts of Africa where many see migration less as a permanent change and more as a continuum in-between the rural and the urban (Geschiere and Gugler 1998: 308-9).

From the Countryside to the City

I had been staying with Baatar, Gogi, and their two children for a couple of weeks. As distant relatives of Batukhan I was introduced to the family as I had expressed an interest in spending time with herders who lived in close proximity to Lake Khövsgöl, Mongolia's largest fresh-water lake situated just east of the Shishged Depression. Together the household lived in a steppe-forest region on the outskirts of Khatgal, a small town of 7000 people and connected by dirt road to the provincial capital.

Like many herders in the region Baatar's family had lost a significant number of animals during the recent dzud. Although he himself rarely spoke about it, Gogi once confessed to me that they had lost over 90% of their herd, mostly consisting of the ever-important sheep and goats from which they acquired wool and cashmere to sell in Mörön market. By the time I met the family they had only a handful of animals left, including three horses and five sheep and goats. Connected to this, the family were visibly poorer than many of the households I had met: their ger was in poor condition, they did not own motorised transport or a solar panel and, although they had mobile phone, Chuluun explained that they had been unable to top-up their SIM card without family support for a number of months.

As we have seen it is commonplace for households to not only share goods and services but also support one another in times of economic and ecological hardship. For Baatar and Gogi the situation was complicated by the fact that both of their parents had passed away many years

ago and, while Gogi had a younger sister, she lived some distance away in Bulgan province. As a result, the family did not have a strong support network, although importantly Baatar's elder sister – Uranchimeg - had moved to Ulaanbaatar in 2008. When I first met the family, they were clearly struggling to make ends meet and, when I returned later during my fieldwork, it was clear that they could no longer survive from animal herding. While Baatar had attempted to find various forms of informal work in and around the regional centre, the family had decided to move to Ulaanbaatar in search of a new life. As Gogi explained: "I was born in Khatgal and this is my home, but there is nothing for us here anymore. We have no animals to give to our children and no way to grow our herds. Uranchimeg (Baatar's sister) is working in the city (Ulaanbaatar) and has told me that she will help find some opportunities. I am only thinking about my children and want Chuluun to go to university and get a good job. I hope in the city we will have a better chance".

Although there has been periodic media attention on the movement of herding households from rural areas to Ulaanbaatar, there has been surprisingly little ethnographic research documenting the process. While of course it would be impossible to present a universal account of rural-urban migration, specifically given the geographic variations in Mongolia, the different distances that people travel to access the capital city, as well as the diverse reasons for migrating itself, I found Baatar and his household to be fairly representative of a large proportion of new migrants I encountered in the Shishged. Indeed, since the postsocialist transition herding has become an increasingly precarious lifestyle for many. Coupled with the collapse of state support, new demands from the market economy, and several years of consecutive winter storms (in 1999, 2002, and again in 2010-2011), many have struggled to maintain their herds at a number sufficient for restocking. As a result, moving to Ulaanbaatar is seen as a viable survival strategy, one with both possible opportunities and inherent problems.

I stayed with Baatar and Gogi for a number of weeks in the lead up prior to their departure. During this time, everyday life was dominated by making preparations for the journey, including packing up their belongings, selling any unnecessary items which would be too cumbersome to transport, and visiting a few friends in the regional centre. Most notably, the household arranged to sell their few remaining herd animals to acquire cash to pay for the journey and help establish themselves upon arrival in Ulaanbaatar. Here Baatar organised to meet an acquaintance just outside Khatgal, who arrived with his son to take the animals back to their own encampment. As the two men discussed the exchange, Baatar worked hard to bargain a good price; as he explained, the three horses were in extremely good health and, given that they had survived the winter dzud, they were highly likely to produce strong offspring. He also described the remaining sheep and goats as producing high quality wool and cashmere, and which had supported his household for many years. However, observing the exchange I saw the acquaintance drove a hard bargain and clearly knew that Baatar was desperate. After some negotiation and eventually agreeing on a price, the two men closed the deal but Baatar was visibly not happy, later commenting that he should have pressed for a higher amount. It was also clear though that he simply regretted having to give away the last of his herd, representing for him the end of his social security.

Also during this time Baatar and Gogi made a number of phone-calls to Uranchimeg in the capital city. This was important to arrange their travel arrangements but to also harness her as a source of practical support. For many rural migrants moving to the capital city is often dependent upon pre-existing networks of support, including friends and family members who may have already moved to – or have contacts in – Ulaanbaatar. Indeed, it is not uncommon for new migrants to already have direct or indirect networks from which they can acquire support,

including to help organise transportation, decide where to situate their gers in the city, and find informal work. As we have seen, cultural norms in Mongolia inculcate the obligation to help one's relatives and close friends. As Baatar's sister was older than him by ten years the sense of obligation was strong and meant that she would reciprocate. Most notably, she gave advice to the household exactly where they should erect their ger – giving the name of one of Ulaanbaatar's specific ger-districts – as well as telling Baatar and Gogi to contact her upon arrival, after which she and her husband would come to assist. From this perspective, we can see how the social relations of obligation connect with newer processes of change such as rural-urban migration. As I show below, this also has implications with regards to the transposition of skills, as friends and family members assist one another in finding new forms of work, settle into the ger-districts, as well as develop alternate livelihood strategies.

On the day of their departure Baatar and his family spent the morning deconstructing their ger following the same order as when moving between seasonal pastures, beginning with the canvas material of the tent and ending with the wooden door. At the same time, they packed up their belongings in much the same way as if moving between encampments, storing white foods in specific food containers, transporting their clothing and bedding in the same colourful chests, as well as arranging their personal items. Although this was a very different kind of move, it is significant to note the similarities between regular mobility and rural-urban migration, something which points to the specificity of rural to urban migration in the Mongolian context. Indeed, unlike for settled communities who may move from one part of the country to another, such as from a rural area to the city, herders are already mobile having practiced mobility as part of their everyday livelihood strategies. This has important implications for the relationship between skill and social change, specifically in terms of the flexible transposition of skills such as moving across the landscape. Indeed, while I would not suggest that moving to the capital city is, for Baatar and his family, 'just' like any other movement, the fact remains that they are already familiar with the pragmatic aspects of facilitating movement – packing up their belongings in an efficient way and maximising space, knowing how to store their foodstuffs so that they remain fresh for as long as possible, and having a mobile dwelling which allows them to move their social existence from one part of the environment to another.

Now there are different ways in which households can move from rural areas to Ulaanbaatar depending upon one's geographic location, economic situation, and embeddedness within networks of support. In the provinces of central Mongolia, for example, it is comparatively easy to migrate as there is less distance to travel and, connected to this, there is a more established (paved) road network. It is for this reason, in fact, why the large majority of new migrants originate from the central provinces of Töv and Khentii, from where it is relatively easy to organise transportation and travel along paved roads leading into Ulaanbaatar, typically by private or long-distance mini-bus (Brunn & Li 2006). Travelling from remote provinces such as Khövsgöl is more complicated. Although in theory one could fly, the large majority of people travel by either long-distance mini-bus or a combination of mini-bus and other vehicles, depending on one's ability to harness social networks. One popular option described to me was to travel from Mörön by mini-bus to Erdenet, a large city approximately 370km northwest of Ulaanbaatar, which is connected to Mongolia's railway network. From there, people would travel the rest of the journey by train, although this was described as a more expensive option.

Baatar and Gogi harnessed their social relations to organise their transport. First, they travelled by jeep that was owned by a friend from Khatgal, who drove them approximately

100km south to Mörön. There they met with Gogi's younger sister and her husband, who himself worked as a driver and had agreed to transport the family to their own home in Bulgan province approximately 350km from Ulaanbaatar. After staying one night, Baatar then arranged to meet a driver with whom he had engaged in trade relations some years ago. However, once in Bulgan this driver was nowhere to be found. After making a number of phone-calls Baatar eventually located another driver willing to take the family into the capital city, although at a higher price than anticipated.



(Figure 67. The ger-districts of Ulaanbaatar – photo by the author)

After travelling for three days, Baatar and his household finally arrived on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar. As the driver of the vehicle approached from the northwest, the city revealed itself by the large concrete towers of the two power stations situated on the edge of town, billowing smoke into the air. While Baatar had visited Ulaanbaatar a number of years before to engage in trade, he was still visibly surprised by the dramatic transformations in the city, including the many new urban developments and the ever-increasing sprawl of ger-districts. Gogi, however, had never visited the city before and was clearly shocked by the sight, commenting that Ulaanbaatar looked very different to how she had seen it on television.

Ulaanbaatar is divided into nine districts, or *duuregs*, each of which is subdivided into smaller areas known as *khoroos*, of which there are 121. The city consists of a central district constructed in the 1940s and 1950s, comprising both Soviet-style architecture and more recent residential blocks and office buildings (Rossabi 2005; Campi 2006; Bawden 1968). The large-scale development of apartment blocks during the socialist period sought to supply much of the Mongolian population with housing and all these have centralised heating, hot water, and sanitation (Byambadorj et al. 2011).

The ger-districts of Ulaanbaatar engulf the city on all sides and literally expand on a daily basis. Some of these districts are at a distance of up to fifty kilometres from the city centre, with people having to travel for hours by bus, motorcycle, private vehicle, or walk to make their way in and out of the city proper, which has implications when considering opportunities for formal and informal employment (Meng 2001). In the first wave of urban transformation between the 1960s and 1980s, many of the older ger-districts were replaced by Soviet-style apartment blocks, specifically financed by the Soviet Union (Chinbat *et al*., 2006). Despite more recent waves of urban development – which have seen the construction of new apartment blocks and offices across the city – the majority of growth in Ulaanbaatar has been in the ger-

districts. The 2000 census indicated that the city's population had grown far more quickly than had previously been anticipated (Bikales *et al* 2000:20), with approximately 70% of residents living in the ger-districts. Of course, there is an important economic dimension to this as it is widely recognised that while apartments are home to the more economically-advantaged of Ulaanbaatar's residents, the ger-districts are generally home to the more disadvantaged and new migrants arriving from rural areas. This is not to suggest that there are no economically successful or medium-income families in the ger-districts, although the difference in services and infrastructure remain stark. By 2012 there were approximately 184,200 families living in the city's ger-districts, and of these around 100,600 lived in gers all year-round with no access to central heating, sewerage, or piped potable water (Byambadorj et al. 2011). While around 80,300 families resided in rudimentary wooden houses, these also had limited access to services and infrastructure. In total, around 55% of Ulaanbaatar's inhabitants do not have access to central heating or reliable water and sewerage systems.

The rapid expansion of the ger-districts is tied to Mongolia's land policy. The *New Constitution of Mongolia* (1992) outlined the policies for all social, political, and economic reforms following the postsocialist transition, and declared that land in Ulaanbaatar should be privatised. The *Constitution* created two provisions: first, land ownership would only be limited to Mongolian citizens, and second, pastureland should never be privately-owned, specifically in an effort to preserve the herding lifestyle and so-called 'nomadic tradition'. As a result, land reform in Mongolia has been a largely urban process and thus differs considerably from other post-socialist countries (Byambadorj et al. 2011; also see Verdery 2003). Privatisation in the ger-districts became a top priority for the regional government, specifically given the high number of occupied plots in these areas. Nevertheless, by 2012 only 7.5% of Ulaanbaatar's population had their land privatised, something which has had implications for herders moving from the countryside as they are allowed – by law – to erect their gers on any unoccupied area of land around the city (Byambadorj et al. 2011), provided that it is not already privatised. Given that the large majority of ger-districts – particularly those at a distance from central Ulaanbaatar – are not privately owned, households are thus free to choose where to erect their gers provided there is free space. It is for this reason why the large majority of people simply arrive on the outskirts of the city, set up their gers, and over time construct wooden fences around their dwellings to 'claim' a space, adding to the ger-districts or neighbourhoods which exist today.



(Figure 68. A ger compound in khoroo 7 – photo by the author)

Gogi's sister had recommended that Baatar and his family make their way to a ger-district in the northwest corner of Ulaanbaatar, in what is officially called *khoroo* 7, and which is also the area where she and her husband resided. For many new migrants, the decision about where to move is based on practical concerns, such as knowing someone already living in a particular area or that being simply the first area one encounters when entering the city. After making our way through numerous unfamiliar roads and side-tracks, our vehicle eventually arrived in khoroo 7. Locating an empty plot of land – which is to say quite literally finding an unoccupied space along the (current) 'edge' of the ger-district - we disembarked the vehicle and began hauling the household's possessions out of the back. Khoroo 7 was situated some distance from the city centre – approximately 25km – and positioned on a large sloping hill overlooking the great city. Surrounding us on all sides were fenced compounds of other gers and a few wooden houses which stretched off into the distance, although immediately to the back of the district was open yet desertified grassland. As the driver of the vehicle explained, this was one of the older ger-districts in Ulaanbaatar and, as a result, the ground was heavily eroded, with little grass growing underneath and consisting of mostly sand, rock, and dust. Nevertheless, a number of herd animals were scattered across the area and even grazed in-between the fences of the ger compounds. As Gogi and the children set about unpacking their belongings Baatar walked over to the animals and looked closely at the ground. Bending down to rub his hand over the earth he returned with a smile on his face, commenting that the grasslands were actually in satisfactory condition and that perhaps the household could eventually obtain one or two herd animals to provide milk.

After unpacking their belongings and paying the driver Baatar and the family set about reconstructing their ger. Much like any other migration they did so by erecting the dwelling in a series of ritualised steps, first placing the larger furniture items on the floor, then positioning the walls, door, and roof in place, and finally covering the dwelling with a layer of canvas material. At the same time, they ensured that the door of the ger faced south, which just so happened to afford a particularly expansive view of the city. The household then began putting away their objects and belongings inside the ger according to the same spatial organisation and corollary conceptualisations of gender and status as described in Chapter 1. Thus, the family's most important items such as their photographs and religious statues were placed in the northern khoimor, while the storage cupboards, cooking and eating utensils, as well as foodstuffs were put in the Eastern (feminine) side of the ger.

This rearticulation of the same spatial organisation, both in terms of the interior and exterior of the dwelling, has important implications for understanding the specificity of rural-urban migration in Mongolia. Indeed, while the household did not explicitly comment on the ritualised setting up of the ger and the positioning of furniture items in their 'correct' places, I myself could see the gradual reconstruction of ('herding') life emerging in the new space of the ger-district. This came to manifest in various informal ways: Gogi sat in the kitchen area putting away her pots and cooking utensils; Narantuya sat on her bed to take a nap; while Chuluun sat on the opposite side relaxing and cleaning his boots. As we have seen, herding life is characterised by a specific experience of temporality, whereby continuity is afforded by movement from one part of the landscape to another: by setting up the ger with the door facing south, erecting each component in the same order, and positioning furniture items in their 'correct' places, households effectively transpose their lives 'as if' one had never moved. Now of course it would be apocryphal to state that Baatar and his household did not experience the first hours of life in urban Ulaanbaatar as if they had never moved; on the contrary, everyone in the family commented on some 'new' aspect of their surroundings, including the noise from the

neighbouring ger, the pollution in the sky, and the lack of a clean river nearby. However, it was also clear that as a result of the dwelling itself – and its 'containment' of herding life - there remained a fundamental element of continuity, one that undoubtedly influenced people's experiences of change over the coming weeks and months. Of course, some things had already changed since moving to the ger-district. Indeed, as Baatar had sold all of his saddles, bridles, and herding equipment prior to departure, there was a visible gap in the eastern (masculine) side of the ger. As I would later come to see, this not only signified an important physical gap in the composition of the dwelling, but also a significant existential change in the lifestyle and sense of self of Baatar himself.

Re-establishing Life and Transposing Skills in the Ger-Districts

Baatar and Gogi spent their first few days in the city setting up their ger and familiarising themselves with the new area in which they now resided. The most important first step was to locate a regular supply of fresh water for drinking, cooking and washing. To this end, Baatar approached a family in a neighbouring ger and was given directions to the location of a communal water pump. As Baatar, Chuluun and I followed the neighbour's directions we passed through a maze of gers and fenced compounds, divided by potholed roads and piles of rubbish strewn along the sides of the street. After walking for around twenty minutes the three of us became totally lost, until Chuluun happened to spot the road we had taken on the day of our arrival. Both Baatar and Chuluun commented how different everything was compared with the countryside, including how complicated the networks of paths were within the ger-district and how crucial it was that they learn a route before nine-year-old Narantuya started school. After eventually locating the pump we found a large number of people waiting in line, all of whom were holding plastic containers, buckets, and trolleys to transport their water to different areas of the ger-district. Although Batukhan and his household were used to travelling to collect water, the idea of having to stand in line every morning caused him some concern, specifically as the walk had already taken us approximately thirty minutes one-way.

Access to water has long been a problem in Ulaanbaatar's ger-districts, particularly as the population continues to expand. Potable water delivery in the city occurs via two distinct mechanisms: in the central district apartment blocks are attached to centrally plumbed supplies, which provide running water directly into individual apartments. In the ger-districts individual homes and gers have no direct connection and thus households either collect water from water-delivery kiosks or from large water tanks that are supplied daily by water trucks (Chinbat et al. 2012). In 2012 a network of almost 600 water kiosks had been established across the ger-districts (NSOM 2010), the majority managed by the state water company but some, such as the one in khoroo 7, were part-funded by the World Health Organisation. On average, each kiosk serves approximately 900-1200 people and government regulations seek to ensure that no household is ever more than half a kilometer from one (Chinbat et al. 2012). Of course, as the population in the ger-districts expand this becomes ever more difficult to manage and so there is a constant rush to collect one's water before long lines begin to form. Coupled with this, conditions inside the ger-districts often make it difficult to transport one's water to and from the kiosk effectively: for example, while the distance between Baatar's ger and the pump was less than half a kilometre, the mazelike roads one needed to take in order to access the pump meant that the journey still took thirty minutes one-way which, coupled with the many potholes in the ground, made the task difficult. As Baatar explained, since this was something one needed to do on a daily basis and, no longer having the option of using animal

transportation, the family would have to adjust their rhythm to collect the water as early as possible and also invest in a trolley to collect their water.

As we joined the back of the line we were surprised to learn that access to the water pump was not free of charge, which of course also differed from the countryside. While residents in apartment blocks are charged for their water usage based on a flat rate, people in the ger-districts are charged a fee each time they visit (Chinbat et al. 2012). In 2012 the cost of water in the ger-districts was 170 MNT (£0.05) per litre which, although not a major cost to most households, nevertheless is a new change for those living in the city for the first time. This inevitably comes to manifest at the level of skilled practice, as having to pay for one's water means that it becomes essential to have a regular income, thus integrating people into new systems of relations with both the state and market economy. On average Baatar's household used 20-30 litres of water per day, which amounts to just over 5100 tugrik, or £1.5. For Baatar, seeing that his household would have to pay for what had always been considered a free resource was a moment of realisation, stating that this would mean that he, Gogi, and 17-year-old Chuluun would very quickly have to find work.

Knowing how to find, collect, carry, and store water is a fundamental skill in rural Mongolia. As water is required for all drinking, cooking, and washing, as well as sustaining one's animals, herders must be able to locate fresh water, transport large quantities effectively and, most importantly, know how to ensure that it remains fresh for as long as possible. Baatar and Gogi have much experience in this from living in the countryside, as well as transporting it relatively long distances and storing it in specific ways so that it remains potable. These are skills that are easily transposed into the new urban context, even while they have to be adjusted at the same time. Indeed, upon returning to the ger Baatar and Gogi set about pouring the water in the same plastic storage containers as they had used in their encampment, as well as placing these containers in the same key positions around the ger where they know the water will remain fresh, such as along the lower portion of the wall close to the ground, or qayaa, which can be rolled up to allow air to flow through and keep the water cool.

Travelling to the water kiosk became the first regular task the household undertook upon arrival in the ger-district, and was carried out by Baatar and Chuluun four or five mornings per week, giving the family the first beginnings of a new routine. By making the same trip regularly and over an extended period of time they also started learning their way around the ger-district and no longer got lost, even finding new short-cuts when travelling back and forth. They also began meeting and speaking with neighbouring households who undertook the same journey, who not only shared important news and information (such as location of shops, transport routes, etc.) but also gave the household an emerging sense of familiarity. Similarly, Narantuya started accompanying her older brother and the pair made it their task of collecting the water for the family. This simultaneously resulted in important changes and adjustments at the level of everyday practice, for while they had initially carried the water by hand, Baatar soon started borrowing a small wheeled cart from one of his new neighbours (and friends), allowing the household to transport up to 20-30 litres in one trip and thus reducing the total number of visits over the week. Over time the collection of water became a taken-for-granted task of life in khoorol 7 and came to be embedded within the very structure of their days and weeks: Gogi knew on which days the water would start to run out; Chuluun knew when he should ask the neighbour to borrow the cart, and eventually both children started undertaking the water run themselves as they had met other youngsters in the district who all collected water on behalf of their households, giving an important sense of community to the family and particularly the children.

Now while the collection of water can be seen as a simple and ordinary activity, it is precisely within such quotidian moments that new migrants come to experience and settle in the new city, becoming familiar with new spaces and routes, and interacting with new people while undertaking daily tasks. This process of familiarisation is fundamentally intertwined with the learning and adjustment of skills, and so it is at this level of everyday enskilment that people come to experience the changes associated with rural-urban migration, through the learning and transposition of skills into new contexts and in articulation with new human-object and human-human relations (also see Sigaut 2002; Hodder 2011). Here people's experience of change is intertwined with their enskilment, and it is through the everyday performance of skills that what at first appeared as 'new' and 'different' (the roads, the rubbish on the side of the street, the line of people waiting at the water kiosk, the pump itself, etc.) eventually become familiar, known, and taken-for-granted.



(Figure 69. The grasslands and the ger-districts converge – photo by the author)

With a regular supply of water coming to the ger Gogi began carrying out many of the same daily tasks she had done while living in the countryside, including boiling water to make tea, washing clothes, and preparing meals. In the case of the latter, she initially used the animal products and commodities the household had brought to the city from the Shishged, including flour to make noodles and dumplings, white foods for breakfast and lunch, tea for drinking, as well as strips of dried meat boiled for dinner. It must be remembered that Mongolian herders are highly skilled in not only preparing a wide variety of foods from animal products such as milk, but more specifically preparing foods which are able to be stored for extended periods of time. Herders have developed unique methods and technologies for processing milk, including boiling, adding bacteria from yoghurt, adding sugar, flour, and drying. All of these serve as techniques of preservation and allowed Gogi to keep a relatively large supply of products from the countryside fresh and ready for preparation and consumption within the ger-district.

Of course, carrying out these daily tasks were not only essential for the household but also played an important part in establishing a rhythm of daily life. This was the case particularly for Gogi who, over the next days and weeks, kept extremely busy working in and immediately around the ger: she started preparing meals at much the same times as she had done in the family encampment, she ventured outside to collect scraps of wood to feed the fire, and she continued putting the last remaining items that had not yet been unpacked in their 'correct'

positions around the ger. As she herself explained, this recreated a comparable rituality to her life in the new urban context: "In the countryside I was always busy: I had to look after the children, prepare the meals, and clean inside the ger. It feels good to be busy again as otherwise I would just sit around". Much as with the collection of water, undertaking the same everyday tasks calls to attention the specificity of rural-urban migration in the Mongolian context, as well as how the teleological narrative of 'urbanisation' fails to capture the lived-experience of migrants themselves. Indeed, for new migrants such as Gogi much of daily life actually remained quite similar to the Shishged: although the position of the ger had changed, many of the everyday practices inside the ger were the same. In fact, during the first two to three weeks Gogi never ventured further than the new compound in which they were situated, spending most of her time inside and performing everyday tasks. Again, this is not to suggest that life somehow 'remained the same', but rather, that the specificity of the ger and certain daily practices afforded an experiential sense of continuity, allowing Gogi to re-articulate many of the same daily practices within the new urban context. Seen from her perspective, 'urbanisation' does not fully capture life in the ger-districts, where in fact the line between the 'rural' and the 'urban' is at least partially blurred, and as I show below has important implications for her own sense of existential security in the face of social change.

Social Ties, Gender, and New Skills in the City

After a few weeks settling in Gogi noted that the number of animal products and commodities were beginning to run low, and suggested the family contact Uranchimeg to help get access to additional foodstuffs, as well as for Baatar to seek out informal work. As Chuluun and Narantuya had spent the last weeks exploring the ger-districts, they had located a mobile phone centre and internet shop not far from the compound. Here the household could make calls for a relatively small fee, top-up their SIM card, and use the internet. Mobile reception is widely available in all parts of Ulaanbaatar and serves as an important tool in the ger-districts, particularly as people often do not have access to transportation and thus have to connect with friends and family members to pool resources. It is significant to note, however, that reception is not present (or not strong) in some of the newest and most distant ger-districts, which people told me increasingly determines their choices of where to move. Despite the fact that Baatar had not wanted to spend too much of their remaining cash, he knew that having a mobile phone was essential and thus sent Chuluun to top-up the SIM card, then calling Uranchimeg and arranging to meet with her and her husband.

Khoroo 7 is one of the largest ger-districts in Ulaanbaatar, covering an area of approximately 25km wide. As Baatar's sister had moved to the district already in 2008, they were currently living approximately 1 hour walk away somewhat closer to the city centre, though her husband had a motorcycle and could reach the household in approximately 30 minutes. As we have seen, the social relations of obligation are strongest at the level of one's immediate family and, as the eldest sister, Uranchimeg appeared to take a certain level of responsibility for the household now that they had arrived in Ulaanbaatar. This came to the fore over the course of the following weeks and months as she assisted Baatar and the family in a number of ways. First, she took Gogi on a guided tour of the area outside the ger-district, including showing her the nearest and cheapest shops and markets from where she could buy food and basic commodities. Second, she showed Gogi and Baatar how to use the city transportation system, which would rapidly decrease their travel time when accessing other parts of the city and which was essential to broaden their knowledge of Ulaanbaatar and incorporate new areas into their subsequent livelihood strategies. Third, she took Baatar and

Gogi to Naram Tuul market, where Uranchimeg's husband also introduced Baatar to a number of friends and retailers who could possibly offer him some informal work. Importantly, I also observed Uranchimeg give the household cash on a number of occasions, as well as various basic commodities such as tea, flour, and rice. This is significant as it reveals how migrants come to be incorporated into the new urban context on the basis of their existing social relations. Indeed, I visited many households in the ger-districts and rarely encountered people who were 'alone': either they had friends and family members living in close proximity or had established contact with people through friends and family members, typically from their own rural provinces. This again problematises the firm division between the rural and the urban, as for many new migrants 'urbanisation' is not experienced as a process of diminishing ties to friends and family in the countryside, but rather, life in the city is often facilitated through the maintenance of such ties and their strategic use in new urban contexts (also see Geschiere & Gugler 1998.

As I left the household at the end of summer and returned in the middle of autumn, I could see that Uranchimeg had been a vital source of social and economic support. Indeed, following my return Gogi had clearly settled in well and had become highly familiar with her new surroundings. Uranchimeg had assisted in enrolling Narantuya in a local school, specifically the same school which two of her own children attended, and by now everyone in the household knew their way around the ger-district and the location of key sites, including other water kiosks, rubbish collection points, communal latrines, as well as small shops from where to buy low-cost commodities (Chinbat et al. 2012). By autumn the ger itself also featured a far greater supply of food products than before, including large amounts of flour, rice, oil, sugar, and tea.

After spending a few days back with the household, I also noticed Gogi preparing *urum* ('white butter'), or clotted cream. This is a common white food in Mongolia and is made by heating milk just below boiling point and, in regular intervals, scooping ladlefuls of the milk high into the air allowing it to splash back into the pot to create a bubbly foam. This 'scooping' technique has a specific term in Mongolia – *samrakh* - and is necessary because the shallow wok-like Mongolian pot makes 'regular' stirring largely ineffective (also see Fijn 2011). At the same time, the technique has the quality of an embodied ritual and is a common sight across the Mongolian countryside, with younger daughters in particular learning the technique by assisting their mothers. Once the foam begins to accumulate, it is then covered and left overnight, following which a skin of clotted cream (the urum) will have formed, which is scooped off and either stored or consumed fresh during the day. Now in order to prepare urum one generally requires a fairly substantial amount of fresh milk, and I was surprised that Gogi appeared to have at least thirty litres bubbling away inside her pot. As she explained, she had initially been forced to buy store-bought milk for the first few weeks, though Uranchimeg soon introduced her to a neighbour who had close family ties to herding households immediately on the outskirts of khoroo 7 ('in the countryside'). As a result, this neighbour organised for milk to be brought via motorcycle directly from the pastures, and given that her and Gogi had become friends she received milk at relatively low cost. In fact, I observed herders from outside the city travelling into the ger-districts to sell milk and other animal products frequently, which allowed residents to not only avoid buying store-bought items but also continue producing white foods inside their new homes, and which of course could be stored for extended periods of time.

This example further demonstrates the permeable relationship between the rural and the urban sectors of life in Ulaanbaatar's ger-districts. Indeed, by being able to source milk directly from herding households, residents not only reduce their costs but also produce the same

foods that they made prior to migration. This again problematises the teleological narrative that urbanisation is a linear (and permanent) process, for here people's experience of 'the urban' is not divorced from the skills and practices associated with the countryside. It also significant to note the implications of this with regards to the teaching and learning of skills. For example, I observed Narantuya assisting her mother in preparing a whole series of white foods in the ger-district, including learning the specific scooping technique described above. In this regard, what we might typically characterise as 'traditional' 'herding skills' are in fact transposable to the ger-districts because of the particular form of urbanisation that has emerged in Ulaanbaatar. This is similarly described by Brunn & Li (2006:14), who emphasise the flexible articulation between rural and urban life:

> Elements of rural and urban lifestyles mix with the growing pace of social change, facilitated by a new culture of modernity, modern education and growing individual mobility. New habits, styles, and goods from the cosmopolitan city are adopted in rural culture as much as rural people move into urbanised areas with their animals and yurts. Thus, both persons and places transcend the distinction between the rural and the urban, without obscuring its significance in common parlance. Pastoral people in great numbers move towards the cities, without this necessarily resulting in general and permanent sedentarisation.

As I described above, Gogi had been the one person in Baatar's family to have adjusted to life in the ger-districts most rapidly. Partly this was due to Uranchimeg's help, who had taken care of her sister-in-law and made a considerable effort in familiarising her with life in the city. At the same time, this was also related to Gogi's own ability to transpose her pre-existing skills into the new urban context, which allowed her to maintain culturally-meaningful practices such as food preparation and corollary social relations such as between herself and her daughter.

This is something which could also be seen as Uranchimeg organised for Gogi to apply for a job in a local cleaning company. The position was relatively well-paid and based in a formal company in the centre of Ulaanbaatar, from where cleaners were sent to work in various offices and buildings across the city. Initially, Gogi was apprehensive because she presumed that they would be looking for what she called a more 'professional' person. Also worrying her was the fact that in order to apply for the job Gogi would have to go for an interview, the very prospect of which caused her much concern. After some time, however and, given the economic situation of the household and the possibility of earning a regular income, Gogi decided to attempt the interview. Of course, having spent her entire life living on the grasslands Gogi had absolutely no experience with formalised work environments. In the lead-up to the day she spent hours with Uranchimeg preparing in any way she could, including holding a 'mock interview' with her sister-in-law and spending hours washing her finest clothes so as to appear presentable. A few days prior she also accompanied Chuluun to the internet café so that she could learn some details about the cleaning company. She also learnt the bus-route that she would have to take on the day of the interview itself, specifically as she did not want to appear bad at time-management. After making much effort Gogi finally headed off to the interview in central Ulaanbaatar and, a few hours later, returned to khoroo 7 with the good news that he had been selected for the job.

Now on the one hand it might appear that a recent migrant such as Gogi would be a suitable candidate for a relatively low-skilled job such as a cleaner. It must be remembered, however, that such positions are highly sought after not only by new migrants but urban workers as well. Indeed, Gogi herself told me that there were over 30 candidates for just one position, and she was surprised by her success. Over the course of the following weeks and months, Gogi clearly enjoyed working at her new job. Every morning, three times a week, she departed by bus and made her way to central Ulaanbaatar and was given the address of a location to where

she would have to travel – with expenses paid – and spent the day cleaning. As she explained, it took some time to get used to all of the specific rules expected, including using products and utensils that she was not familiar with. However, after a period of time she became accustomed and started enjoying her new work: as she explained, she had always been good at cleaning since she was young and, with this new position, she was earning a salary for her household while doing something that she enjoyed. Not only did it give her a sense of pride but she also explicitly characterised her job as working to support her household: "The important thing in my life is to make things better for my children. I hope with this new work I can earn enough money to pay for Chuluun's education. While I miss my life in the countryside it is also good to try new things. When I was young I never that I would one day live in Ulaanbaatar and take the bus to work every day".

Now Gogi is an apt example of the ways in which some migrants actively harness the new conditions they enter into upon arriving in Ulaanbaatar, generating new possibilities for work and livelihood. Indeed, by adapting and learning new skills she flexibly adapted to the new urban context which afforded both her and her family new opportunities for the future. It must be remembered that the kinds of skills which Gogi learnt were not only those articulated in the interview setting, but a broader set of bodily skills such as moving through the city with a greater degree of confidence, taking public transport, and interacting with 'professional' Ulaanbaatar-based colleagues and clients.

This points to a wider gendered dimension associated with the so-called 'feminisation' of labour in contexts of economic change (Yanagisako 2002; Elmhirst & Saptari 2004; Man 2004). Here feminisation refers to the process by which available employment and labour options tend increasingly to characterise activities associated with women. A particular job could be feminised, or men could find themselves in feminised positions; more women could find themselves in jobs traditionally taken by men, or certain jobs could be changed to have characteristics associated with women's historical pattern of labour (Elmhirst & Saptari 2004). This has important effects on skills (Glenn & Feldberg 1977). First, there has been a decline in the proportion of jobs requiring 'craft' skills learnt through apprenticeships or long-term on-the-job training. Such crafts have traditionally been the domain of men, and thus their decline and the changing character of skills have influenced the gender division of labour (Yanagisako 2002:136-8). Second, there has been a trend towards skill polarisation, with a minority of workers required to possess specialist skills and a majority possessing minor training. As Yanagisako (2002:138) has shown, the latter are typically imparted through 'modules of employable skills', in which docility, application, rote learning and related capacities figure prominently (also see Attewell 1987). The feminisation of labour can be seen in the context of rural-urban migration to Ulaanbaatar and has both positive and negative dimensions. In general, women find it easier to locate employment in the city, though typically in low-salary (and often informal) jobs such as cleaning or textile production. Here women are at an advantage because their particular ('feminised') skills are deemed to be transposable, despite in some cases resulting in deskilling. It is interesting to note though that the attitudes of women themselves tend to be more positive, in the sense that women find even the deskilled jobs relatively attractive and they enjoy retaining a degree of control over their work (in the form of 'useful' skills) and wider household incomes. This is reported elsewhere particularly in contexts of de-industrialisation, where women are economically empowered through feminisation of labour while the demise of, for example factory work and mining, result in a loss of perceived masculinity and status (Glenn & Feldberg 1977; Man 2004).

This further highlights an important yet relatively neglected aspect of the enskilment process: namely, the role of the imagination in transposing existing skills, and learning entirely new skills, and putting them into practice in new contexts. Indeed, skills are often treated as somehow tied to 'tradition' or merely reproduced on the basis of past practice. Although it is true that every skill has some precedent there are instances when people enter new contexts of relations with both their environment and other people and thus must transpose or generate entirely new skills in the process. Of course, this can be seen in innumerable formalised contexts such as in scientific invention and when artists or craftsmen develop a new technique (Grasseni 2009). However, it is also worth considering the everyday generation of new skills particularly as people encounter and adapt to social change. By considering the generation of new skills we focus our attention on the active, productive, and imaginative capacity of human beings to not only maintain what already exists but to effectuate something new (also see Castoriadis 1997). Here I see the processual concept of enskilment as articulating precisely this imaginative capacity, the practical foundations of what Hannah Arendt calls natality: "the tendency of all human action not only to conserve the past but to initiate new possibilities" (1958:176-178 my emphasis). Indeed, it is through the learning of new skills that people such as Gogi actively engage with their present in order to generate a potential future. Here skills can be seen as the creative capacity through which women such as Gogi cope with their changing worlds, harnessing the ever-changing affordances of their environments and embodying new identities in the course of their everyday lives. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: "To be born is both to be born of the world and to be born into the world. The world is already constituted, but also never completely constituted; in the first place we are acted upon, in the second we are open to an infinite number of possibilities" (1962:453).

Existential Dislocation and the Limits of Enskilment

So far in this chapter I have described some of the ways in which migrants come to settle in Ulaanbaatar's ger-districts and gradually familiarise themselves with life in the new urban context. I have also drawn attention to the often-permeable relationship between the 'rural' and the 'urban' in peoples everyday lived-experience, as well as the cultural specificity of Mongolian urbanism in understanding life in the ger-districts. It is important to recognise, however, that there are a range of new problems and limitations associated with life in the ger-districts, including high levels of unemployment, health issues and the consequences caused by air pollution, as well as relatively higher instances of crime, violence, and alcohol abuse. While many of these are pertinent across postsocialist Mongolia, their relative higher frequency in the ger-districts suggests a link between migration and the capital city that demands further exploration. In the sections below I provide ethnographic evidence of some of these problems as they were encountered by Baatar and his household over the subsequent months. This will lead, in the final section, to a consideration of how these come to manifest at the level of skilled practice and what this reveals about the limitations of people's enskilment - and the existential consequences of deskilment - in the face of radical change.

Social Change and Struggle in the Ger-Districts

I returned to Ulaanbaatar in the middle of winter, when life inside the ger-districts is the most challenging. It had been 5 months since Baatar and his family arrived in khoroo 7 and I was interested to see how they had been coping and adjusting to their new lives. Before making my way to their district I called Bataar to see whether he and the family were available. Somewhat to my surprise it was Chuluun who answered the phone and told me that he was busy working

in Naram Tuul. As he explained, he had managed to secure a part-time job as a parking attendant just outside the market, where his official role was to assist drivers in finding a parking and, along with a team of other young men, collect payment from the drivers and generally help oversee the organisation of traffic. As I was walking not too far from Naram Tuul we decided to meet up and travel together to khoroo 7 after his shift.

Arriving in Naram Tuul I spotted Chuluun just outside the entrance and walked over to greet him. He looked well and was busy socialising with a group of young friends, all of whom worked alongside him as part-time parking attendants. I enquired into how he and his family had been doing over the past few months and he explained that although everyone was fine things had been getting more difficult, particularly since the start of winter. Although he had initially expressed interest in going to university he told me that he had been forced to look for informal work instead, specifically as the cost of living had risen and the household were not earning enough to cover all of their daily costs. As Chuluun explained, since the temperatures had started to fall the household were forced to spend far more of their already limited income on heating the ger. Initially he had found a job in khoroo 7 itself, specifically collecting scrap metal for recycling. However, as this was very low paid and as the cost of heating increased he was forced to look for alternate work and was recommended the parking position by one of his neighbours. This was an informal job and he was paid on a daily basis below the minimum wage, earning 1200 MNT per hour and working for approximately 6 hours a day, 3 days per week, giving him an average monthly income of 21600 MNT (£6.3), which he contributed directly to the family.

With average winter temperatures ranging between -30˚C and - 40˚C in Ulaanbaatar, it is essential for residents in the ger-districts to keep themselves warm. As a result, all households keep their central stoves lit inside their gers throughout the day and night. However, while in rural areas herders can easily acquire wood or argal free of charge, in the city they are forced to purchase fuel. Given the fact that winters last particularly long from the end of October to the beginning of April, residents spend a considerable amount of their annual income on keeping their gers warm. Indeed, a recent Asian Development Bank study (2006) found that on average a household in the ger-districts spends upwards of 40% of their monthly income on heating. As Chuluun explained, this was by far the single most important factor which had problematised the household's situation, and was the reason why he himself had been forced into work. Connected to this and, much like the majority of residents in the ger-districts, the household could only afford to burn the very lowest-quality wood and coal, which produces high levels of air pollution across the city and has been shown to contribute to major health problems for local residents. As Chuluun himself described it:

> In the spring and summer months the sky above the city was beautiful and just like back home. But now it is cold and people burn their stoves all the time so the sky is full of smog and dust. Sometimes it is very hard to breath when you are walking through the city, but what can I do? I have to walk to get the bus to work here and help pay to keep us warm.

After making our way to khoroo 7 we were greeted inside by Gogi and Narantuya. As usual, Gogi prepared tea and snacks and invited me to sit down and keep warm by the stove. I immediately noticed the difference inside the ger in terms of air-quality: while in the countryside herders burn either wood or argal – both of which do not produce excessive smoke or have a distinct odour – the coal inside the stove was extremely dirty. Not only did it exude a toxic smell but it also produced a large amount of smoke, so much so that only a portion exited through the upper chimney while much escaped from the sides of the stove and

entered the inside of the ger. I asked Gogi whether it had caused problems and she replied that everyone in the household had been coughing, and she was particularly concerned for Narantuya given that she was still young. However, Gogi reiterated Chuluun's remarks that the household had little choice but to burn the lowest-quality fuel.



(Figure 70. Winter in the ger-districts – photo by the author)

There are two types of coal available to burn in the ger-districts: *nailakh* and *baganuur*. With its sparkling surface and more efficient burn rate the former is generally the preferred choice, although it is also more expensive (ADB 2006). As Gogi described it: "People who have a middle-range income are able to buy nailakh coal. But 15kg of nailakh is 3500 MNT more expensive than baganuur, which you can get 50kg for only 4500 MNT (£1.3). Therefore, the city's poorest people can only afford to buy baganuur coal". Being cheaper, baganuur coal is also far less efficient. While the household initially purchased a higher-quality wood, the falling temperatures and difficult economic situation meant they soon had to switch to coal, initially nailakh but soon changing to the cheaper and more damaging baganuur. This regressive adjustment provides insight into many household's worsening economic situation.

I stayed with Gogi and the household for the next few weeks and during this time came to experience more of the new problems associated with life in the ger-districts. On one typical afternoon, I observed Chuluun carrying the household's rubbish outside the ger and dumping it in a big pile in the corner of their compound. This had caught my attention because the last time I visited the household had carried their garbage to a rubbish collection point approximately 250 metres away from the ger. In fact, I had even assisted Baatar and Chuluun in transporting their waste, specifically using the same trolley borrowed from their neighbours when collecting water. Enquiring about this Chuluun explained that it was all to do with what he called 'Ulaanbaatar 2020'. This is an urban policy 'master plan' intended to improve the urban development of the city and, in particular, life in the ger-districts (Chinbat et al. 2012). Although consisting of various social, economic, and environmental aspects the part which Chuluun was referring to was the intended goal to supply the ger-districts with a provision of basic infrastructure such as water supply, sewerage, roads, drainage, electricity, and rubbish collection, all by the (optimistic) target of 2020. The implications of this for ordinary households were that the local government gradually implemented various development initiatives, of which the installation of water kiosks was one example.

As Chuluun explained, soon after I left the government 'upgraded' the rubbish collection point in their area by implementing what it called a more efficient system. While previously the rubbish was collected once a month, now it was collected every two weeks. However, as part of this change households in khoroo 7 were now charged a new monthly fee of 2500 MNT, to be paid regularly should they wish to utilise the service. As many households could not (and would not) pay this fee, many simply began discarding (or burning) their rubbish within their ger compounds, as well as increasingly along the street. As Chuluun explained, of course he and his family did not want to throw their rubbish beside their ger but they had little choice given that they could not afford the new cost. This became a widespread issue during my stay in khoroo 7 as rubbish piled up and residents began to complain. Coupled with this, it came to the attention of local residents that the government was operating a more efficient rubbish collection service at a lower price in the 'wealthier' residential areas of the city centre. Thus, it was reported that while in the ger-districts households were being charged 2500 MNT (£0.7) per month for a vehicle to remove rubbish once a week, residents in both new and socialist-era apartment blocks were charged only 2000 MNT (£0.4) per month for a service which collected their rubbish two times per week. This emerged as a key point of debate amongst all residents in the area, who pointed out that there was a far higher concentration of people in the ger-districts and many felt this to be an unfair policy imposed on the economically-disadvantaged. Making matters worse was the fact that it is widely known that people living in socialist-era apartment blocks often do not pay utility bills at all, despite the fact that they have access to electricity, heating, hot water, and sanitation. I have spent time in a number of these apartments and in almost all cases the residents told me that indeed they had never paid for these services over a period of decades, a remnant of the old socialist model. This is something which the local government claimed to be addressing, although at the time of writing the situation remained. Residents of the ger-districts are acutely aware of this and feel persecuted for having to pay for what they believe to be basic services, while those that they perceive as wealthier do not have to pay anything at all.

Over the following days and weeks, I stayed with the household and assisted them in any way I could. Although they were obviously struggling economically they continued to receive support from Baatar's sister, as well as from other households in the neighbourhood. Indeed, by far one of the most significant changes I observed was the expansion of the household's network of social support, which now included a diverse range of people from across the ger-district. Much as in rural areas, households in khoroo 7 shared both commodities and services, including smaller items such as food and alcohol, as well as more essential things such as providing transportation whenever possible. For example, one of Chuluun's friends had a motorcycle which came to play a central role in the household's lives, not only to travel more quickly to pick up supplies, but also to transport Narantuya to school. Of course, given the cost of fuel there were also many times when the motorcycle was not in use, and it was common for Chuluun to pass by his friend and ask whether the motorcycle was 'running' or not.

Travelling by public transport was another important aspect of daily life for the household, particularly as Chuluun, Gogi, and Baatar used it whenever possible to carry out work. However, there were also significant problems with using public transport, not only in terms of cost, but also the limitations associated with the ger-districts specifically. In general, public transport is highly limited in Ulaanbaatar's ger-districts: while in older neighborhoods situated closer to the city there are buses which provide fairly regular access, there is no transportation in many of the newer districts rapidly emerging around the city. This limits people's mobility in terms of seeking – and maintaining – employment. Indeed, as Chuluun explained, as soon as he

managed to get a job at Naram Tuul it became imperative that he start travelling by bus as the market is approximately 15km from khoroo 7. As the household themselves are located on the outskirts of the district there is no public transportation in their immediate area. As a result, Chuluun would have to first walk 20 minutes through the ger-district until reaching a main road. From there, he had to walk another 15 minutes to reach the bus-stop, which arrives only every half an hour. The journey itself took approximately 25 minutes, although as Chuluun explained the traffic in Ulaanbaatar was such that he often took double this time. What this meant was that in order to get to and from work Chuluun would travel between 2 and 3 hours per day. Despite the fact that Chuluun needed to work in order to supplement his family's income he also had to spend a considerable amount of money on transport itself. He earned approximately 1200 MNT per hour and worked for approximately 6 hours a day, 3 days per week, giving him an average monthly income of 21600 MNT (£6.3). Based on this, he calculated that he spent at least one quarter of his monthly income on transportation.

As such examples make clear life in Ulaanbaatar's ger-districts is far from easy. Although improvements have been made over the last two decades the large majority of people continue to have no access to infrastructure or basic services. While a number of districts have more recently been connected to electricity, most have no electrical supply, running water, heating, or landline telephones. According to a recent World Bank (2011) report, 97% of households only have outside latrines, which has contributed to a series of health issues in some areas. With higher levels of unemployment, pollution, and social tensions than anywhere else in the country, all of these factors combine to create a situation of relative uncertainty. Although as we have seen some people actively cope with this by learning new skills and developing alternate livelihood strategies, the situation for many remains difficult. Life expectancy is significantly lower in the ger-districts than in other regions of the city, as are levels of crime and violence. As I show below this is something which comes to manifest at the level of skilled practice, specifically as people experience these problems in articulation with their own inability to learn new skills, their deskilment over time, as well as their failure to transpose pre-existing skills into the new urban context. This reveals significant insights into the limitations of enskilment in the face of radical change, as well as draws attention to what I see as a fundamental connection between people's ability to maintain meaningful skills and their sense of existential security, which has implications for understanding how people experience wider processes of change in other ethnographic contexts.

Existential Dislocation and Deskilment

Following my return to the ger-districts the one person who I had not had the chance to speak with properly was Baatar. Partly this was due to the fact that he himself was preoccupied with undertaking informal work. Indeed, as the household's economic situation had worsened Baatar spent much of his time away from the ger either working or searching for work, leaving early in the morning and returning late at night. As time went on, however, I noticed that there was something more complicated going on. As Gogi eventually confided to me Baatar was in fact suffering from depression and, although it was true that he worked most of the day, he also spent much of his time in a neighbouring ger drinking with a friend. This came to the fore over the following weeks as Baatar's drinking began to cause conflicts at home. As I came to learn, Baatar had initially worked with Chuluun in collecting scrap materials for recycling. Soon afterwards he managed to get a better paid job in Naram Tuul, specifically working as a 'transporter' - carrying goods in and out of the market for settled retailers.

It was during this time that Baatar began feeling depressed about his and his family's situation: as costs began to rise and they struggled to make ends meet he took to drinking with another transporter from the market. After missing work a number of times and, coming to work drunk multiple times, he was eventually fired. For the next three days he simply went missing, although as I later heard from Baatar himself he spent the entire time getting drunk in a neighbouring ger-district. It is difficult as an anthropologist to watch one of one's friends and interlocutors in the field experiencing personal problems, particularly after the suffering associated with the 2009-10 dzud.

There are times when one's personal sentiments become complicated by the very nature of ethnographic research, and it seems incorrect or unethical to question one's friend when one knows that s/he is suffering. Anthropologists working in Northern and Inner Asia are, perhaps more than others, acutely aware of the complexities of alcohol consumption. On the one hand, alcohol is undeniably related to acts of violence, drunkenness, and mortality, and statistics suggest there are higher rates of alcohol abuse in Northern and Inner Asian societies than many other parts of the world (McKnight 2006). Alcohol, however, is also a highly symbolic substance, one that has a particular place in the cultural lifeworld of people and which is fundamentally intertwined with social relations, gender constructions, and ontological presuppositions. As Williams (2002) notes, alcohol consumption is an embedded social phenomenon that can neither be dismissed as commonplace pathology nor be disregarded as quaint local culture. Indeed, who you drink with (and how much you can drink) reveals considerable insight into your embeddedness within social networks of obligation, as well as your status and hierarchy within particular communities. Similarly, alcohol plays a key role in ritual contexts and engagements with non-human agencies, such as when people flick drops of alcohol to pay respect to the sky, earth and hearth, all of which are perceived as having their own modes of being and which specifically affect humans and thus require material consideration. At the same time alcohol has a fundamental role in instilling a sense of intimacy and ease between people, and it is often during moments of drinking – and drunkenness – that relationships are forged. This is true not only of the relationships one observes while undertaking ethnographic research, but also, of the relationship between the ethnographer and one's interlocutors as well. Indeed, while anthropologists have been largely reluctant to write about alcohol as a part of the fieldwork experience, I argue that rather than disregarding it as a mere formality of the ethnographic encounter, it should instead be treated as a serious, experiential aspect of fieldwork itself, at least in the context of Northern and Inner Asia. This is something I encountered when asked by Baatar whether I wanted to 'have a drink' (by which he meant get drunk with him) and, through this, he revealed a series of emotions, feelings, and undefined experiences associated with his struggle to adapt to life in the ger-districts. Here I saw that asking me to have a drink - and 'getting drunk' together - was also a way of establishing, for Baatar, an intersubjective space through which he felt comfortable enough to tell me how he felt and the problems he had been facing (also see Turner & Brunner 2001; Jackson 1996).



(Figure 71. In the shadow of new Ulaanbaatar – photo by the author)

As Baatar explained, he had felt totally lost since his arrival in the capital city. As a Mongolian man and the head of a household he had tried to be strong and set a good example for his wife and children. However, he now felt they had made the wrong decision in leaving the Shishged. He told me that he missed the open space of the grasslands and felt restricted in the ger-districts: "It is like having something hanging over your head all of the time. In the winter, there is pollution and smog, while in summer there just cars and people all over. I am a simple man from the countryside. I did not even like visiting Mörön when I was young and now I am in the biggest city in Mongolia. Sometimes I wish I could just wake up and be back with my herd". Connected to this, Baatar explained that he hated the fact that he no longer had any herd animals of his own, perceiving this to be somehow a failure on his part. Importantly, Baatar not only explained his feelings of loss and despair on the basis of what he felt he had left behind, but also, in terms of how he could not adapt (*dasakh*) his skills to city life:

> Everything is different in Ulaanbaatar than in the countryside. In the countryside when you get up in the morning you immediately have work to do: you have to take the sheep and goats away from the encampment and make sure they are grazing in the right place. After that, you must work with the horses and train them for riding. If it is spring, then you must castrate lambs and if it is autumn then you castrate mares. In the countryside, I always have things to do, but here is totally different. Work means something else here; it means to struggle (*temtsel*) and fight (*tulaldakh*). Here you have to find work. You have to show that you can do different things. But I have never learnt these things before: I cannot drive a car, I cannot calculate like in the market. I don't think I can work like they do here. In the countryside, you have your own animals and everything is up to you. You choose when to move and where to go. But here everything is different. Here everything is out of your control.

Sitting with Baatar over the course of the day and night and becoming quite drunk, he revealed many of his deepest fears and anxieties, as well as his own self-perception as being somehow limited or blocked from adapting to the city on the basis of his own inapplicability to urban life. This is something which is far from unusual in the context of rural-urban migration in Mongolia. Indeed, as increasing numbers of herders move from the countryside to the city, it has become apparent that not all are able to adjust. This is the case, in particular, for men who have a far higher rate of unemployment, alcohol abuse, and psychological problems. A report carried out by the Health Ministry of Mongolia noted that alcohol abuse amongst male migrants in the city was Mongolia's biggest social and economic crisis. In 2010, the World Health Organisation found that more than half of Ulaanbaatar's total population - or 55% - admitted that they used alcohol excessively and 15% felt themselves to be completely dependent. In 2010 alone, 140 thousand people were found by local police or ambulance

services drunk in the ger-districts, and had to brought to specific sobering-up cells to prevent them from freezing to death in winter or from doing harm to others. The same survey indicated that around 1000 people died because of accidents related to alcohol abuse on an annual basis, while 72% of serious crime - including murder, violent robbery, and household abuse - were alcohol related. Many politicians have a direct interest in the alcohol industry, and alcohol taxes generate large revenues for the government. In the years 1985-1990 surveys show that 87.7% of the total population did not consume alcohol at all, 10.6% used to drink only on special occasions, 1.2% consumed alcohol regularly, and only 0.7% were alcohol-dependent. By 2010, the World Health Organisation found that more than half of Ulaanbaatar's population admitted they used alcohol excessively, 15% were dependent, and one in five men binge drink on a weekly basis. 1000 people die because of accidents related to alcohol abuse on an annual basis, while 72% of serious crime are alcohol related. One additional factor is the sheer availability of alcohol. Mongolia has one shop selling alcohol for every 270 people, the highest number in world.

Now while such statistics are certainly revealing, it is important to situate them within the context of people's everyday lives. I met a number of individuals – usually men – who expressed precisely the same concerns as described by Baatar. Indeed, the most common reason given by people for excessive alcohol consumption (and related issues such as violence) was that they felt they could not adapt to life in the city. Connected to this, people explained that the things which mattered most to them while living in the countryside seemed to no longer have relevance in the new urban context, such as herding animals, being able to move freely on the grasslands, and being in control of one's life path. Often this was articulated in characteristic expressions of Mongolian notions of self, including references to losing or having one's 'soul' or 'life force' (suld) diminished. Here the issue of gender plays an absolutely central role. Indeed, Mongolian notions of masculinity are firmly rooted in attitudes and perceptions of strength, autonomy, and bravery (Bille 2012; also see Campi 2006; Hanson 2004). This is the case, in particular, for herder men, for whom 'being a man' is directly associated with the practices and skills of riding and training horses, working with herd animals, spending time in the landscape and, in the Shishged, hunting in the taiga. In learning these skills over time men – and young boys – gradually come to form the very basis of their self-identity. As many of these skills are deemed not applicable in the urban context and the ger-districts, many herder migrants experience a sense of existential loss (Bikale & Khurelbaatar 2000). This is compounded by the fact that many migrant women adapt rather better, often finding work for the first time and to some extent replacing their husbands as the sole bread-winner. Here there is also a gendered distinction with regards to the different kinds of skills that can and cannot be transposed from the rural context. Thus, while Gogi could quite easily adapt her pre-existing skills such as cleaning to working in a more formal company, for people such as Baatar it is far more difficult – at least for him – to imagine how the skills which he has been trained in and which he has come to learn– can be put to use in what is a radically different context. This has been reported by a number of NGO's working in the ger-districts, specifically trying to tackle the problem of alcohol and violence. As one employee of a United Nations Development Project told me: "Pastoral men find it much harder than women when they come to the city. These men are used to taking care of the household. They had the freedom to be on the steppe, go hunting. When they come here they cannot use any of these skills. It is a total transformation".

Speaking with Bataar about this one day he remarked that "many men here cannot do anything, so they just stay at home and drink". As we have seen, herding life in all of its many forms is characterised by specific kinds of relationship between human beings, herd animals,

and the landscape. For herders the everyday practices of herding, hunting, and moving between pastures are not simply tied to economic production but how they experience themselves as individuals and which give meaning to their existence. For a person such as Baatar who has lived all of his life on the grasslands, moving to Ulaanbaatar is not simply a movement across space but a movement between two different lifeworlds. What gives him meaning in the countryside may indeed be transposed into the city and produce new kinds of lifestyle, but it might also not be transposed and thus result in a radical experience of profound loss, dislocation, and existential angst.

Although anthropology has rarely explored the effects of social and economic change on the 'loss' or 'transformation' of skills (but see Grasseni 2009; Harris 2005), the subject has a relatively long history in both sociology and political-economy (Beynon 1994; Jaros 2008). Particularly in the context of industrial work studies have explored the impact of technological change on the skills of workers, out of which emerged the concept of 'de-skilling': the process by which skilled labour is eliminated by the introduction of technology (Braverman 1998). Implicit within this is a Marxist critique of Taylorism (and 'Scientific Management') and of a capitalist mode of production more generally. Indeed, Braverman (ibid) suggested that both manual and non-manual work were being deskilled in his seminal analyses of craft work and clerical work. Consequently, for Braverman, advanced capitalism is said to be producing a proletarianisation of the workforce, and this is seen as a vindication of earlier Marx's arguments on deskilling and proletarianisation under conditions of competitive capitalism (Adler 1990). Here there is an assumption that de-skilling is directly tied to decreasing quality, demeaning labour by rendering work mechanical, rather than thoughtful, making workers automatons rather than artisans, as well as undermining community cohesion (ibid:174-6). Although a range of stances have since emerged since Braverman's work it is possible to identify two major positions ((Littler & Innes 2003: 75; Spencer 2000; Heisig 2009). First, Braverman's account of the tendency for industrial societies to disempower and deskill workers has been rejected in favor of approaches which emphasise up-skilling, including new job opportunities, employee flexibility, access to knowledge, and the use of new technologies. Such stances are also typically codified "into a post-Fordist, post-modernist or 'new industrial era' discourse" (Littler & Innes 2003: 75; Gaillie 1991;), where the jobs of new sub-fields such as media and information technology (Silicon Valley, Google, call-centres, Uber, etc.) are said to produce new forms of post-industrial skills. Second, and in direct contrast, there has been those who seek to modify but largely support Braverman's thesis (Attewell 1987; Littler 1982; Adler, 1990; Jaros 2008; Spencer, 2000; Wood 1982; Gallie 1991; Beynon, 1994; Heisig 2009). As Littler and Innes (2003:73) put it in reviewing this work: "The analogy of an epistemological pendulum has been drawn, in which the deskilling/upskilling debate 'has swung back and forth across the academic generations". More detailed research with a specific ethnographic focus have been Linhart's (1981) study of de-skilling in a Citroen factory in France, Ching Kwan Lee's (1998) analysis of urban workers in Shenzhen, as well as Joshi's (2003) study of declining skills amongst Indian textile workers, who all point to revised elements of Braverman's initial thesis.

Now on the one hand the above theoretical and ethnographic work has provided much important insight into the effects of social, economic, and technological change on the skills and practices of workers. Indeed, the concept of de-skilling has been useful in linking the political economy of industrial work with the transformation of skills over time and, particularly in the context of technological change, has shown the human impact of so-called technical improvements with the innovation of new forms of technology. At the same time, however, there have been a number of limitations with this research and the concept of de-skilling in

particular, and this goes some way to explaining why it has not had the deserved consideration in cognate fields such as anthropology. First, there has been an understandable yet un-balanced tendency to focus specifically on industrial work and skills. Implicit within this is the assumption that skills are 'specialist' practices associated with the world of formal labour and corollary institutions, hence the focus on 'the workplace', 'the factory floor', and the skills of key employment categories such as engineers, scientists, textile workers, and others. I would argue, however, that what is required of the anthropology of skill is to consider the everyday processes of deskilment in ordinary contexts of change, such as migrants moving to the capital city and becoming 'de-skilled' on account of the inapplicability of their pre-existing skills to be applied and rendered meaningful in the new context. Part of this is also an exercise in broadening our own theoretical presuppositions, specifically deconstructing the hierarchy between the so-called 'high' skills of the engineer or technical expert and those that come to be learnt and practiced in other, less formal settings, such as living on the grasslands or migrating to a capital city. As I have shown, herders are themselves specialists in their own particular lifeworlds and the skills which support herding life are no less complex and deserving of attention than those in formalised work places. Anthropologists, of course, are ideally suited to broadening the scope of the study of skills, specifically as the people with whom we live and work all learn and embody their own specific kinds of expertise. In the process, we are in a suitable position to understand and describe the transformation of these skills in contexts of social, economic, and political change, presenting ethnographic accounts of how skills come to be adapted, transposed or, as in the case of Baatar, deemed no longer relevant.

Building upon this is another limitation associated with the above literature; namely, the lack of attention to the existential impact of de-skilling on people's everyday lives. Indeed, while it is no doubt essential to describe the effects of technological change on work relations and institutional arrangements within contexts of production, the question of how do workers 'feel' and 'experience' the loss and transformation of their skills largely goes unanswered. Here we require phenomenological descriptions of the de-skilling process itself based on individual cases and communities of practice, in order to prioritise the existential impact and visceral effect of losing one's skills or having them deemed no longer necessary. In the case of Baatar, for example, it is not simply enough to state that the skills of herding life are no longer relevant in the urban context, but rather, to connect the inapplicability of those skills to how he himself imagines them as part of his own meaningful existence. As I myself encountered time and again in the ger-districts, herder men identify with the skills they had learnt in the countryside and which they 'brought with them' in the form of practical embodied experience. This practical experience is itself what has given their lives meaning and faced with their 'irrelevance' in the new context is experienced as an existential dislocation. Of course, this link between skills, meaning, and existential crisis is not confined to rural-urban migration but would be equally applicable in the context of other settings such as industrial change. After all, this is precisely what Marx himself referred to when discussing the de-humanisation of labour in the context of industrial capitalism, emphasising that the transformations in people's skills were not simply characterised by statistics of unemployment or the redundancy of particular kinds of work, but the very devaluation of workers' identities and senses of self.

I argue that a phenomenological approach to deskilment is especially important in contexts of radical change such as migration or relocation. This is the case because these moments induce experiences that are not easily translated by normative anthropological theory, such as those of Bataar and other new migrants in the capital city. Here people often apply ambivalent self-characterisations such as 'in-betweeness' and 'loss' to capture their shifting existential

moment. Such self-characterisations are examples of what Durkheim called *anomie* or what Bourdieu termed *conatus*, 'critical moments when the expectations that sustain people's habitus are no longer available, when our illusio – our interest and investment in life (is) shattered' (Jackson 2005: xxii). Here the effects of migration are not necessarily definable but emerge through everyday events and encounters, such as Bataar turning up to work drunk or feeling ashamed for having 'let his family down'. It is for this reason that I adopt a phenomenological perspective when seeking to understand Baatar's experiences, attending to the ways in which change had been grasped, experienced and, as we have seen, not entirely dealt with. Here the transformations brought about by migration are expressed contextually, in everyday experiences, comments, and actions, from 'feeling lost' to moments of drunkenness and, unfortunately for some, violence and suicide. As Merleau-Ponty remarked, being human is not only a matter of 'I think' but 'I can' (1962:137). As Jackson adds, however, it is also frequently a matter of 'I cannot'; "To be human is not only to have intentions and purposes, which one strives to consummate…it is to be thwarted, conflicted and thrown by contingency and circumstance" (2005: xiii-xiv; also see Jackson 1989). Here I see a useful collaboration between phenomenological descriptions and the anthropology of skill, specifically highlighting the existential foundations of skills and their deep meaning in people's lives (Fraser 2010, 2015). Furthermore, I see a useful potential connection between the political-economy of skill outlined here and the recent anthropology of hope articulated in other ethnographic contexts (Miyazaki 2006; Hage 2003), whereby hope is dependent on the maintenance and successful transposition of deeply meaningful skills (also see Mertz 2002). In this way, the anthropology of skill has the potential to become an empirically-grounded political-economy of skill which traces the impact of social, economic, and political change, not just in people's abstract lives but in their bodies and articulated through their emotional responses and experiences.

Conclusion

In this chapter I described the movement of households from rural areas to the capital city. Using ethnographic material of one particular household I described their process of migrating to Ulaanbaatar, beginning with the various preparations required before departure, the 1000km journey itself, their arrival in the ger-districts of the capital city, as well as finding an appropriate plot of land upon which to erect their ger and begin their new lives. I also described the everyday experiences of life in the ger-districts including acquiring food, water, and household supplies, moving across the city in seeking out informal work, as well as negotiating with local government and international development organisations. Here I showed how, for many new migrants, survival is fundamentally intertwined with the learning of new skills and the transposition of existing skills into a radically different context.

Also in the chapter I considered some of the more problematic aspects associated with life in the ger-districts and how they come to manifest at the level of skilled practice. I showed how for some people life in the ger-districts is characterised by an inability to learn new skills, by processes of deskilment, as well as the failure to take pre-existing skills and apply them in a city environment. Thus, I described how Baatar struggled in Ulaanbaatar as the skills which he had learnt and which had given meaning were no longer relevant in the new urban context. Engaging with the wider literature on de-skilling, I pushed the anthropology of skill further to reveal the relationship between skills and people's own sense of existential security, elucidating the implications of losing one's skills or finding that one's skills are no longer applicable in the face of radical change. Here I argued that skills should not be seen simply as practices which one comes to learn, lose, or forget but as deeply meaningful embodied

expressions of self. In this way, I extended the hermeneutic framework towards what might be called a political-economy of skill, whereby social, economic, and political changes are tracked and traced at the level of human embodiment and experience, and argued for a revised conceptualisation of change itself based on skilled practice.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have attempted to develop a new approach to postsocialist change. More specifically, I proposed a hermeneutic framework for elucidating the polydirectional experience of postsocialist change, extending Ingold's concept of enskilment – and developing the terms *deskilment* and *transposition* of skills - combined with a critique of the teleological metanarratives which underpin normative conceptualisations. I argued that such normative approaches fail to capture the reality of life as I encountered it during my fieldwork between 2012-3, and in opposition to this I developed a processual and polydirectional perspective grounded in skilled practice. This approach was designed to capture not only the transmission of skills between the generations but also new skills learnt in articulation with change, as well as those that are lost, forgotten, transformed, contested, and transposed in relation to varying contexts of social, economic, and political transformation. By extending skill in this way and by observing transformations in skilled practice I argued that we are better afforded insight into the polydirectional experiences characteristic of life in late postsocialist Mongolia, including differentiation within communities and between the generations, non-linear changes and

transpositions, as well as non-teleological reversals. With this approach, I sought to analyse how people living in a remote part of Northern Mongolia have experienced the recent changes to have occurred over the last ten to fifteen years since the postsocialist transition. In the process, I critiqued the teleological metanarrative of 'modernisation' and related concepts of 'globalisation', 'marketisation', 'sedentarisation', and 'urbanisation', which failed to capture the everyday lived-experiences of my interlocutors.

My main argument in the dissertation was that while Mongolia's postsocialist transition occurred over twenty years ago it is still not clear what has come after postsocialism, or how we as anthropologists might conceptualise the contradictory, non-linear, and reversible experiences of people during the so-called postsocialist period. Here I used the hermeneutic framework to investigate different aspects of social life as I encountered them during my fieldwork. In each case I described the continuities and transformations of skills and problematised what I saw to be four major narratives of teleological change.

In Chapter 1 I described the most fundamental aspects of herding life and showed how these come to be taught and learnt between the generations, specifically through the informal apprenticeships within herding households and the intimate relations between human beings and herd animals. In Chapter 2 I described how herding life intersected with the collapse of state socialism and the return to a subsistence economy, as well the corollary changes associated with the postsocialist transition such as the advent of marketisation and shifting relations between the mobile and settled sections of rural life. I showed how these changes have manifested at the level of skilled practice and how they are experienced by herders in polydirectional ways. In the process, I problematised the assumption that change occurs as a linear process from 'tradition' to 'modernity', emphasising instead peoples' non-linear experiences and the permeable divisions between the presocialist, socialist, and postsocialist contexts. In chapter 3 I explored the use of new technologies and how they were incorporated into herding practices, generating alternate livelihood strategies, and resulting in wider changes in social life. I argued that while notions of technological change have long been tied to the teleological metanarrative of modernisation it is important to emphasise the polydirectional ways in which herders experience technological change. Here I showed how motorcycles, solar panels, and mobile phones are not experienced as a transition from 'tradition' to 'modernity', as a singular 'improvement', or as replacing pre-existing technologies in a uniform way, but rather, from within the context of the postsocialist transition and the return to a subsistence economy - as simultaneously providing benefits and disadvantages, producing losses and gains, and resulting in enskilment and deskilment. In chapter 4 I considered the ontological presuppositions of my interlocutors within the context of taiga based hunting and ritual practices. I described the skills associated with these and elucidated the ways in which novices come to learn via participation, as well as how these skills are intertwined with those of 'properly' relating to nonhuman agencies. I showed how people's ontological presuppositions have intersected with both the collapse of state socialism and the advent of a market economy, contributing to recent theoretical debates concerning multiple ontologies and the revitalisation of the concept of 'animism'. Here I problematised what I see to be a teleological narrative and argued for a processual conceptualisation of ontology based on skilled practice, whereby experiences and understandings about 'what exists' come to be generated through cumulative processes of enskilment and deskilment. In chapter 5 I explored trans-frontier trading in articulation with herding life. By following the journeys two trans-frontier traders I described their everyday practices and how they not only afforded new opportunities but also demanded new skills, including the flexible transposition of pre-existing

skills into new contexts. In the process, I demonstrated how informal trading cannot be understood as a transition from pre-capitalist (or socialist) to a capitalist economy, or from the 'logic' of the neoliberal market and the purportedly universal goal of capital maximisation. Instead they remain intertwined with non-economic factors such as maintaining social obligations (*hariutslaga*), ontological presuppositions and experiences of the soul (*suld*), as well as culturally-specific understandings of wealth and capital. Finally, in Chapter 6 I explored the migration of herding households to the capital city, describing the process of rural to urban migration and the everyday experiences of life in the ger-districts. I showed how these are fundamentally tied to the learning of new skills and the transposition of existing skills into the urban context. I also considered the new problems and restrictions associated with life in the ger-districts and how these come to manifest at the level of skilled practice. Here I showed how for some people this is characterised by an inability to learn new skills, processes of deskilment, as well as the failure of pre-existing skills to be transposed in the new urban context. In the process, I pushed the hermeneutic framework further to reveal the relationship between skills and people's sense of existential security, developing what I called a political-economy of skill and demonstrating how processes of social, economic, and political change can tracked and traced at the level of human embodiment and experience.

The wider conclusions which I have drawn from this research are multiple. Firstly, that Mongolia's transition to postsocialism has not unfolded as first predicted, either by the state, international donor agencies, non-governmental organisations, and ordinary Mongolians. For most people life continues to be constrained by the limitations of living in a rural society, refracted through new contradictions associated with Mongolia's struggling economy. My second finding is that especially for herding households their experiences of postsocialism cannot not be reduced to any teleological process, but are instead characterised by a range of non-linear, co-existing, and often reversible processes which problematised normative assumptions. My third conclusion is that in order to fully understand how people experience life in the late postsocialist context it is essential to develop new ways of thinking and writing outside the familiar metanarratives. I showed that in order to take the non-linear, non-teleological experiences of people seriously we require different theoretical and methodological tools, ones which are able to capture simultaneously both positive and negative transformations, advances and reversals, changes and continuities. My fourth conclusion is of a more theoretical kind. Namely, that there are important implications that a person, after becoming accomplished in a particular set of skills, is forced into a context where those skills are no longer applicable or have their value reduced. Here I explored the social and existential implications of people losing or forgetting certain skills, and debated how they go about re-embodying, re-inventing, and re-imagining new skills in contexts of social change. I argue that this goes to the heart of any analysis of social change and therefore demands of us as anthropologists that we trace the losses, transformations, and transpositions of skills as people encounter change and attempt to cope with their lives. Finally, the dissertation also offered a critical reflection on how we think about change in both explicit and implicit ways, and how we might use our ethnographic material from different social and cultural contexts to problematise our own taken-for-granted disciplinary assumptions.

The results of this dissertation have important relevance to anthropological understandings of social and cultural change and to the wider sub-fields of postsocialist studies and Inner Asian societies. Firstly, by developing a new approach to postsocialism this can usefully be applied to other postsocialist contexts. Secondly, by developing a new approach to change more generally it has relevance to other ethnographic contexts as well. In fact, I argue that it is

essential that others apply this approach to other cultural settings, adapting it and to reveal possible limitations. Thirdly, the results have relevance for recent theoretical debates concerning the anthropology of skill, practice, and embodied learning. By developing a more processual approach to the transmission of skills the dissertation offers a critical example of how we might use our ethnography to problematise normative assumptions of social change and critique the enduring legacies of modernist teleological metanarratives. Fourthly, the results have relevance for phenomenological approaches within anthropology and the social sciences. There remains a widespread assumption that phenomenological approaches often fail to capture the political and economic context in which human beings experience the world, and therefore remain ill-equipped to describing the changing circumstances in which skills are taught and learnt. I began this research in agreement with this critique but have attempted to show that by extending the concept of enskilment to include polydirectional transformations of skill we are afforded a useful lens through which to combine phenomenological descriptions of everyday life with wider processes of economic and political change. This political-economy of skill moves beyond purely theoretical considerations and demonstrates how phenomenological approaches can be applied to real-world ethnographic contexts, and I suggest this should be further developed in other settings.

The results of the dissertation also have implications for policy and development, both at a state and non-governmental level. While Mongolia is often characterised as one of the success stories following the collapse of state socialism it continues to face substantial challenges, particularly in terms of economic restructuring, environmental degradation and corollary effects, as well as life in Ulaanbaatar's ger districts (Meng 2001). This dissertation has shown how people experience these challenges in complex and variegated ways, which often problematise the normative assumptions of economists, development agencies, and state actors. It also points, however, to potential solutions by emphasising the social and existential importance of skills, and thus suggests that policies should be developed which recognise their value and support ways in which they can be maintained and adapted in contexts of change. There are a large number of non-governmental organisations working in Mongolia who recognise the challenges faced by people in the postsocialist context, and for whom the results of the dissertation should have immediate practical relevance.

Of course, there are a number of limitations that can be drawn from the dissertation. The most notable is that in prioritising a phenomenological approach the results are drawn from a relatively small sample of people. This is a common limitation in anthropological research but perhaps more pronounced in phenomenologically orientated studies which focus on individuals and households over an extended period of time. I sought to counter this by spending time with multiple kinds of actors in varying social and economic circumstances in different locations, though this itself could be seen as problematic given the wide range of my ethnographic research. I suggest it would be beneficial to scale up the research to include a broader cross section of Mongolian society, including newly middle-class citizens living in urban centres such as government officials, employees of mining companies, and development organisations, for whom different types of skills are necessary and could be analysed. This raises broader questions concerning the scale of analysis in anthropological research and the value of phenomenologically orientated approaches. I maintain that a focus on a smaller number of individuals and households is essential for observing processes of enskilment and deskilment, and to properly understand the everyday relationships between people through which skills come to be taught and learnt, as well as lost, contested, and transformed in contexts of change. I argue that presenting one's ethnographic material via the notion of

'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger 1998) is a useful approach, whereby skills can be observed processually described ethnographically in the social contexts of their transformation. A second limitation concerns the hermeneutic framework itself. As my focus was on the maintenance and transformation of everyday skills it is arguably difficult to demarcate which particular skills are important in any cultural context, particularly as I have argued for a collapsing of the distinction between so-called high skills and low skills of daily life. I suggest that if researchers apply the framework to other ethnographic settings they adopt a context specific approach by identifying particular regional and culturally-embedded skills suitable to that location. This would offer alternate case studies for the analysis of skill and social change, as well as further the discussion of the relationship between everyday skills and wider social life.



(Figure 72. "Like pearls on a sea of green velvet" – the precariousness of life on the Mongolian steppe – photo by the author)

Postscript

In the years since completing my fieldwork the situation in Mongolia has arguably worsened for the majority of the population. The country has experienced rising inflation, increased corruption and government mismanagement, as well as a lack of stable employment and opportunities. These have combined to make large numbers of people highly uncertain about their future and it is commonplace today to hear people describe themselves as somehow "lost in the transition" (also see Pedersen 2017). This seems to confirm the findings of my dissertation that the advent of the ""Age of the Market"" cannot be understood in teleological terms. It also confirms the need for in-depth ethnographic accounts of the everyday experiences of postsocialist change in order to better understand how people practically cope living in contexts of perpetual transition, as well as a revised theoretical approach to postsocialist studies which account for the nonlinear experiences of people themselves.

I hope that this research may serve as a useful lens through which to situate people's experiences of postsocialist change, but also for other researchers and policy makers to recognise the fundamental role of skills as the foundation of these experiences. As I have attempted to show skill is not only the locus of how people experience change, but is also the creative capacity through which they flexibly engage with the manifestations of such change. In this way, the focus is shifted towards people learning and adjusting their skills while making their way through the world and, in the process, skills are seen as the imaginative potential

through which people actively engage with the changing constituents of their lifeworlds. Here a focus on skills offers one possible route out of the agency-structure dichotomy, and must be better considered in future studies if we are to understand the relationship between abstract political and economic processes (such as "postsocialism") and how they are embodied, experienced, and rendered meaningful by people in their everyday lives. I see a useful potential between the political-economy of skill developed in this dissertation and the recent anthropology of hope articulated in other ethnographic contexts (Miyazaki 2006a, 2006b; Hage 2003; also see Pedersen 2017). Reflecting on my own friends and interlocutors I myself remain hopeful that they will continue to adapt and transpose their skills in the face of increasing uncertainty and precarity, as well as continue to give meaning to their lives through enskilment and the informal apprenticeships which constitute their everyday existence.

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Summary

How do Mongolian herders and rural dwellers experience social and cultural change twenty years after the postsocialist transition?

How can *skill* offer a useful lens to better understand people's experiences of postsocialist change?

Keywords:
Postsocialism, Skill, Social Change, Herding, New Technologies, Ontology, Sedentarisation, Urbanisation, Mongolia

At the most general level, this dissertation is about postsocialist change. Or, more specifically, it is about how people living in a remote part of Northern Mongolia have experienced the recent changes to have occurred over the last ten to fifteen years since the postsocialist transition. My main argument is that while Mongolia's postsocialist transition occurred over twenty years ago it is not at all clear what has come after socialism, or how we as anthropologists might conceptualise the contradictory, fuzzy, and often reversible experiences of people during the so-called postsocialist period. To this end I develop in this dissertation a new hermeneutic framework for elucidating the polydirectional experience of postsocialist change, taking the form of an extension of Tim Ingold's (2000, 2001) concept of enskilment – and inspired by a broader anthropology of skill and practice (Marchand 2008; Portisch 2009; Gieser 2008, 2014; Chaiklin & Lave 1996; Coy 1989; Harris 2005, 2007; Grasseni 2009; Downey 2005; Froerer & Portisch 2012; Van Ede 2009, as well as the comparative literature on postsocialism (Berdahl 1999; Borneman 1997; Hann 1994; Verdery 1996, 2003; Berdahl et al. 2000; Kideckel 1993; Humphrey 2002) and de-modernisation in Africa (Geschiere, et al. 2008) – combined with a critique of the teleological metanarratives which underpin normative conceptualisations of change (Ferguson 1999; Mosse 2005; Tsing 2005; Arce & Long 2000; Garden & Lewis 1996; Inda & Rosaldo 2001). I argue that these metanarratives fail to capture the full spectrum of co-existing variations as they are experienced by people in the late postsocialist context - including the differentiation within individual communities and between the generations, non-linear changes, transformations and transpositions, as well as non-teleological reversals - specifically because of their implicit allusion to the teleological metanarrative of 'modernisation', the hidden trajectories inherent within related concepts such as 'globalisation', 'marketisation', 'sedentarisation', and 'urbanisation', as well as the broader teleological doxa of change which remains embedded within much academic discourse. In opposition to this I develop a processual and polydirectional perspective grounded in skilled practice, which envisions the transmission of skills as not only being re/produced between the generations (Ingold 2000), but also new skills learnt in articulation with change, as well as skills that are lost, forgotten, transformed, adapted, and transposed in relation to transforming social, economic, and political contexts. By extending skill in this way and observing transformations in skilled practice I argue that we are afforded better insight into the polydirectional experiences characteristic of the late postsocialist context, and which can

better reveal a more diverse range of processes as they are experienced by people in their everyday lives.

Here I use this hermeneutic framework to investigate different aspects of social life as I encountered them during my fieldwork in Mongolia between 2012-2013, including herding strategies, hunting and ontological presuppositions, uses of new technologies, trans-frontier trading, and the migration of people from rural areas to the capital city. In each case I describe the transformations in skilled practice and problematise what I see to be four major narratives which influence normative conceptualisations of change: namely, the relationship between 'tradition' and 'modernity' and the teleology of temporality; 'globalisation' and the teleology of technological innovation; the advent of 'marketisation' and the transition from socialism to capitalism; and the rural-urban dichotomy as epitomised in the concepts of 'sedentarisation' and 'urbanisation'. In the process, I demonstrate how a consideration of people's skills allows one to prioritise the lived-experience of change and reveal the non-linear experiences brought about by the postsocialist transition, as well as the mutual co-existence between continuity and change in the re/production of social life. In this regard, the dissertation should also be seen as a critical reflection on how we as anthropologists think about change in both explicit and implicit ways, where I use the ethnographic particularities of life in Mongolia to problematise normative assumptions and critique the enduring legacies of modernist teleological metanarratives.

In Chapter 1 I describe the most fundamental aspects of herding life and showed how these come to be taught and learnt between the generations, specifically through the informal apprenticeships within herding households and the intimate relations between human beings and herd animals. In Chapter 2 I describe how herding life intersected with the collapse of state socialism and the return to a subsistence economy, as well the corollary changes associated with the postsocialist transition such as the advent of marketisation and shifting relations between the mobile and settled sections of rural life. I show how these changes have manifested at the level of skilled practice and how they are experienced by herders in polydirectional ways. In the process, I problematise the assumption that change occurs as a linear process from 'tradition' to 'modernity', emphasising instead peoples' non-linear experiences and the permeable divisions between the presocialist, socialist, and postsocialist contexts. In chapter 3 I explore the use of new technologies and how they were incorporated into herding practices, generating alternate livelihood strategies, and resulting in wider changes in social life. I argue that while notions of technological change have long been tied to the teleological metanarrative of modernisation it is important to emphasise the polydirectional ways in which herders experience technological change. Here I show how motorcycles, solar panels, and mobile phones are not experienced as a transition from 'tradition' to 'modernity', as a singular 'improvement', or as replacing pre-existing technologies in a uniform way, but rather, from within the context of the postsocialist transition and the return to a subsistence economy - as simultaneously providing benefits and disadvantages, producing losses and gains, and resulting in enskilment and deskilment. In chapter 4 I consider the ontological presuppositions of my interlocutors within the context of taiga based hunting and ritual practices. I describe the skills associated with these and elucidated the ways in which novices come to learn via participation, as well as how these skills are intertwined with those of 'properly' relating to nonhuman agencies. I show how people's ontological presuppositions have intersected with both the collapse of state socialism and the advent of a market economy, contributing to recent theoretical debates concerning multiple ontologies and the revitalisation of the concept of 'animism'. Here I problematise what I see to be a

teleological narrative and argued for a processual conceptualisation of ontology based on skilled practice, whereby experiences and understandings about 'what exists' come to be generated through cumulative processes of enskilment and deskilment. In chapter 5 I explore trans-frontier trading in articulation with herding life. By following the journeys two trans-frontier traders I describe their everyday practices and how they not only afforded new opportunities but also demanded new skills, including the flexible transposition of pre-existing skills into new contexts. In the process, I demonstrate how informal trading cannot be understood as a transition from pre-capitalist (or socialist) to a capitalist economy, or from the 'logic' of the neoliberal market and the purportedly universal goal of capital maximisation. Instead they remain intertwined with non-economic factors such as maintaining social obligations (*hariutslaga*), ontological presuppositions and experiences of the soul (*suld*), as well as culturally-specific understandings of wealth and capital. Finally, in Chapter 6 I explore the migration of herding households to the capital city, describing the process of rural to urban migration and the everyday experiences of life in the ger-districts. I show how these are fundamentally tied to the learning of new skills and the transposition of existing skills into the urban context. I also consider the new problems and restrictions associated with life in the ger-districts and how these come to manifest at the level of skilled practice. Here I show how for some people this is characterised by an inability to learn new skills, processes of deskilment, as well as the failure of pre-existing skills to be transposed in the new urban context. In the process, I push the hermeneutic framework further to reveal the relationship between skills and people's sense of existential security, developing what I called a political-economy of skill and demonstrating how processes of social, economic, and political change can tracked and traced at the level of human embodiment and experience.

The wider conclusions which I have drawn from this research are multiple. Firstly, that Mongolia's transition to postsocialism has not unfolded as first predicted, either by the state, international donor agencies, non-governmental organisations, and ordinary Mongolians. For most people life continues to be constrained by the limitations of living in a rural society, refracted through new contradictions associated with Mongolia's struggling economy. My second finding is that especially for herding households their experiences of postsocialism cannot not be reduced to any teleological process, but are instead characterised by a range of non-linear, co-existing, and often reversible processes which problematised normative assumptions. My third conclusion is that in order to fully understand how people experience life in the late postsocialist context it is essential to develop new ways of thinking and writing outside the familiar metanarratives. I showed that in order to take the non-linear, non-teleological experiences of people seriously we require different theoretical and methodological tools, ones which are able to capture simultaneously both positive and negative transformations, advances and reversals, changes and continuities. My fourth conclusion is of a more theoretical kind. Namely, that there are important implications that a person, after becoming accomplished in a particular set of skills, is forced into a context where those skills are no longer applicable or have their value reduced. Here I explored the social and existential implications of people losing or forgetting certain skills, and debated how they go about re-embodying, re-inventing, and re-imagining new skills in contexts of social change. I argue that this goes to the heart of any analysis of social change and therefore demands of us as anthropologists that we trace the losses, transformations, and transpositions of skills as people encounter change and attempt to cope with their lives. Finally, the dissertation also offered a critical reflection on how we think about change in both explicit and implicit ways, and how we

might use our ethnographic material from different social and cultural contexts to problematise our own taken-for-granted disciplinary assumptions.

The results of this dissertation have important relevance to anthropological understandings of social and cultural change and to the wider sub-fields of postsocialist studies and Inner Asian societies. Firstly, by developing a new approach to postsocialism this can usefully be applied to other postsocialist contexts. Secondly, by developing a new approach to change more generally it has relevance to other ethnographic contexts as well. In fact, I argue that it is essential that others apply this approach to other cultural settings, adapting it and to reveal possible limitations. Thirdly, the results have relevance for recent theoretical debates concerning the anthropology of skill, practice, and embodied learning. By developing a more processual approach to the transmission of skills the dissertation offers a critical example of how we might use our ethnography to problematise normative assumptions of social change and critique the enduring legacies of modernist teleological metanarratives. Fourthly, the results have relevance for phenomenological approaches within anthropology and the social sciences. There remains a widespread assumption that phenomenological approaches often fail to capture the political and economic context in which human beings experience the world, and therefore remain ill-equipped to describing the changing circumstances in which skills are taught and learnt. I began this research in agreement with this critique but have attempted to show that by extending the concept of enskilment to include polydirectional transformations of skill we are afforded a useful lens through which to combine phenomenological descriptions of everyday life with wider processes of economic and political change. This political-economy of skill moves beyond purely theoretical considerations and demonstrates how phenomenological approaches can be applied to real-world ethnographic contexts, and I suggest this should be further developed in other settings.

The results of the dissertation also have implications for policy and development, both at a state and non-governmental level. While Mongolia is often characterised as one of the success stories following the collapse of state socialism it continues to face substantial challenges, particularly in terms of economic restructuring, environmental degradation and corollary effects, as well as life in Ulaanbaatar's ger districts (Meng 2001). This dissertation has shown how people experience these challenges in complex and variegated ways, which often problematise the normative assumptions of economists, development agencies, and state actors. It also points, however, to potential solutions by emphasising the social and existential importance of skills, and thus suggests that policies should be developed which recognise their value and support ways in which they can be maintained and adapted in contexts of change. There are a large number of non-governmental organisations working in Mongolia who recognise the challenges faced by people in the postsocialist context, and for whom the results of the dissertation should have immediate practical relevance.

Samenvatting

Hoe ervaren Mongoolse herders en anderen sociale en culturele veranderingen twintig jaar na de postsocialistische overgang?

Hoe kan vaardigheid een bruikbare lens bieden om de ervaringen van mensen met postsocialistische verandering beter te begrijpen?

Trefwoorden:
Postsocialisme, vaardigheid, sociale verandering, het hoeden van vee, nieuwe technologieën, ontologie, sedentarisatie, verstedelijking, Mongolië

Op het meest algemene niveau gaat dit proefschrift over postocialistische verandering. Of, meer in het bijzonder, het gaat over hoe mensen in een afgelegen deel van Noord-Mongolië de recente veranderingen hebben meegemaakt die zich hebben voorgedaan in de laatste tien tot vijftien jaar sinds de postsocialistische overgang. Mijn belangrijkste argument is dat, terwijl de postocialistische overgang van Mongolië meer dan twintig jaar geleden plaatsvond, het helemaal niet duidelijk is wat er na het socialisme is gekomen, of hoe wij als antropologen de contradictoire, vage en vaak omkeerbare ervaringen van mensen tijdens de zogenaamde postsocialistische periode zouden kunnen conceptualiseren. Hiertoe ontwikkel ik in dit proefschrift een nieuw hermeneutisch raamwerk voor het ophelderen van de ervaring van postocialistische verandering in meerdere verschillende richtingen, in de eerste plaats door een uitbreiding van Tim Ingold's (2000, 2001) concept van enskilment, maar ook geïnspireerd door een bredere antropologie van vaardigheden in de praktijk en de vergelijkende literatuur over postsocialisme en de-modernisering in Afrika (Geschiere, et al. 2008) die ik combineer met een kritiek op de teleologische meta-narratieven die ten grondslag liggen aan normatieve opvattingen van verandering (Ferguson 1999; Mosse 2005; Tsing 2005; Arce & Long) 2000; Garden & Lewis 1996; Inda & Rosaldo 2001). Ik beargumenteer dat deze metanarratieven er niet in slagen om het volledige spectrum van naast elkaar bestaande variaties van veranderingen te vangen zoals ze worden ervaren door mensen in de late postsocialistische context - inclusief de differentiatie binnen individuele gemeenschappen en tussen de generaties, niet-lineaire veranderingen, transformaties en transposities, evenals als niet-teleologische omkeringen - met name omdat ze impliciet terugvallen op het teleologische metanarratief van 'modernisering', op vergelijkbare lineaire trajecten verborgen in verwante concepten zoals 'globalisering', 'marktwerking', 'sedentarisatie' en 'verstedelijking', en op de bredere teleologische doxa van verandering die ingebed blijven in een groot deel van het academisch discours. In tegenstelling hiermee ontwikkel ik een procesmatig perspectief van meerdere richtingen dat gebaseerd is op praktijken van vakkundige vaardigheden, waarbij vaardigheden in de overdracht tussen de generaties niet alleen opnieuw worden uitgevonden (Ingold 2000), maar ook afstemmen op nieuwe vaardigheden die tijdens de veranderingen werden geleerd, evenals op vaardigheden die verloren, vergeten, getransformeerd, aangepast en getransponeerd leken te zijn in de nieuwe sociale, economische en politieke contexten die zich aandienden. Door ons begrip van vaardigheid op deze manier uit te breiden en transformaties in vakkundige praktijken te analyseren, beargumenteer ik dat we een beter

inzicht kunnen krijgen in de meervoudige veranderingen van ervaringen die karakteristiek zijn voor de late postsocialistische context, en die een meer divers scala aan processen, zoals deze worden ervaren door mensen in hun omgeving dagelijks leven, moet kunnen onthullen.

Ik gebruik dit hermeneutische raamwerk om verschillende aspecten van het sociale leven te onderzoeken, zoals ik deze tegenkwam tijdens mijn veldwerk in Mongolië in 2012 en 2013: strategieën van het hoeden van vee, jachtstrategieën, de ontologische vooronderstellingen achter de jacht, het gebruik van nieuwe technologieën, de nieuwe grensoverschrijdende handel en de migratie van mensen van het platteland naar de hoofdstad. In elk geval beschrijf ik de transformaties in de vakkundige praktijk en problematiseer ik wat ik zie als de vier belangrijkste verhalen die de normatieve conceptualisaties van verandering beïnvloeden: de relatie tussen 'traditie' en 'moderniteit' en de lineaire teleologie van tijd; 'globalisering' en de teleologie van technologische innovatie; de opkomst van 'marktwerking' en de overgang van socialisme naar kapitalisme; en de dichotomie van het platteland en de stad zoals belichaamd in de concepten 'sedentarisatie' en 'verstedelijking'. In dit proces laat ik zien hoe de studie van vakkundige menselijke vaardigheden ons in staat stelt om prioriteit te geven aan de door mensen beleefde ervaring van verandering, om de niet-lineaire ervaringen te onthullen die tot stand zijn gebracht door de postsocialistische transitie, en om de wederzijdse co-existentie tussen continuïteit en verandering in de re/productie van het sociale leven te laten zien. In dit opzicht moet het proefschrift ook worden gezien als een kritische reflectie op hoe wij als antropologen zowel expliciet als impliciet nadenken over verandering, waarbij ik de etnografische bijzonderheden van het leven in Mongolië gebruik om normatieve aannames the problematiseren en kritiek te leveren op de duurzame erfenis van modernistische teleologische metanarratieven.

In hoofdstuk 1 beschrijf ik de meest fundamentele vaardigheden van het hoeden van dieren en laat zien hoe deze worden onderwezen en geleerd van de ene generatie op de andere, met name door de informele leertijd in huishoudens van herders en de intieme relaties tussen mensen en kuddedieren. In hoofdstuk 2 beschrijf ik hoe het leven van herders doorbroken werd door de ineenstorting van het staatssocialisme en de terugkeer naar een zelfvoorzienende economie, evenals de veranderingen die voortvloeiden uit de postsocialistische transitie, zoals de opkomst van de markt en de verschuivende relaties tussen de nomadische en sedentaire elementen van het leven op het platteland. Ik laat zien hoe deze veranderingen zich in meervoudige richtingen hebben gemanifesteerd op het ervaringsniveau van de beoefening van vaardigheden door herders. Daarbij problematiseer ik de veronderstelling dat verandering optreedt als een lineair proces van 'traditie' naar 'moderniteit' en leg in plaats daarvan de nadruk op de niet-lineaire ervaringen van mensen en de permeabele scheidslijnen tussen de pre-socialistische, socialistische en postsocialistische context. In hoofdstuk 3 onderzoek ik het gebruik van nieuwe technologieën en hoe deze worden opgenomen in de praktijk van het hoeden van dieren, het genereren van alternatieve strategieën voor levensonderhoud, en hoe ze resulteren in bredere veranderingen in het sociale leven. Ik beargumenteer dat, ondanks het feit dat noties van technologische verandering al lang verbonden zijn met het teleologische meta-verhaal van modernisering, het belangrijk is om de nadruk te leggen op de meervoudige richtingen van technologische verandering die herders ervaren. Hier laat ik zien hoe motorfietsen, zonnepanelen en mobiele telefoons niet worden ervaren als een overgang van 'traditie' naar 'moderniteit', als een unieke 'verbetering' of als vervanging van reeds bestaande technologieën op een uniforme manier, maar dat zij, in de context van de postsocialistische transitie en de terugkeer naar een zelfvoorzieningseconomie eerder worden ervaren als veranderingen die tegelijkertijd voor- en

nadelen opleveren, verliezen en winsten genereren en leiden tot zowel *enskilment* als *deskilment*. In hoofdstuk 4 bespreek ik de ontologische vooronderstellingen van mijn gesprekspartners die zij hanteren in de context van jacht- en rituele praktijken in de *taiga* (de wilde steppe). Ik beschrijf de vaardigheden die hiermee verband houden en licht toe op welke manieren beginnelingen deze leren via participatie, en hoe zij zo leren om zich te gedragen zoals het hoort ten opzichte van niet-menselijke levensvormen. Ik laat zien hoe de ontologische vooronderstellingen van mensen zijn verweven met ideeën over de ineenstorting van het staatssocialisme en de opkomst van een markteconomie, en hoe dezelfde vooronderstellingen hebben bijgedragen aan recente theoretische debatten over meerdere ontologieën en de revitalisering van het concept van 'animisme'. Ik problematiseer deze discussie door een kritiek op teleologische vooronderstellingen in deze discussie en een pleidooi voor een processuele conceptualisatie van ontologie op basis van geschoolde praktijk, waarbij ervaringen en inzichten over 'wat bestaat' worden gegenereerd door cumulatieve processen van *enskilment* en *deskilment*.

In hoofdstuk 5 onderzoek ik de grensoverschrijdende handel en hoe deze is afgestemd met het pastorale leven. Ik beschrijf twee trans-frontier-handelaren door hun reis te volgen en te beschrijven hoe hun dagelijkse praktijken niet alleen nieuwe kansen boden, maar ook nieuwe vaardigheden vereisten, waaronder de flexibele omzetting van reeds bestaande vaardigheden naar nieuwe contexten. Zo laat ik zien hoe informele handel niet kan worden opgevat als een overgang van pre-kapitalistische (of socialistische) naar een kapitalistische economie, of van de 'logica' van de neoliberale markt en het vermeende universele doel van kapitaalmaximalisatie. In plaats daarvan blijven deze handelspraktijken verweven met niet-economische factoren zoals het handhaven van sociale verplichtingen (*hariutslaga*), ontologische vooronderstellingen over en ervaringen van de ziel (*suld*), evenals cultureel specifieke afspraken over rijkdom en kapitaal. Ten slotte breng ik in hoofdstuk 6 de migratie van herders-huishoudens naar de hoofdstad naar voren, waarbij ik het proces van migratie van het platteland naar de stad en de dagelijkse ervaringen van het leven in de urbane ger-districten beschrijf. Ik laat zien hoe deze fundamenteel verbonden zijn met het leren van nieuwe vaardigheden en de omzetting van bestaande vaardigheden naar de stedelijke context. Ik bekijk ook de nieuwe problemen en beperkingen in verband met het leven in de ger-districten en hoe deze zich manifesteren op het niveau van kundige praktijken. Hier laat ik zien dat dit voor sommige mensen wordt gekenmerkt door het onvermogen om nieuwe vaardigheden te leren, door processen van *deskilment*, evenals doordat reeds bestaande vaardigheden niet kunnen worden getransponeerd naar de nieuwe stedelijke context. In dit proces breidt ik het hermeneutische raamwerk verder uit om de relatie tussen vaardigheden en het besef van bestaans-veiligheid van mensen boven tafel te krijgen. Zo ontwikkel ik wat men een politieke economie van bekwaamheid kan noemen, en laat ik zien hoe processen van sociale, economische en politieke verandering kunnen worden gevolgd en getraceerd op het niveau van menselijke belichaming en ervaring.

De bredere conclusies die ik uit dit onderzoek wil trekken zijn meervoudig. Ten eerste ontvouwde de overgang van Mongolië naar het postsocialisme zich niet zoals voorspeld door de staat, door internationale donoragentschappen, door niet-gouvernementele organisaties en door gewone Mongolen. Voor de meeste mensen wordt het leven nog steeds bepaald door de beperkingen van het leven in een rurale samenleving, maar nu vertekend door nieuwe tegenstellingen die de worstelende economie van Mongolië met zich meebrengt. Ten tweede blijft de ervaring van het postsocialisme van met name herders-huishoudensocialisme niet beperkt tot een teleologisch proces in één richting, maar wordt in plaats daarvan gekenmerkt

door een reeks niet-lineaire, naast elkaar bestaande en vaak omkeerbare processen die zulke lineaire en normatieve veronderstellingen problematisch maken. Mijn derde conclusie is dat, om volledig te begrijpen hoe mensen het leven in de late postsocialistische context ervaren, het essentieel is om nieuwe manieren van denken en schrijven te ontwikkelen buiten de bekende metanarratieven om. Ik toon aan dat om de niet-lineaire, niet-teleologische ervaringen van mensen serieus te nemen, we verschillende theoretische en methodologische instrumenten nodig hebben, die in staat zijn tegelijkertijd zowel positieve als negatieve transformaties, vooruitgang en omkeringen, veranderingen en continuïteiten te vangen. Mijn vierde conclusie is van meer theoretische aard: dat er belangrijke implicaties volgen uit het feit dat een persoon, nadat hij volleerd is in een bepaalde verzameling van vaardigheden, in een context gedwongen wordt waarin deze vaardigheden niet meer van toepassing of van ondergeschikt belang zijn. Hier vestig ik de aandacht op de sociale en existentiële implicaties voor mensen die bepaalde vaardigheden verliezen of vergeten, en discussiëren over hoe ze de omgang met hun omgeving na deze verandering opnieuw moeten belichamen en heruitvinden en zich nieuwe vaardigheden moeten voorstellen. Ik beargumenteer dat dit de kern raakt van elke analyse van sociale verandering en daarom van antropologen eist dat wij het verlies, de transformatie en de transpositie van vaardigheden van mensen die tegen verandering aanlopen en vervolgens hernieuwd proberen om te gaan met hun leven moeten traceren. Tenslotte biedt het proefschrift ook een kritische reflectie op hoe we zowel expliciet als impliciet denken over verandering, en hoe we ons etnografische materiaal uit verschillende sociale en culturele contexten zouden kunnen gebruiken om de vanzelfsprekendheid van onze eigen disciplinaire veronderstellingen te problematiseren.

De resultaten van dit proefschrift zijn relevant en belangrijk voor antropologische inzichten in sociale en culturele verandering, zeker in de bredere sub-disciplines van postsocialistische studies en Noord-oost-Aziatische samenlevingen. Ten eerste kunnen zij, door een nieuwe benadering van postsocialisme te ontwikkelen, nuttig worden toegepast op andere postsocialistische contexten. Ten tweede een nieuwe benadering van sociale verandering in het algemeen ook relevantie voor andere etnografische contexten. Sterker nog, ik beschouw het als essentieel dat anderen deze benadering toepassen op andere culturele omstandigheden om deze aan te passen en mogelijke beperkingen er van te onthullen. Ten derde zijn de resultaten relevant voor recente theoretische debatten over de antropologie van praktische vaardigheden en de belichaming van leerprocessen. Door een meer procesmatige benadering van de overdracht van vaardigheden te ontwikkelen, biedt het proefschrift een kritisch voorbeeld van het gebruik van etnografie om normatieve vooronderstellingen over sociale verandering te problematiseren en ons kritisch op te stellen tegenover de traditie van modernistische teleologische metanarratieven. Ten vierde zijn de resultaten relevant voor fenomenologische benaderingen binnen de antropologie en de sociale wetenschappen. Er blijft een wijdverspreide veronderstelling dat fenomenologische benaderingen vaak niet de politieke en economische context waarin mensen de wereld ervaren kunnen vastleggen en daarom slecht toegerust zijn om de veranderende omstandigheden te beschrijven waarin vaardigheden worden onderwezen en geleerd. Ik begon dit onderzoek in overeenstemming met deze kritiek, maar heb geprobeerd aan te tonen dat we door het concept van enskilment uit te breiden naar transformaties van vaardigheden in meerdere richtingen een bruikbare lens krijgen om fenomenologische beschrijvingen van het dagelijks leven te combineren met bredere processen van economische en politieke verandering. Deze politieke economie van vaardigheid gaat verder dan puur theoretische overwegingen en laat zien hoe fenomenologische benaderingen kunnen worden toegepast op echte etnografische contexten,

en ik stel voor dat dit in andere onderzoeksomstandigheden verder zou moeten worden ontwikkeld.

De resultaten van het proefschrift hebben ook implicaties voor beleid en ontwikkeling, zowel op staats-niveau als bij niet-gouvernementele organisaties. Hoewel Mongolië vaak wordt gekenmerkt als een van de succesverhalen na de ineenstorting van het staatssocialisme, staat het nog steeds voor grote uitdagingen, met name in termen van economische herstructurering, aantasting van het milieu en negatieve gevolgen voor het leven in de urbane districten van Ulaanbaatar (Meng 2001). Dit proefschrift laat zien hoe mensen deze uitdagingen ervaren op complexe en gevarieerde manieren, die vaak de normatieve veronderstellingen van economen, ontwikkelingsorganisaties en statelijke actoren problematiseren. Het wijst echter ook op mogelijke oplossingen door het sociale en existentiële belang van vaardigheden te benadrukken, en suggereert daarom dat beleid moet worden ontwikkeld dat hun waarde erkent en manieren ondersteunt waarop ze in contexten van verandering kunnen worden onderhouden en aangepast. Er zijn een groot aantal niet-gouvernementele organisaties werkzaam in Mongolië die de uitdagingen waar mensen voor staan in de postsocialistische context erkennen en voor wie de resultaten van het proefschrift een directe praktische relevantie zouden kunnen hebben.

Curriculum Vitae

Richard Fraser was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1981. He studied social anthropology at Sydney University, earning a Bachelor of Arts (BA, *honours*) degree in 2007. Between 2008 and 2009 he completed a Masters degree (MA, *cum laude*) in Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology at Leiden University, the Netherlands, based on fieldwork with Evenki reindeer herders in China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. After receiving a Toptalent scholarship from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), he began his PhD on skills, social change, and postsocialism amongst herders and rural residents in Northern Mongolia. This dissertation is the result of this research.

Richard is a *Research Associate* at the Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit, Department of Social Anthropology, Cambridge University (UK), and will take up a new position in 2019 at the Collaborative Innovation Centre for Security and Development of Western Frontier, Sichuan University (China). He has carried out fieldwork with Evenki, Orochen, and Mongol communities in China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and Heilongjiang province since 2007, as well as with Mongolian (Darhad and Duha) communities in Mongolia since 2009. His regional specialisation is Northern and Inner Asia, specifically China and China's minorities, Mongolia, and Siberia. His research interests span human-environment relationships; economic and phenomenological-existential anthropology; pastoralism, hunting and land-use; skills and learning; technology and work; ethnic minorities and the state; displacement and resettlement; mining and resources; renewable and non-renewable energy; climate change; human-animal relations; shamanism and animism; tourism; and socialism and postsocialism.

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Stellingen

(Propositions)

Behorende bij het proefschrift

1. Normative conceptualisations of change do not capture the reality of life in Mongolia as I encountered it during my fieldwork between 2012-3.
2. Mongolia's transition to postsocialism has not unfolded as first predicted, either by the state, international donor agencies, non-governmental organisations, and ordinary Mongolians.
3. For most people life continues to be constrained by the limitations of living in a rural society, refracted through new contradictions associated with Mongolia's struggling economy.
4. Especially for herding households their experiences of postsocialism cannot not be reduced to any teleological process, but are instead characterised by a range of non-linear, co-existing, and often reversible processes which problematise normative assumptions.
5. In order to fully understand how people experience life in the late postsocialist context it is essential to develop new ways of thinking and writing outside the familiar metanarratives.
6. *Skill* offers a useful lens to better understand people's experiences of postsocialist change.
7. Extending Tim Ingold's concept of enskilment and combining this with a critique of the teleological metanarratives which underpin normative conceptualisations gives a processual and polydirectional perspective of change grounded in skilled practice.
8. My approach emphasises not only the transmission of skills between the generations but also new skills learnt in articulation with change, as well as those that are lost, forgotten, transformed, contested, and transposed in relation to varying contexts of social, economic, and political transformation.
9. By extending skill in this way and by observing transformations in skilled practice, we are better afforded insight into the polydirectional experiences of the postsocialist context, including differentiation within communities and between the generations, non-linear changes and transpositions, as well as non-teleological reversals.
10. It is crucial to explore the social and existential implications of people losing or forgetting certain skills, and how they go about re-embodying, re-inventing, and re-imagining new skills in contexts of social change.
11. Anthropologists require a critical reflection on how we think about change in explicit and implicit ways, and how we might use our ethnographic material from different social and cultural contexts to problematise our own taken-for-granted assumptions of processes of transformation.