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## GOING ON OTOR: DISASTER, MOBILITY, AND THE POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF VULNERABILITY IN UGUUMUR, MONGOLIA

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Daniel J. Murphy

The Graduate School

University of Kentucky

2011

GOING ON OTOR: DISASTER, MOBILITY, AND THE POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF  
VULNERABILITY IN UGUUMUR, MONGOLIA

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
Department of Anthropology at the University of Kentucky

By  
Daniel J. Murphy

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Peter D. Little

Lexington, Kentucky

2011

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### GOING ON OTOR: DISASTER, MOBILITY, AND THE POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF VULNERABILITY IN UGUUMUR, MONGOLIA

Post-socialist states have increasingly adopted rural governance and resource management policies framed around the concepts of decentralization, devolution, and de-concentration in which formerly central state powers are transferred to lower, more local levels of governance. In more recent incarnations, these policies have become inspired by neo-liberal discourses of minimal government, self-rule, and personal responsibility. Increasingly, the social science literature has argued that such forms of neo-liberal governance lead to a variety of unforeseen and diverse consequences. This dissertation attempts to understand the impact of these political transformations on household vulnerability in the context of hazardous events called *zud*. I do this through an ethnographic study of institution-building and risk management in a pastoral district of eastern Mongolia where I explore contemporary transformations in the management of critical resources such as livestock, labor, and land.

As this dissertation shows, differential mobility practices are strongly correlated to *zud*-based livestock mortality rates. In particular, households that are more capable of practicing *otor*, a kind of non-customary and irregular migration strategy, are less susceptible to the conditions that threaten herd loss. Households with a greater capacity for conducting *otor* are able to move greater distances, in shorter time spans, and to regions with less severe conditions, thereby escaping the possibility of facing high loss rates. Differential capacity to mitigate the risk of *zud* conditions also was found to be deeply affected by previously under-studied institutional transformations surrounding rights and access to livestock, labor, and land.

Primarily, this study demonstrates that decentralization and other neo-liberal models of governance not only open space for significant reconfiguration of the institutional landscape in ways that support social inequality, but also subsequently lead to increased differentiation in vulnerability to disaster. Theoretically, this work contributes to critical understandings of political ecology by uncovering circulations of power through constellations of actors (human and otherwise), institutions, and meanings as well as through bio-physical landscapes. In addition, this study contributes to work in vulnerability studies by shedding light on how administrative governance, local institution-building, and property-making shift the apportionment of entitlements to produce hazardous conditions and unequal distributions of risk and vulnerability.

KEYWORDS: Political ecology, disaster, vulnerability, pastoralism, post-socialism

Daniel J. Murphy

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Student Signature

May 2, 2011

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Date

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VULNERABILITY IN UGUUMUR, MONGOLIA

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DISSERTATION

Daniel J. Murphy

The Graduate School  
University of Kentucky  
2011



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I have moved around most of my life and interestingly it was not until I lived with 'nomads' that I felt like I had found a home. I thank my host families for their incredible hospitality and warm companionship during my time in the *xuduu*. Most people thought I was crazy for living a whole year on the range, even other Mongolians, but my friends in Uguumur made life quite easy, even in hard times. I want to also acknowledge the contribution of the herding families of Uguumur and the local administrative staff for their contribution to this work. In particular, I want to recognize the soum and bag governors who were open and supportive of my research and uncannily frank about the realities of governing in this strange new world. A number of people, both men and women, much more eloquent than I, explained the ins and outs

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION .....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	iii
LIST OF TABLES .....	x
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xii
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
Vulnerability in a Neoliberal Age .....	1
Research Statement .....	5
Literature .....	6
Theoretical Orientation: Political Ecology .....	6
Problem: Neo-liberalism and the ‘Natures’ of Hazards, Risk, and Vulnerability .....	9
Theoretical Framework: Access, Institutions, and Property .....	17
Research Design and Methods .....	23
Site Selection .....	24
Methods .....	25
Data Analysis .....	27
Chapter Overview .....	27
Chapter 2 Putting <i>Zud</i> in its Time and Place .....	30
Introduction .....	30
Mongolian Climate and Zud .....	31
Types of Zud .....	32
Temporal Frequency and Geographic Extent of Zud .....	34
Zud as Hybrid .....	41
The Making of Uncertainty and the Production of Disaster .....	44
Uncertainty and Response in Uguumur .....	47
Building a ‘Neo’-Mongolia .....	49
Making Do in the New Mongolia .....	52
Facing Zud .....	53
Uguumur in Transition .....	58
Uguumur in History .....	61
Conclusion .....	67
Chapter 3 A Herder’s <i>Biznes</i> : The Dynamics of Wealth and Poverty in the ‘Age of the Market’ .....	69

Introduction.....	69
Background: Asset Dynamics and Management .....	72
Asset-based Approaches and Poverty Traps .....	73
Asset-based Approaches in Pastoral Research.....	74
Being Malchin: Households and Herd Management in Uguumur.....	75
Households and Herd Ownership .....	76
Acquiring Herds.....	81
Herd Acquisitions .....	82
Socio-Economic Differentiation and Herd Acquisition.....	89
Building a Herd: Herd Size and Composition .....	91
Herd Size.....	91
Animal Reproduction and Herd Growth.....	91
Socio-economic Differentiation and Herd Growth.....	93
Herd Composition.....	95
Socio-Economic Differentiation and Herd Composition.....	99
The <i>Biznes</i> of Herds: Pastoral Production and Making a Living in Uguumur.....	100
Herders and the Market.....	101
Livestock Product Sales and Pastoral Income .....	114
Managing Loss.....	120
Sources of Loss .....	121
Loss and Herd Dynamics .....	123
Strategies and Tactics for Managing Loss .....	124
Conclusion: The Meaning of Difference - Being <i>Bayan</i> , Being <i>Yaduu</i> .....	132
Chapter 4 From Kin to Contract: Labor in Uguumur .....	135
Introduction.....	135
Labor in Uguumur.....	137
Division of Labor .....	137
Meanings of Work .....	140
The Problem of Pastoral Labor .....	141
Historical Patterns of Labor Exchange in Mongolia.....	148
Pre-socialism 1206-1921 .....	148
Socialism: 1921-1991 .....	154
Contemporary Labor Exchange Practices in Uguumur .....	158

Introduction.....	158
Cooperative Labor Exchange.....	158
Non-Cooperative Labor Exchange.....	177
The Life of the Contract: Hired Herding and Share Herding in Uguumur .....	185
Geree: The Culture of the Contract.....	186
Hiring: Search, Bargaining and Negotiation.....	195
Life Under Contract: Disciplining Labor and Resistance .....	201
Living Power: Manufacturing Authority and Consent.....	209
Beyond the Contract: Patronage and Clientalism .....	218
From Kin to Contract.....	222
Conclusion: The Meaning of Labor and Work .....	226
Chapter 5 <i>Minii Nutag</i> : Changing Modes of Property and Access to Land in the Age of the Market.....	228
Introduction.....	228
History of Land.....	229
Pre-Socialism 1206-1911 .....	230
Socialism 1921-1991 .....	239
Post-Socialism: 1991-Present .....	241
Campsites.....	243
Rights in Campsites .....	248
Categories of Rights.....	248
Hierarchy of Rights.....	249
Rights in Practice .....	250
Formal or ‘State-recognized’ Rights to Campsites .....	250
Custom and the Laws.....	256
Nutag.....	264
Groups and Claims.....	268
Defending and Enforcing Rights in Campsites.....	274
Local Practices .....	274
Deterrence .....	275
Xuux, tuux: Expel, drive out.....	277
Formal Enforcement and Defense.....	280
Dispute Resolution.....	284

Exchange and Access to Land .....	287
Exchange and the State .....	288
Exchange in the Margins of the State .....	288
‘Twilight’ Exchanges.....	294
Dispute and Resistance .....	296
Case studies of Dispute.....	297
The War to Come.....	304
Debating the Future.....	305
Privatization: Pro .....	307
Privatization: Con .....	309
Conclusion .....	312
Chapter 6 Men like Mountains: Authority and Territory in Uguumur .....	314
Introduction.....	314
Decentralization, Community-based Resource Management, and Empowerment.....	317
Collectivizing the Decollectivized: The Cooperative Movement and IFAD’s Rural Poverty Reduction Project.....	320
Decentralization, Development, and Herder Cooperatives.....	320
Project Background.....	326
Rural Poverty Reduction in Xentii and Uguumur.....	331
Herder Cooperatives in Uguumur.....	332
‘Indirect Rule’: Power, Authority, and Territory in Rural Mongolia .....	335
The Power of Men and Mountains: Modes of Hierarchy and Privilege .....	335
Power and Landscape in Mongolia.....	337
<i>Uul shutex</i> : Mountain Worship.....	342
Patriline in Practice .....	345
Spaces of Male Authority .....	347
Men Like Mountains: Axlagh .....	349
The New Territoriality: Pastoral Power and the Spatial Politics of Resource Control .....	358
Cooperative Groups .....	358
Group Formation.....	360
Group Territories .....	366
Producing Spatial Power.....	372
Alternative Spaces .....	373

Conclusion .....	374
Chapter 7 Mobile Practices and Decision-Making in Uguumur .....	376
Introduction.....	376
<i>Nuudel, Suudel</i> : Historical Patterns of Migration and Settlement in Mongolia.....	377
On the Move: Contemporary Household Mobility Strategies .....	381
Typologies of Movement.....	381
Formulating Decisions.....	385
Influential Factors .....	388
Economic Factors.....	395
Socio-Cultural Variables.....	399
Political Variables.....	401
Making Decisions: Migration and Settlement .....	402
Mobile Strategies .....	403
Customary moves.....	404
Otor .....	405
Collective otor migration versus individual otor migration.....	411
Non-migration.....	414
Other migration strategies.....	414
Observations of Decision-Making .....	415
Analysis .....	420
Conclusion: Mobility and Access .....	422
Chapter 8 Administering <i>Zud</i> : Law and Disaster ‘Management’ .....	423
Introduction.....	423
History of Disaster Management .....	423
Pre-socialism.....	423
Socialism.....	425
Post-Socialism.....	427
Governing Disaster in Uguumur 2007-2008.....	432
Administrative Organization of Disaster Preparation .....	433
Institutions and Responsibilities .....	434
<i>Togtool</i> : Governance Ex Post Facto.....	438
Otor Contracts.....	443
Law in Practice .....	443



Negotiating Otor contracts .....	445
Obtaining Contracts .....	453
Other contracts .....	456
Conclusion .....	457
Chapter 9 Disaster in Uguumur 2007-2008 .....	459
Introduction.....	459
Disaster and Migration 2007-2008 .....	460
Livestock Losses.....	465
Post-disaster .....	467
Understanding Mobility .....	468
Household Profiles.....	469
Batbuyan .....	470
Battogtokh.....	475
Munkhbaatar .....	479
Gansukh .....	485
Analysis of Profiles.....	491
Statistical Comparison of Households .....	494
Conclusion .....	501
Chapter 10 Conclusion: Pastoralism and Vulnerability in a Neo-Liberal Age .....	503
Introduction.....	503
A Political Ecology of Disaster in Uguumur: Summary.....	503
Kin and Community.....	504
Property, Governance, and Territory .....	505
Market integration.....	508
Mobility, Disaster, and Development .....	509
Pastoralism in ‘The Age of the Market’.....	509
Development as Transformation.....	510
Neo-liberalism and the Local.....	511
Alternatives .....	515
Visions of the Future.....	516
Pastoral Development in Mongolia.....	518
Conclusion: What is to be done? .....	524
APPENDIX A: Acronyms .....	526

APPENDIX B:	Glossary of Mongolian terms.....	527
APPENDIX C:	Additional materials.....	529
	Additional Figures .....	529
	Additional Household Profiles.....	530
REFERENCES	.....	560
2002	The New Poverty Studies: The Ethnography of Power, Politics and Impoverished People in the United States. NYU Press: New York. ....	571
VITA	.....	582

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1. Sample household characteristics by wealth category (data collected in household survey). .....	80
Table 3.2. Percent of households by type of livestock acquisition (data collected from household survey). .....	90
Table 3.3. Average births and birthing rates for each household category (data collected from household survey). .....	95
Table 3.4. Livestock Products in Uguumur and marketability (Compiled by author). .....	103
Table 3.5. Annual production cycle. ....	104
Table 3.6. Range of meat and live animal prices (MNT) in Undurxaan in 2008 (Data collected from interviews with traders and through household surveys). .....	115
Table 3.7. Range of other product prices (MNT) in Undurxaan in 2008 (Data collected from interviews with traders and through household surveys). .....	116
Table 3.8. Average Sales Off-take for Households by Wealth Category. (Compiled from data collected in household survey). .....	118
Table 3.9. Loss percentages according to source and wealth category (Compiled from data collected in household survey). .....	120
Table 4.1. Annual Labor Schedule (Compiled from fieldnotes, interviews, and surveys). .....	143
Table 4.2. Remuneration rates for various occupations and tasks. (Compiled from surveys, interviews, and fieldnotes based on observations) .....	181
Table 4.3. Percent of sample who hire according to tasks. (Compiled from household survey data). .....	182
Table 4.4. Labor Day pay system in tugrug (from Goldstein and Beall 1994). Conversion rate, 5.6 MNT = \$1 US. ....	192
Table 4.5. Contract system remuneration rates with new bonuses for various households. (From Goldstein and Beall 1994) .....	193
Table 4.6. Lease system remuneration rates for a horse herd. (From Goldstein and Beall 1994) .....	194
Table 5.1. Percent of households by category that claim 'customary campsites'. (Compiled with household survey data) .....	244
Tables 5.2. Number of incidents of trespassing and dispute from July 2006 to July 2008. (Compiled from household survey data) .....	297
Table 5.3. Number of incidents of trespassing and dispute from July 2006 to July 2008. (Compiled from household survey data) .....	297
Table 6.1. Uguumur-based herder group cooperatives or malchnii buleg. Numbered axlagch were not part of the sample. (Compiled from interviews) .....	360
Table 7.1. Location of secondary residence and access to communication. (Data collected in household surveys) .....	385
Table 7.2. Numbers of households that use each kind of well. (n=68) .....	393
Table 7.3. Numbers of households with each structure at their customary campsites. (Data collected in household survey) .....	395
Table 7.4. Number and percent of households with transportation. ....	396
Table 9.1. Statistical summary of Batbuyan's household. ....	475
Table 9.2. Statistical summary Battogtokh's household herd and migration data. ....	478

Table 9.3. Statistical summary of Munkhbaatar’s household herd and migration data. ....	484
Table 9.4. Statistical summary of Gansukh's household herd and migration data.....	490
Table 9.5. Comparison of wealth category averages with profiled households. (Numbered households can be found in Appendix B). ....	496
Table 9.6. Comparison of wealth category averages with profiled households. (Numbered households can be found in Appendix B). ....	499
Table 9.7. Comparison of profiled households. Numbered households can be found in Appendix B.....	500
Table 9.8. Comparison of profiled households. Numbered households can be found in Appendix B.....	501
Table A.1. Statistical summary of Galkhuu's household herd and migration data. ....	534
Table A.2. Statistical summary of Munkhbayar’s household herd and migration data. ....	540
Table A.3. Statistical summary of Nergui’s household herd and migration data. ....	545
Table A.4. Statistical summary of Buyanjargal’s household herd and migration data.....	549
Table A.5. Statistical summary of Altangerel’s household herd and migration data.....	555
Table A.6. Statistical summary of Amarkhuu’s household herd and migration data. ....	559

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1. My host household's encampment in eastern Bayankhutag in late February 2008(Photo taken by author).....	1
Figure 2.1. UNDP hired local herders to dispose of carcasses following the 2010 zud disaster. (Photo taken by Gilles Sabrie for the New York Times, permission given to reprint). ....	30
Figure 2.2. The major ecozones of Mongolia (Batima et al 2009). ....	32
Figure 2.3. Geographic variation of frequency of white or black zud 1973-2000. (Batima et al 2006) .....	34
Figure 2.4. Geographic vulnerability to white or black zud combined with drought 1973-2000. (Batima et al 2006).....	35
Figure 2.5. Changes in severity of winter conditions for Mongolia. (Batima et al 2006).....	36
Figure 2.6. Changes in severity of drought for Mongolia. (Batima et al 2006).....	36
Figure 2.7. Changes in mean January and July temperatures from 1992-2008 (Data collected by Xentii Aimag Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology) .....	37
Figure 2.8. Total annual precipitation and days of precipitation 1993-2008. (Data collected by Xentii Aimag Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology) .....	37
Figure 2.9. Total monthly precipitation during growing season 1993-2008. (Data provided by Xentii Aimag Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology) .....	38
Figure 2.10. Annual mean temperature for economic regions of Mongolia (1940-2005). (Natsagdorj 2006) .....	39
Figure 2.11. Annual mean precipitation for economic regions of Mongolia (1940-2005). (Nastagdorj 2006) .....	39
Figure 2.12. Average livestock mortality rate 1972-2008. (Data provided by NSO, Mongolia; compiled by author) .....	40
Figure 2.13. Bayankhutag soum annual livestock mortality rates 1972-2008. (Data provided by NSO and Bayankhutag soum Archives. Compiled by author) .....	40
Figure 2.14. On left, annual distribution of soum mortality rates from 1971-2003. On right, 2002 distribution of household rates in each soum. (From World Bank 2006).....	44
Figure 2.15. The massive drop in GDP, despite economic growth in other sectors, was largely due to the zud (NSO 2008). ....	54
Figure 2.16. Rural-to-urban migration (UNDP 2010). ....	55
Figure 2.17. Location of research site (Authors map). ....	59
Figure 3.1. Distribution of livestock amongst Uguumur district households (Data gathered from soum statistical office; compiled by author). ....	71
Figure 3.2. Mean herd growth rates of wealth categories from July 2007 to July 2008 (from household survey data). ....	72
Figure 3.3. Primary herd acquisitions (data collected from household survey).....	83
Figure 3.4. Secondary herd acquisitions (data collected from household survey).....	83
Figure 3.5. Average herd acquisition by wealth category (data collected from household survey). ....	90
Figure 3.6. Herd compositions by household category for all Uguumur households, n=134 (data collected from soum statistical office). ....	99
Figure 3.7. Value of Agricultural GDP (NSO 2008). ....	102

Figure 3.8. Total number of meat sales by month of all households (volume of sales not shown).(Data collected in household survey) .....	107
Figure 3.9. Total number of live animal sales by month of all households (volume of sales not shown). (Data collected in household survey) .....	107
Figure 3.10. Household income composition by wealth category (Compiled from household survey data).....	115
Figure 3.11. Proportion of product-specific sales in household incomes by wealth categories (Compiled from data collected in household survey). ....	117
Figure 3.12. Loss category percent of total loss for household groupings (compiled from data collected in household survey).....	121
Figure 3.13. Average number of sales trips in January and February 2008 (Compiled from data collected in household survey).....	128
Figure 3.14. Distribution of mortality rates by herd size (Compiled from 2007 soum census data and data collected in the household survey). ....	130
Figure 3.15. Households with loss rates above 10% and below 5% by social categories (Data compiled from household surveys, interviews, and fieldnotes).....	131
Figure 4.1. Percentage of labor source by wealth category. (Compiled from household survey data) .....	223
Figure 4.2. Labor exchange preference by wealth category. 1 = poorest, 5 = wealthiest. (Compiled from household survey data).....	224
Figure 4.3. Number of contracts by year and average length of contract period with linear trendlines. (Compiled from household survey data).....	225
Figure 5.1. Comparison of possession contract provision amongst soums in Khentii aimag as of December 2008. ....	254
Figure 5.2. The old trough.(Photo taken by author).....	263
Figure 5.3. Categories of households permitted to settle on respondents' customary campsites (Compiled from household survey data).....	269
Figure 5.4. Categories not permitted to settle on respondents customary campsites (Compiled from household survey data).....	270
Figure 5.5. The campsite Batdalai is attempting to purchase. (Photo taken by author).....	293
Figure 6.1. Conceptual pyramid of the hierarchy of 'rule' (Derived from textual schema proposed by Xurelbaatar and Humphrey 2006).....	314
Figure 6.2. Official administrative organization of IFAD's RPR herder group cooperatives. (Compiled by author from www.ifad.mn and interviews with administration officials).....	327
Figure 6.3. Altar in the xoimor of the ger (Photo taken by author). ....	347
Figure 6.4. Spatial configuration of the ger. (Compiled from observations and fieldnotes by author).....	348
Figure 6.5. Territorial configuration of Batdalai's buleg in Xaya and Tuxum beginning in March 2008 (Base satellite photo from Google Earth and settlement pattern compiled from observation and fieldnotes).....	368
Figure 6.6. Territorial settlement of Batdalai's buleg on the northeastern border with Batnorov soum in later summer and early fall of 2008. (Base satellite photo from Google Earth and settlement pattern compiled from observation and fieldnotes) .....	369

Figure 6.7. Territorial configuration of Batdalai's buleg during late summer and early fall of 2008 near the eastern border of Bayankhutag soum and Sukhbaatar province.(Base satellite photo from Google Earth and settlement pattern compiled from observation and fieldnotes) .....	370
Figure 6.8. Territorial groupings of Uguumur buleg and important pastoral resources. (Compiled from campsite and pasturing data collected in surveys, interviews, and fieldnotes) .....	372
Figure 7.1. The four season round: Uvujluu (winter campsite) - Xavarjaa (spring campsite)- Zuslan (summer campsite) - Namarjaa (fall campsite). ....	383
Figure 7.2. Location of important resources and various eco-zones of Uguumur. ....	389
Figure 7.3. A kind of short otor practiced during the summer, what I call short continuous otor. (from Purev 1990).....	406
Figure 7.4. In this depiction, Purev (1990) distinguishes between 'buuri selgex otor' or 'moving base-camp', 'nutag solix otor' or 'changing pasture', and 'alsiin otor' or 'far otor' .....	410
Figure 7.5. A series of photos from the actual migration from my host family's home nutag to the eastern side of Bayankhutag. Top left: my host household breaks down the ger. Top right: we see another household in the group preparing for the move. Bottom left: the camel train begins the journey. Bottom right: Trucks are loaded and on the move. (Photos taken by author) .....	419
Figure 7.6. Households in the fall encampment occupying a valley. (Photo taken by author)....	420
Figure 8.1 State central government ministries, institutions, and actors involved in disaster management. (Compiled from Swift (2007), interviews, and observations). ....	429
Figure 8.2. Legislative and non-governmental institutions involved in disaster management. Development and aid institutions are managed by MoFALI (see Figure 8.1 above). (Compiled from Swift (2007), interviews, and observations).....	429
Figure 8.3. Ideal flow chart of how otor contracts should operate in principle. (Assembled from interviews with soum and aimag officials) .....	436
Figure 8.4. 2007-2008 Pasture Condition Assessment. Dark red represents 'severe conditions'. (Obtained from MoFALI) .....	437
Figure 8.5. Pasture Conditions Assessment data produced by provincial extension office in summer 2007.....	438
Figure 8.6. Draft otor contract used for all winter otor contracts in 2007 and 2008.....	452
Figure 9.1. A herder rides out by motorcycle to return camels to camp. Uguumur, January 2008. (Photo taken by author).....	459
Figure 9.2. Locations of households in fall and winter of 2007-2008. On the left (a), locations of sampled households in Fall of 2007. On right (b), locations of sampled households in Winter of 2007-08. (Maps compiled by author with survey data) .....	461
Figure 9.3.Uguumur in early December of 2007. There was no grass, excessive snow, and few households (left). Pasture conditions at my host family's otor campsite in February (right). (Photos taken by author) .....	462
Figure 9.4. Winter strategies. Top left: Feeding xiiveg to calves, Top right: Calf wearing a nemxii or cover. Bottom left: hay reserves fenced in to protect from starving livestock, Bottom Right: collecting ice for drinking water and mixing with xiiveg for weak stock.(Photos taken by author) .....	464
Figure 9.5. Winter strategies. On the left, a herder separates the weak from the strong. On the right, several of the hired herders slaughter weakened stock for sale in Undurxaan. (Photos taken by author).....	465

Figure 9.6. Consequences of zud. Left, carcasses left behind after zud . Right, a burn pile for dead animals. Burning prevents the spread of disease.(Photos taken by author).....	466
Figure 9.7. Average mortality rates of sampled households by winter location.(Compiled using data from household surveys) .....	467
Figure 9.9. Batbuyan’s annual migration route.....	472
Figure 9.10 Battogtokh’s annual household and herd migration route. ....	477
Figure 9.11 Munkhbaatar’s annual household and herd migrations. ....	482
Figure 9.12. Munkhbaatar's summer otor tent at campsite 7. (Photo taken by author).....	484
Figure 9.13. Gansukh's annual household and herd migrations.....	488
Figure 9.14. Comparison of household herd size to household zud-based livestock mortality rate. (Data gathered from household surveys) .....	495
Figure 9.15. Comparison of zud-based livestock mortality rates based on social attributes of households. ....	497
Figure 9.16. Changes in household livestock wealth relative to sample averages pre-disaster and post-disaster. Although there is a slight non-linear relationship in the middle wealth category, linear trend here demonstrates the stability of wealth in disaster. ....	502
Figure A.1. Percentage of District SSU by Wealth Quartiles. ....	529
Figure A.2. District herd composition and total. SSU are provided for camel, horse, and cow. .	529
Figure A.5. Galxuu’s annual household and herd migration. ....	532
Figure A.6. Munxbayar’s annual household and herd migration.....	537
Figure A.7. Nergui’s annual household and herd migration.Green represents livestock migration rather than household migration. ....	543
Figure A.8. Buyanjargal’s annual household and herd migration. ....	547
Figure A.9. Altangerel’s annual household and herd migration. ....	552
Figure A.10. Amarkhuu’s annual household and herd migration.....	557



## Chapter 1 Introduction

*We thought since we had few animals it would be okay. But then everyone left and scattered.*

*Here, we have no labor power and we just watched everyone as they moved north.*

*Uguumur herder*



*Figure 1.1. My host household's encampment in eastern Bayankhutag in late February 2008(Photo taken by author).*

### **Vulnerability in a Neoliberal Age**

In late November of 2007 my host household scouted pastures in the south-east corner of Bayankhutag *soum* (county) in the 2<sup>nd</sup> *bag* (district) and after careful consideration of several sites, selected a location for their winter *otor* campsite where they would most likely remain until late February or early March when they move to their spring campsite. *Otor* is a non-customary migration strategy whereby a household interrupts their normal four season campsite rotation to either opportunistically exploit pasture or evade hazardous conditions. Their customary winter campsite (*uvuljuu*), in their home district of Uguumur, was lacking in adequate forage due to a serious drought the previous summer and much of what had grown in their reserve pastures was inferior forage (*tsakhildag* or siberian iris) or had already been grazed, including their customary summer (*zuslan*) and fall (*namarjaa*) sites. The summer rains had been late and when they finally came, little fell. Consequently, they had little option but to leave their district.

Other households also were forced to migrate. Many of the wealthiest households were able to arrange 'wintering *otor* contracts' (*otoroor uvuljix geree*) with governors in soums to the immediate north of Bayankhutag through various formal channels and informal social

connections.<sup>1</sup> Those poor and middle wealth households fortunate enough to be a client of the wealthy also were able to make the move north. Some of the wealthiest households preferred to go even farther north into generally unwelcoming territory without contracts. Securing agreements in these soums required significant informal negotiation and extra-legal exchange with local administrators and residents. As a secondary strategy, the majority of these households moved en masse with a number of kin and client households that they hoped would provide a buffer against *xuux* or expulsion.

My host household, unfortunately, was not wealthy with only 120 head of stock and although they were a client household, their patrons had made other arrangements. Without the economic and political resources provided by their patrons, they did not have enough political weight, deep enough social connections, or enough economic resources to cover the costs of arranging contracts or some other kind of agreement. Even with such arrangements they simply could not afford the transportation costs of moving out of the soum. As a result, they were forced to remain in Bayankhutag searching for the region least degraded. In the region they had scouted, outside their *bag* (district) and customary migration territory (*nutag*), the grass was high, about a foot in height, and more than adequate for winter pasturage. The mix of species was also particularly beneficial, a range of *xyalgana* (*stipa siberica*) and several kinds of *xyag* (*agropyron*) species mixed with *xaragana* (*caragana*) shrubs. With many local households, who are few to begin with, gone on winter *otor* to the north or settled at their distant winter campsites, the region seemed to be a prime location to settle.

Two weeks later on an auspicious day chosen in consultation with their lama in the provincial center, they prepared their belongings and supplies, loaded them onto camel wagons, and over the course of four days drove their stock to their new campsite. When they arrived, large herds of horses, in multiples of a thousand, were grazing the valley around their selected site. The grass had been greatly decimated leaving little forage for their exhausted animals to consume in preparation for the extreme cold and snowfall of winter. Another migration was not an option. The rest of the valley's potential sites were occupied within a week, they did not have access to large-scale transportation for their herds, and leaving again on a long migration would have significantly sapped the strength of their herd. Instead, they had to purchase hay (a poor forage) and other feeds to which their stock are not accustomed and hope that the winter would turn out to be not so severe.

Unfortunately it was quite severe as nearly a foot of snow fell, which over time through pressure becomes ice, and temperatures dropped regularly below -45 F at night. By the end of

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<sup>1</sup> These contracts are discussed in detail in chapter 9.

February 2008, due to lack of pasture and the inability to move, they had lost roughly 50 per cent of their small stock and all save one cow to freezing temperatures, exhaustion and starvation. Their horse herd (26) fled the region due to excessive snowfall and windstorms, disappearing until they were found four months later a province away in the hands of a horse meat trader (*agt*)<sup>2</sup> who refused to return the animals and sold them eventually in the Bayanzurx<sup>3</sup> market in Ulaanbaatar. By the end of the research period, my first host household had made a partial exit from the pastoral economy, and moved their herds, now greatly decreased, to a permanent campsite closer to the provincial capital. In contrast to my hosts, those who had left the *soum* that winter lost few livestock.

The disaster described here, *zud*, was not solely climatic or meteorological in nature; rather, the foundations of these events, like other disasters, were in large part *political* and *social* (Oliver-Smith 1996; Watts 1983; Wisner et al 1996, 2004). The epicenter of this disaster was my host household's inability to access the best resources and, secondly, to effectively secure the resources to which they did have access. The horse herds which grazed away their winter pastures belonged to wealthy households from other *soums*, permitted to openly graze by a *soum* governor who, due to the current structure of rural administration, has little accountability to the constituents of the local districts and who can, because of the ambiguity of his legally defined role and the near lack of oversight of his authority, disregard the already vague legal codes that are meant to regulate such inter-*soum* grazing. Moreover, many of these wealthy herders from other *soums* feel reduced threat grazing their herds because of their ability to recruit households from their home districts and mobilize these collectivities to serve as buffers against expulsion, official or otherwise. However, such problems are not limited to external threats. My host household itself was unable to recruit such a collectivity because of the lack of male kin through the household head and his lack of status and prestige amongst neighbors and affinal kin. Moreover, the unwillingness of fellow neighbor households to monitor unsanctioned behavior, antagonisms between kin and ethnic groups, and lack of willing or enabled formal enforcement at local administrative levels has fostered an adverse social and political environment. The result of these events and processes was a disaster for my host family.

Yet, not all are vulnerable to this kind of herd loss. Other households, particularly the wealthy and socially connected, were able to organize collective migration, induce local governors to enter into inter-*soum* *otor* grazing contracts, exchange with local households for campsite use-rights, and defend against various social and political threats to their presence in

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<sup>2</sup> Also the word in Mongolian for 'gelding'.

<sup>3</sup> The second most important market in Ulaanbaatar for meat products besides *Xuchit Shonxor*.

non-affected soums. These households greatly benefit from these practices and so many did not face *zud* or lose animals.

Understanding the differential effects of *zud* conditions on household herd loss requires, in part, an institutional analysis. I argue that one of the root causes of this vulnerability is the institutional uncertainty witnessed across the post-socialist world in the wake of neo-liberal ‘shock therapy’ reforms and the emergence of both reconfigured and novel modes for social interaction, authority, and ‘rule’ in rural lands. In conditions of uncertainty, it is argued, social actors, in order to secure access to resources necessary to their livelihood goals and strategies, attempt to utilize existing institutions, draw on past ones, or create new ones in order to channel social action so that outcomes can be expected with a greater degree of certainty. In this political process social actors mobilize their assets both economic and social, while weighing costs and benefits of potential courses of action, in order to further their strategies, manipulate political alignments and social configurations, and accomplish their ends. For some, the uncertainty and insecurity of social life in post-socialist Mongolia has been a dangerous milieu, while for others it has been an opportunity. For those who can tame such situations and carve out a niche of control and expectation, much is to be gained. Clearly, as this dissertation will show, some pastoralists in rural Mongolia are better positioned to benefit from the institutional effects of neo-liberal reforms than others.

The decentralized administrative structure of rural Mongolia, implemented in the consecutive barrage of neo-liberal inspired reforms, and the increasing integration of pastoral livelihoods in market economies provides an environment in which to witness processes of institutional bricolage in resource management and control. Dialectically, this process of institution building has been both cause and effect in producing both socio-economic differentiation and an emergent rural hierarchy. These dynamics have, I argue, critical implications for understanding rural transformation and current distributions of risk. Without understanding the connections between hierarchy, institutions, and the distribution of access to resources, understanding vulnerability becomes near impossible.

In this dissertation, I do this by describing institutional transformations surrounding livestock, labor, and land and the impact of these transformations on household vulnerability to *zud*-based livestock mortality (i.e. herd loss).<sup>4</sup> I argue that broader neo-liberal policies and their

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<sup>4</sup> In this dissertation I look at vulnerability to *zud*-based herd loss primarily because livestock are the primary critical asset of a herding livelihood without which a pastoral life is not possible (see Little et al 2006 for a similar explanation). As chapter 7 will also make clear, I avoid defining vulnerability to specific weather conditions because for some these weather conditions mean different things and I do not find

impact on institutional transformations have played key roles in fostering the conditions that currently shape access to resources which are essential to risk management strategies like mobility. Moreover, I also argue that when ‘access’ to these resources (not just the resources themselves) is unequally distributed the effect both in mobility outcomes and herd loss will be differentiated. Rather than look at large-scale catastrophic zud like those described above, a research design that would depend greatly on a perverse luck, I look at herd loss in the small district of Uguumur in Bayankhutag soum, a county in the eastern province of Xentii. As I described above, in the winter of 2007-2008 a ‘low-to-medium’ level zud struck households in Bayankhutag, other soums of Xentii, and across the eastern provinces. Preceded by a drought, this low magnitude disaster allows me to explore the effect of differential capacity to access resources on household herd loss in more ‘normal’ conditions. In Bayankhutag soum, the average loss rate in that year was 18 per cent. Although this is not as disastrous as 1999-2002 and 2010 when vast areas of the country and millions of animals perished, the distribution of losses were varied enough to demonstrate not only the unequal effects of zud on herd loss but it also allows me to explore the underlying factors and conditions that produce this differentiated distribution. In particular, I argue that shifts in entitlements to critical pastoral resources such as campsites, transportation and ambiguous property regimes resulting from neo-liberal policies of strategic absence (i.e. devolution and decentralization) lie at the heart of such problems.

## **Research Statement**

The research presented here has gone through considerable changes since I first proposed this project in 2006. This research originally sought to investigate how absentee herd-ownership affects the capacity of resource management institutions to effectively regulate common property resource use. During the course of the fieldwork it became increasingly evident that most herders are to some degree absentee. Nearly 52% of households sampled had a secondary ger in the soum or aimag centers and many who did not spent a considerable amount of time ‘visiting’ relatives there. Additionally, the major difference in patterns of resource use and mobility were not between those who had a secondary ger and those who did not; rather, the difference was largely between different classes of herders: wealthy (*bayan* or *mal ixtei*), middle (*dund zereg maltai*), and poor (*yaduu* or *mal bagatai*). It was apparent, as the data in this dissertation makes clear, that different classes of herders pursued different methods for securing access to resources and used those resources in different ways.

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broader definitions of vulnerability such as economic vulnerability or physical vulnerability because they are too broad and unwieldy in the field. Vulnerability to herd-loss is simply more important and much easier to operationalize than other definitions.

Yet, it was also clear in the field that other forms of social inequality beyond wealth including gender, age, and ethnicity affected access to resources and patterns of resource use. In Uguumur, such social markers significantly affect use and control, as female-headed households are less mobile and depend to a great extent on male relatives (but not always), political configurations of kin organize around patrilineal principles, racial and ethnic differences between the majority Khalkha and minority Uriankhai affect territorial configurations, and young herders are largely dependent on their fathers. These markers of social difference were found to be critical and form essential elements in the work presented here. More importantly, their presence and importance as the structural backbone of rural institutions were evidently a result not just of local political machinations but also neoliberal policies and practices since the collapse of socialist state.

Moreover, although I did not intend to research risk management, herd loss, and vulnerability issues, I arrived in the field when what could be called a ‘zud’ was occurring. The previous summer a drought had seriously affected the grazing potential of the bag and by December temperatures had dropped drastically and snow covered most of the pasture. Consequently, a number of households suffered high rates of herd loss. Despite this, I continued with the original research design in the field understanding the study, discussed in detail below, would produce considerable data which could help shed light on possible answers to a range of questions. When I returned from the field I realized that there were other, and possibly more important, questions I could ask of the data, particularly the extensive collection of data on livestock mortality, household mobility, and rural institutions.

In short, this work proposes to explore how neoliberal shifts in rural governance have impacted household vulnerability to *zud*. Moreover, the work aims to explore how neoliberal policies are appropriated and territorialized through local and translocal practices and how these rural politics reconfigure the institutional basis for resource access, control, and use as well as how these transformations in turn impact household vulnerability. In the following sections I lay out the theoretical orientation of political ecology, the problems of neoliberalism, rural governance, and vulnerability to hazards, and my framework for exploring institutional dynamics of resource access and control.

## **Literature**

### **Theoretical Orientation: Political Ecology**

The theoretical framework that guides this research is political ecology. At its core political ecology emphasizes the importance of asymmetries of power, the unequal relations

between different actors, in explaining the interaction of society and environment (Bryant and Bailey 1997). Consequently, power, politics, and inequality are viewed as ‘integral to all human-ecological interactions’ including those that shape access to resources and resource use practices as this research illustrates (Gezon 2006). The framework used to guide this research is situated at the nexus of recent political ecological work concerning three important conceptual foci: power, actors, and culture.

Rather than the rigid ‘regional’ political ecologies that privilege overly structural notions of power and gave little attention to ‘the rough and tumble of everyday environmental politics’ (Watts 1986: 305), or the dehumanized frameworks that privilege inherently powerful, disembodied discourses (Escobar 1999), this work employs more recent political ecology that incorporates lessons on power from practice theory that view power as a pervasive element in the interstices of all social life (Paulson et al. 2005). In this sense, power is both limiting and generative and is characterized by challenge and negotiation as well as coercion and acquiescence. This dynamic, active, and fundamentally social notion of micro-power encourages researchers to utilize an actor-oriented framework for approaching human ecological problems.

Consequently, rather than viewing actors as passive pawns unconsciously responding to structural shifts in power relations emanating from ‘above’, as powerful as they may be, this research takes seriously the notion that rural resource users are agents in their own right. Yet, following Gezon (2006:15), this “requires a concept of human agency that is neither determined by social structure nor entirely voluntaristic.” Actors, in this framework, are seen as socially positioned with systematic and ‘patterned affinities’ and ‘dispositions’ (Rocheleau 1995), or what Bourdieu (1977) calls *habitus*, while at the same time, pursuant to their own interests, constantly engaged in negotiation and “the work of social change” (Bailey 1969). Actors are also positioned within differential, yet dynamic power matrices whereby identities such as race, gender, ethnicity, class, and other collectivities frame strategies and shape social interaction. These identities and positions are recognized as multiple and overlapping, problematizing simplistic ideas of subject formation (Rocheleau et al. 1996). By expanding our conception of power to active agents at multiple scales while appreciating the *social* nature of agency, political ecologists open analyses to the diverse range of factors that influence the knowledge, decisions, and actions of rural producers in their attempt to access and use resources.

Clearly, the conceptualization of political ecology privileged here gives primacy not to a priori ‘cultural mediation’ (Escobar 1999) but rather to the real social world of interacting agents. Moreover, I argue along with Gezon and Paulson (2005) that political ecology is best when it foregrounds the productive activities of real people in the course of social interaction and process

as this dissertation does. As Biersack (2006: 28) states, political ecology “must address the material stakes of a material world ... if it is to be fully political.” In this sense, power is not inherently imbued in disembodied discourses but rather continually implicated and emergent in the inner-workings of material social processes, material practices, and the outcomes of material struggles (Roseberry 1989). In order to construct viable livelihoods, it is clear rural resource users must formulate decisions not only from the calculation of a range of variables such as labor availability, technology, and prices but also in interaction with the real, material power of states, institutions, and markets and their actors.

This embrace of the material also extends to the bio-physical environment because the role of the environment as agent, acting upon human wills and behaviors, is taken seriously (Cliggett and Pool 2008; Latour 2004). Anyone spending winter in the countryside of Mongolia would be hard-pressed to contend otherwise. Following Zimmerer and Bassett (2003: 3): “the environment (is) not simply a stage or arena in which struggles over resource access and control take place. We consider ... biophysical processes to play an active role in shaping human-environment relations.” Yet, moving beyond notions that support dichotomization of an extra-organic humanity and pre-human ‘nature’, a political ecology that embraces the notion of a ‘real’ environment does not necessarily support nature/culture dualisms but, instead, argues that social interactions are part and parcel of a broader conception of ecological process (Gezon 2006; Latour 2004; Zimmerer and Bassett 2003).

Such a materialist perspective does not relegate the role of culture to mere epiphenomenon. As Bryant (1998: 82) points out political ecology must “demonstrate not only how the environment is constituted through struggles over material practices” but also draw attention to “struggles over meaning.” Political ecology must attend to the idea that culture is important; yet, to say culture mediates action, as Escobar (1999) argues, entraps agents in a cultural prison, the proverbial pre-social ‘text’ that dictates behavior. More important is to understand that agents actively manipulate symbolic meaning to their own ends by framing their interests and strategies within particular cultural frames. In the course of social interaction, where power is constantly at play, some meanings are privileged over others (Haenn 2002). In other words, this is important not only because meaning shapes how particular actions are framed and understood but also because particular meanings, such as expressed in norms, rules, and institutions like property, which have important effects on how rural agricultural producers access resources and use them, become established in material ways that shape the possibilities for action by others.



**Problem: Neo-liberalism and the ‘Natures’ of Hazards, Risk, and Vulnerability**  
*Neoliberalism, Governance, and Disaster*

Many of the policy shifts and development practices I discuss in this dissertation, such as administrative decentralization, privatization, and community-based development, emerge (at least in part) from appropriations of neoliberal thought, a philosophical world view that has become uniquely global and powerful though not necessarily hegemonic. These policies have also been integral in producing new kinds of vulnerability, particularly in the case of disaster. In this section I briefly tease out how others have traced the impact of neoliberal thought on resource politics (Ferguson 2006). Because of the consistent conflation of neoliberal with on-the-ground actualities, here I follow Castree (2010) in separating neoliberalism as philosophy, as policy, and as program or practice.

According to Harvey’s (2005) interpretation, neoliberalism represents society as a market place for social capital that consists largely of a collection of individuals. What collective action occurs, such as ‘community’, is seen as an agglomeration of individual choices resulting from a largely free and fair process of negotiation and bargaining, i.e. the invisible hand of ‘society’ (Creed 2006). In essence, society itself is a result of individual choices. The moral implication of this view is that individuals, as rational maximizers, are also independently responsible for social outcomes (Rose 1996). In its most purist form, neo-liberal ideology promotes the view that choices are best left to individuals where their intrinsic value as ‘social laborers’ or ‘social entrepreneurs’ can be most efficiently wrought and human capital can be promoted and judiciously allocated in ‘fair’ ways.<sup>5</sup>

In programmatic or policy terms, the state or ‘government’ is seen as meddling in a natural process, whether that is the marketplace proper or society as marketplace. Consequently, particularly ‘neo-liberal’ reforms call for the “rolling back of the state” through economic deregulation, liberalization, and privatization<sup>6</sup> and the promotion of civil society or bodies of governance that are not “government” per se. Yet, as a number of scholars have pointed out, neoliberal policy and practice often require considerable state involvement (Ong 2006). For instance, privatization reforms require considerable state bureaucratic institutions in order to protect individual rights of ownership. Deregulation often involves various kinds of reregulation

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<sup>5</sup> This interpretation is clearly present in earlier forms of capitalist ideology such as Smith’s idea of the ‘invisible hand’, Ricardo’s ideas concerning property, and notions of Pareto optimality. In some ways this more closely attends to a social Darwinist interpretation of society although others point out that lying behind this political philosophy is a deep reliance on state-management and law and order rhetorics.

<sup>6</sup> Particularly, the privatization of resources. The logic here is to promote ownership so that revenue streams can be produced. This is the logic behind the western notion of ‘property’.

albeit ones that are ‘market friendly’ (Robertson 2007). Even in the government itself, market proxies become critical entities like the secret armies such as Blackwater used by the US government to fight the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, neoliberal policies often incorporate various kinds of disciplinary tactics like ‘workfare’ programs or community management in order to foster conceptions of citizenship that produce free, self-sufficient, and self-governing individuals and communities (Maskovsky and Goode 2002). Monitoring, auditing, and a strong focus on ‘law and order’ also attempt to discipline individuals as atomized actors by holding them to a decontextualized form of individual responsibility (Kipnis 2008).

In many studies of neoliberalism there is often a conflation, however, of neoliberal philosophy for what actually occurs on the ground and often a presumption of its hegemonic ubiquity (Freeman 2007). In turn, some argue for the study of “actually existing neoliberalisms” (Brenner and Theodore 2002) while others argue that path dependency and contingency as well as mutation and resistance are critical to understanding territorializations of neoliberalism (McCarthy 2004). Because of this divergence there is considerable disagreement as to what can rightly be called neo-liberal and what are simply hybrid or mutated effects of actors uses of ‘neoliberalism’ in “on-the-ground” politics. Neoliberalism has been interpreted in various ways, as a hegemonic worldview (Harvey 2005), as a toolbox of specific practices (Ong and Collier 2005), and as a catch-phrase used by leftist activists. Because of this some have sought to simply throw the term out (Maskovsky and Goode 2002). Despite attempts to abandon the term, I argue that because of the broad and powerful, though uneven, presence of such thinking and action on regional or global scales and in materially powerful institution apparatuses (such as IFAD and the World Bank), it is a critically important rubric in understanding the deep relationships between political and economic philosophy and the practical realities of grounded politics. Moreover, there are such consistent, though not completely analogous, comparisons between various case studies and field sites, it is clear the term must have critically important trans-local implications.

This is most critically evident in the emergence of new regimes of governance and state-society configurations. Scholars have used a variety of terms to describe these modes of governance borne at least partly out of an ideological bent towards neoliberal thought and exemplified by policies like decentralization and privatization. Terms like the ‘hollow state’ (Milward and Provan 2000), the ‘franchise state’ (Wood 1997), ‘voluntary state’ (Nickel and Eikenberry 2006), and the Li’s (2007) concept of trusteeship all refer to the privatization or relinquishing of state power in various ways such as through community institutions, individual actors, or to corporate entities. Several scholars point to the implications of such policies for disaster management. “Part and parcel of the emergence of the voluntary state is a growing global

reliance on the supposed *voluntary emergence* of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in disaster relief operations” (Nickel and Eikenberry 2007: 536). In turn, Ozerdem and Jacoby (2006: 21) point out that “the pre-eminence of neo-liberal economic orthodoxy has resulted in an abdication of governmental responsibility during times of crisis.”

More broadly, this kind of governance, which in Uguumur I call the strategic absence of the state, has had enormous in-roads into reframing environmental governance.<sup>7</sup> In particular, policies like decentralization, devolution, and deconcentration all seek to either remove the state from local governance or delegate its authorities to lower levels of decision making over environmental resources. Most studies, however, tend to represent the state, the local, or some other representative category as ontologically divisible from each other. Agrawal (2005) and others (Ferguson 2006; Freeman 2007; Kipnis 2008; Ong 2006; Sharma 2006; Schwegler 2008) have shown that the state and its ‘others’ such as the local, communities, or individual actors are not entirely separable. And as I argue here, even state absence is often intentionally subsidized often by other regimes of ‘governing’ such as within households, through kin structures, or within the multiple lines of difference that make up community political economies. It is these kinds of state-societies configurations or ‘rule by remote control’ that neoliberal thought promotes and neoliberal inspired policies attempt to enact.

Consequently, as McCarthy (2006: 87) points out: “processes of neoliberalization never occur on blank slates, but rather hybridize with existing institutions”. In essence, neoliberal forms of governance are reliant on other social forms and the political formations, subjectivities, and modes of affect that configure them.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the territorialization of neoliberal governance agendas in rural resource management is often highly mutated and hybrid simply because of how such forms of indirect rule are formulated.<sup>9</sup> Actors and institutions are therefore

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<sup>7</sup> I call this the ‘strategic absence of the state’ because the state can arrive once again or even use absence to in fact demonstrate its power. Most studies tend to represent these policies as if the state has simply disappeared. I argue that this is short-sighted because conditions are dynamic and state strategies are as well.

<sup>8</sup> And it is often because of this hybridity that neoliberal reforms are at times accepted by local populations though they may have deleterious consequences over the long run. In essence, these reforms appear non-state or even anti-state though they can surreptitiously extend the purview of state power (Mansfield 2007; Wolford 2007; St. Martin 2006).

<sup>9</sup> As I make clear in the next chapter, these kinds of governance strategies are not new. For example, see Mamdani’s (1995) work on British indirect rule and Berry’s (1993) idea of ‘hegemony on a shoestring’. Even in Mongolia history, this is not unprecedented. However, the ideology behind the actual material practice of rule is different. Whereas Qing imperial rule in Outer Mongolia was comparable in structure and effect to ‘decentralization’ measures the logic was rooted in territorial dominance rather than in a market logic of efficiency.

subject to other kinds of power and other ideologies of rule. As I describe in chapter 6, age and gender based forms of domination within kin structures have become integral aspects of contemporary neo-liberal rule in Mongolia.

These kinds of hybridity therefore are central to developing deeper a understanding of the production of new vulnerabilities. Because institutions distribute both resources and risks, understanding how these neoliberal shifts impact the vulnerability of actors and communities to hazardous conditions is critical. Moreover, the dramatic ruptures that often follow such reforms atomize individuals, sever deep social connections, and remove the safety nets and social insurance that either reduce vulnerability to hazardous events or sensitivity to them. The work included in this dissertation contributes in this way to a nascent but growing literature on the ways neoliberal policies reframe exposure to risk and produce either new vulnerabilities or deepen sensitivities to particular hazards (Eakin 2005, 2006; Nelson and Finan 2009)<sup>10</sup>. Although most work on neo-liberalism and disaster has focused to a great extent on post-event coping or recovery (Pyles 2009) the work here explores more deeply the connections prior to and in the event of a hazardous shock.

The wave of neo-liberal reforms over the last twenty years since the demise of socialism is an appropriate context in which to explore this problematic of governance and vulnerability. For instance, following administrative decentralization in rural Mongolia, what effect did the absence of state management authorities have on rural institutions and the control and use of resources? What new institutions emerged in this void and who benefitted? What effect have new policies, like campsite contracting and cross-boundary winter migration contracting, had on local resource use and the management of risk? How have these new policies intersected with pre-existing forms of local hierarchy and what impact has this new regime of governance had on household vulnerability to disaster like *zud*? In this dissertation I attempt to answer these questions.

In the next second section I formulate the perspective this dissertation uses to examine hazards, risk, and vulnerability focusing in particular on the institutional relationships that produce vulnerability and affect the management of risks. Then, drawing from a broad literature on access and property I develop a theoretical framework for thinking about the social nature of vulnerability and its institutional basis.

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<sup>10</sup> Also see the special 2006 Hurricane Katrina issue (no. 4) of *American Anthropologist*.

### ***Hazards and Risks***

Risk is defined as “the *probability* of loss or hazard” while uncertainty is often defined as the *possibility* of such loss or hazard (Knight 1921). Risk in this sense is to a degree calculable while uncertainty is not. Such terms have important implications for understanding the effects of adverse events on rural livelihoods. Consequently, in recent years, there has been a strong focus on risk and risk management in anthropology, particularly in pastoral research. Borrowing from Wisner et al (2004), I argue that much of the literature in anthropology and related disciplines concerning hazards and risks can be divided into three theoretical camps: (1) realist perspectives, (2) strong constructionist positions, and (3) weak constructionist or what Zimmerer and Bassett (2003) call ‘critical realist perspectives’.

Realists take hazards and risk as objective, empirical realities with definable and measurable qualities. Hazards and the ‘risks’ they pose have inherent qualities and effects. For example, hurricanes such as Katrina are treated not as socio-ecological phenomena but as ‘natural’ hazards that pose inherent risks (i.e. ‘they happen *to* society’) and can be examined only in empirical ways. But as Wisner et al (2004) point out, such an approach “risk(s) separating ‘natural’ disasters from the social frameworks that influence how hazards affect people, thereby putting too much emphasis on the natural hazards themselves, and not nearly enough on the surrounding social environment” (4).

In contrast, strong constructionists argue that risk is not inherent and hazards are not empirical phenomena. Rather, they are constitutive of social natures where hazards and risks are ‘ways of seeing’ discursively constructed by culturally circumscribed actors (Bankhoff 2003). Risk and hazards are themselves a kind of discursive technology. They argue that realists create ‘nature-culture’ dualisms and reduce human-ecological worlds to empirical, natural phenomena where ‘nature’ exists independently of human mediation (Murphy 2002). In contrast, they argue that there is no ‘nature’ outside ‘the text’ of culture (Braun 2002). Murphy (2002: 250) points out that in these approaches “risks are reduced to threats that are talked about ... neglect(ing) the ‘nature’ part because for them it does not exist.” Moreover, “they tend to neglect and obscure the autonomous dynamics of nature and hence are themselves reductionist from the other side; reducing nature to a socio-cultural construction.”

Here I argue for what Wisner et al (2004) call a weak constructionist approach or what Zimmerer and Basset (2003) have called a critical realist approach. Risk, I argue, is the probability of some ‘thing, event, or process’ occurring at some magnitude. These phenomena are not, however, inherently ‘hazardous’. This ‘thing, event, or process’ is a hazard if it poses a deleterious or adverse consequence such as some kind of loss. Therefore hazard must imply that

there is a risk or at least possibility of some event occurring. The terms, I argue, are mutually constituted in the sense that risk cannot exist without hazard and vice versa.

These things, events, or processes are themselves pre-socially unmediated, biophysical phenomena; yet, the ‘hazardousness’ and ‘riskiness’ of the potential occurrence, effect, and magnitude of these ‘things, events, and processes’ are *always* socially mediated (i.e. socio-ecological). As Wisner et al 2004 point out in their pressure-and-release model of disaster, risk is constituted in the interplay between certain non-human processes or events interacting and underlying social dynamics and unsafe conditions, such as those produced through neoliberal practices. In this sense, risk and hazard are themselves forms of social mediation, but they are also, simultaneously contingent on bio-physical agency (Tsing 2005) because as Latour (2000) points out “things strike back.” Furthermore, although risk and hazard involve perception which is subject to cultural mediation (Goebel 2008), that mediation does not negate the inherent biophysical reality of that ‘thing, event, or process’. It is at this intersection of event and mediation that I argue for a broader conception of ‘ecology’ which places humans *in* nature, albeit one different from a ‘realist’ perspective, and not nature in humans (Ingold 2000; Latour 2004).

### ***Vulnerability***

This understanding of risk and hazard cannot be separated from an equally important term: vulnerability. If risk is the probability of a hazardous event occurring then vulnerability is exposure to that risk. In other words, I argue that vulnerability does not refer to exposure to the risk of some otherwise neutral event but rather to its ‘hazardous’ elements, i.e. its effects or impacts. For example, all individuals in a community may be exposed to the risk (and experience) of an event occurring but their vulnerability to the hazardousness (effects and impacts) it implies refers to something different. For example, as we will see in chapters 7 and 8, all herding households in Uguumur were vulnerable to the conditions that produce zud, but they were not equally vulnerable to the hazardousness of those conditions.

Wisner et al (2004) defined vulnerability as “the characteristic of person or group and their situation that influences their capacity to anticipate, cope with resist, and recover from the impact of a natural hazard.” Nelson and Finan (2009) lay out a critique of the uses of this concept and argue that these interpretations view vulnerability as “a context-derived social state of being” constitutive of communities, groups, or individuals. They argue conversely that “vulnerability is not something that resides in groups or individuals but, rather, is ‘embedded in complex social relations and processes’” (Nelson and Finan 2009: 305 citing Hilhorst and Bankhoff 2004: 2). As Bankhoff (2003: 225) points out “social systems generate unequal exposure to risk by making

some people more prone to disaster than others and that these inequalities in risk and opportunity are largely a function of the power relations operating in every society.”

Although groups, individuals, and communities may be ‘exposed’, ‘exposure’ is indicative of broader social dynamics. Clearly, such definitions are influenced by the work of Watts and Bohle who argue that ‘vulnerability is fundamentally relational ... and hence the space and shape of vulnerability is given by its social relations’ (1993: 54 cited in Cliggett 2005: 50). Exposure to risk, i.e. vulnerability as so defined, turns our attention, therefore, to the social relations of access and the distribution of power and agency in society (Adger and Kelly 1999; Oliver-Smith 2002; Wisner et al 2004; Nelson and Finan 2009). Cliggett (2005), citing the work of Watts and Bohle (1993) points out three conditioning factors: (1) entitlement or the command over resources, (2) empowerment or the control over resources, and (3) political economy or the distribution of power within society.

Echoing this shift in focus, in Wisner et al’s (2004) ‘pressure-and-release’ (PAR) model vulnerability is shaped primarily by ‘underlying factors and root causes’. They point out that “when these underlying factors and root causes coincide in space and time with a hazardous event or process, we think of the people whose characteristics have been shaped by such underlying factors and root causes as ‘vulnerable to that hazard’ and ‘at risk to disaster’” (Wisner et al 2004: 49). In their model, pressure (which creates effects and impacts) comes from both the hazard-event and the ‘unsafe conditions’ that lead to disastrous events. At the heart of these ‘unsafe conditions’ are the social relations which produce ‘exposure’.

Because my concern here is the degree to which particular conditions of vulnerability affect zud-based herd loss and therefore the viability of herding livelihoods, one of the ways we can explore the dynamics of vulnerability (the production of ‘exposure’) is through a livelihoods approach. Livelihood refers to the means of gaining a living, including capabilities, tangible assets, such as stores and resources and intangible assets, such as claims and access (Chambers and Conway 1992). West (2009) points out the importance of understanding the ways various forms of capital including human, natural, physical, financial, and social can shape how people ‘gain a living’ and mobilize them to ‘mitigate’ risks and cope with shocks. Consequently, these various capitals, as well as other capabilities, assets (including symbolic ones), and other endowments critically shape ‘vulnerability’ (Carney 1998).

However, these approaches can often in practice become exceedingly apolitical and revert to a focus on individual or group attributes rather than broader social systems and the place of individuals and groups in them. For example, although the term ‘asset’ refers broadly to livestock and property claims equally, in practice the term often comes to represent only easily

definable and measurable ‘productive’ assets like livestock (see Lybbert et al 2004 for an example). And property is utilized only in the sense of what claims an individual *can* make rather than what they *cannot*. I follow Haan and Zoomers (2003: 33) in arguing that livelihoods:

... are still bound by property relations and configurations of power which play a major role in inducing poverty in the first place. Although transforming structures, mediating processes, institutions, and organizations appear in all livelihood frameworks, there is a tendency within livelihoods studies to downplay these structural features and to focus on capitals and activities.

Consequently, I turn my attention to politics of access, entitlements, and ‘property’ and the deep role they play, as ‘root causes’, in shaping and producing ‘exposure’ and the ‘unsafe conditions’ which result at times in disaster. Moreover, transformations, neo-liberal or otherwise, in access, entitlements, and property have critically important effects on the dynamics of vulnerability.

However, unlike Haan and Zoomers (2003) I remain leery of the boundedness of ‘power’ which in livelihood studies implies a pre-determinedness in thinking about vulnerability. Although I am sensitive to the structural and material implications of socially-legitimated difference and systematic social exclusion, as evident is in the chapters that follow, I see in the politics of distribution and access space for maneuverability and social agency, particularly in the context of neoliberal decentralization and the emergence of the “voluntary state” (Cupples 2004). This dynamic perspective appreciates the ability of individuals to mobilize what resources they can to enact their strategies in novel situations or crises of the social order. For example, as I will demonstrate, access to state-based resources is often ambiguously defined, manipulable, and context-specific so that certain people at times can exact state influence in times of stress without ever having had such prior access or expectation of access. Such ill-defined ‘powers’ are critically important. Clearly, peoples are not passive subjects, but also active agents who display unbeknownst resilience by resisting, averting, and adapting both to hazards and ‘unsafe conditions’ and the politics that produce them.

I argue that understanding vulnerability to zud-based herd loss fundamentally requires the comprehension and appreciation of the ‘nature’ of access, entitlements, and property in contemporary Uguumur. In the next sections, I extend this reframing of hazard, risk, and vulnerable by setting up the framework for how I understand the ‘nature’ of these social phenomena. In short, I argue that power is pervasive and materially and symbolically manifest in the distribution of access to resources.



## **Theoretical Framework: Access, Institutions, and Property**

### ***Access***

As Berry points out “people’s ability to generate a livelihood or increase their assets depends on their *access* to productive resources and their ability to control and use resources effectively” (1989:41). These ‘productive’ resources include not only labor and capital inputs such as technology or the natural resource base upon which rural agricultural livelihoods depend but also the social relations and institutions through which actors construct particular livelihood strategies. An actor’s ability to access and secure these resources affects not only their ability to increase returns from productive enterprises but also to reduce uncertainty, stress, and insecurity, mitigate risk, and cope with the occurrence of hazards and shocks (Ellis 1998).

Berry (1989: 1) states that “access implies the *right* to use or benefit from a productive resource” while others argue that the notion of rights excessively delimits the ways in which people gain access to resources. A particular ‘right’ may confer access, but access is not always achieved through defined ‘rights’ (Ribot and Peluso 2003). Little (2003) has shown how wealth in livestock and labor allows wealthier herd-owners in Somalia to access more distant pastures though not at the expense of other resource users or the claims of others. Rather, the ecological distribution of pasture resources, affected by climatic and geological processes, the transactions costs of travelling great distances and the herd capital and labor herd-owners mobilize to cover those costs makes moot any discussion of who has ‘rights’ vis a vis another. Moreover, anthropologists have long demonstrated that ‘rights’, not a formal guarantee but a kind of mutual recognition of legitimacy (Robbins 2006), are often associated with particular social positions, identities, and/or membership in social groups such as through kinship, race, ethnicity, gender, class, citizenship or other positions, making actors subject to broader regimes of inequality that limit as well as enable certain kinds of action (Biersack 1999; Rocheleau et al. 1996).

In a broader approach that moves beyond a focus on ‘rights’ and formalistic notions of access, Leach et al (1999) argue, following Sen (1983), that individual resource users acquire access to necessary resources through a process of entitlement mapping. They argue that individual resources users are endowed, at any one time and asymmetrically, with certain assets *and* rights. Assets are more than material capital, including, in addition, the social ties, political alliances, and institutional membership that can serve productive ends. However, the translation of those assets and rights into productive use of resources that will benefit a livelihood is then mediated by their ability (i.e. capabilities) to effectively use those assets to assert ‘command’ over the channels of access or, rather, ‘entitlements’ (1999). To clarify, entitlements are not the material resources themselves (i.e. the bundles), such as well water, pasture, or livestock, but the

‘command’ of or ‘power over’ (Ribot 1999) the means by which actors access those material resources necessary for a productive and sustainable livelihood. ‘Command’ is shaped by the various forces that position actors within systematic and patterned matrices of power, particularly along class, gender, racial, and ethnic lines; yet, at the same time, command is not always determined by these forces.

Actors can effectively assert command or ‘access’ resources through a variety of ‘strategic acts’ of exchange, gifting, investment, patronage, and claims (Ribot and Peluso 2003). Access, at times, requires engagement in a range of social relations including those of the market. In doing so, actors must be able to navigate a dense, overlapping institutional landscape, a nested hierarchy of authority and control from formal powers such as states to informal ones like heads of households that differentially distribute channels of access or entitlements (Berry 1993; Leach et al. 1999; Ribot 1999). Clearly, some actors are more beneficially situated than others to achieve such goals, but this does not always prohibit actors from trying to manipulate powers of authority and control to their own ends. Securing access is an outcome encapsulated in dialectic processes of negotiation and bargaining among various forces and powers and at varying scales of social interaction.

At times when the conditions that ensure access to resources change and actors are faced with uncertainty, actors must actively pursue other venues, fora, and channels that will enable them to realize their goals (Leach et al. 1999; Lesorogol 2008). Like post-colonial shifts in the 1970s and 1980s, contemporary neo-liberal restructuring exemplified most strikingly in the post-socialist context has provided an important viewpoint from which to witness how social actors do so in the face of massive social change, where the institutional make-up of social life virtually collapses, forcing individuals to re-orient their investments both social and otherwise and develop new strategies to secure access to critical resources. With the rapid re-orientation of political and economic life in post-socialist states following shock therapy, an important realm in which actors have attempted to broaden or reshape the channels of access to resources is through institutions such as property which are not just sets of rules but are political techniques and methods for differentially distributing entitlements.

### ***Institutions***

Institutions are the rules of the game, the regularized social norms that make up the order of social interaction (North 1990). Institutions that manage natural resources like land and water control to varying degrees who can use which resources, under what conditions, at what times, and how they can use and dispose of those resources. New Institutional Economics (NIE), the primary application of rational choice theory to institutional and collective action problems in

resource management situations, argues that in an uncertain world where information concerning other's actions is imperfect, institutions act to reduce uncertainty by providing the grooved channels of social life (Ensminger and Knight 1997). In other words, NIE argues that institutions evolve to create assurance mechanisms that reduce uncertainty and diminish transaction costs incurred through information asymmetries related to possible actions of other resources users (Runge 1981). Rational actors, it is argued, will sacrifice investments in institutions for the benefit of greater and more certain *access* to information and other resources.

New institutional economics, relying heavily on game theoretic models, argues that strategic actors, acting both collectively and in their own individual self interest, negotiate institutional strictures and rules over time in order to arrive at increasingly efficient outcomes. In this sense institutions are the 'by-product of (a) strategic conflict(s)' that, intentionally or not, coordinates interests among disparate actors over time arriving at equilibrium, or in other words 'commonly agreed upon norms' (Ensminger and Rutten 1990). Institutions change, it is argued, when the calculus of cost and benefit no longer favors coordinated action between actors. In anthropology, this approach to institutional emergence and institutional change is exemplified in the work of Ensminger (1992), Acheson (1994), and Lesorogol (2008) amongst others.

Although such work highlights the role of individual actors, the asymmetric distribution of power, and the complex processes of negotiation and bargaining, there are however a number of issues other anthropologists raise concerning the application of rational choice models to social institutions and institutional dynamics (McCay and Jentoft 1998; Peters 1994). In new institutionalist works, the actors that make up institutions are rational, autonomous decision-makers rather than the socially embedded and politically enabled or constrained actors that exist in real social interactions (McCay 2001). Moreover, institutions differentially empower and constrain actors' choices by supporting and privileging particular norms, rules, and strictures and are "clearly not simply mechanisms for efficiently allocating resources" but are also techniques of discipline and control (Agrawal 2005). This is clearly seen in Sara Berry's (2001) work among the Asante where conflicts over property centered more on control over people and only indirectly over land as a productive resource itself. In social situations marked by modes of domination, clearly seen in the case of gender, for example, norms may never have been agreed upon; rather, institutions, always built within social fields marked by inequality, may result from coercion, subjection, deference, acquiescence or even violence rather than 'free' negotiation and bargaining. Even gifting, that sine qua non of moral economies, can be deployed in strategic acts that create or reinforce forms of domination and submission that may be considered in broader terms as unjust and oppressive (Hann 1998).

Clearly, as feminist scholarship has demonstrated, institutions, through the distribution of entitlements in households, amongst kin, or in communities, are also sites of *social reproduction*, where inequalities are remade (Rocheleau et al. 1996). In this sense, institutions do a lot of other ‘work’ besides spread risk, reduce uncertainty, diminish transaction costs, and coordinate interests. It is this other ‘work’ that may be the more important factor in institutional maintenance than efficient distribution of physical goods and capital. Moreover, institutions, in their effective use of ideology and culture, often appear natural or ‘timeless’, much like tradition, and consequently are in effect a kind of cultural hegemony that support particular configurations of entitlement distribution (Agrawal 2005; Crehan 1997; Gramsci 1971).

When people engage institutions to access resources, including those critical to their livelihoods, they legitimate, even if done so reluctantly, that institution’s powers of authority and control. Yet, as hegemony implies, actors can contest that institution as a legitimate arbiter of access as hegemonies are never complete and are at times resisted and even challenged (Scott 1985). In the context of dramatic social change, such as in the post-socialist ‘transition’, such hegemonies were to a great extent laid bare, providing a context for contestation, challenge, and the emergence of new ones. In other contexts, institutional change can be incremental where continual re-interpretation, forced to the forefront through constant social conflict, dispute, resistance, negotiation, or bargaining, can ultimately lead to dramatic shifts in the distribution of entitlements.

### ***Property***

Property, as an institution of significant political power, can be an important site of both hegemony and resistance. In the post-socialist context, property has been of particularly important significance because of the dramatic difference in the dominant property regimes between what existed in the socialist period and the dominance of private property regimes in the broader capitalist world. In the Mongolian context, property, an important institutional forum through which herders access resources, has emerged as a primary site of contestation in the rural economy. Herders in Uguumur have developed a range of different conceptions of property rights and modes of appropriation which have been contrasted to a state property regime that is both ambiguous and arbitrarily enforced.

Property is often defined in economics as a means of regulating access to scarce resources and increasing efficiency by establishing secure ‘claim(s) or expectation(s) over a future stream of benefits arising from’ those resources (McCarthy 2004). In contrast, anthropologists have long favored a broader definition that defines property relations as the relationships between persons in regards to things. In other words, as McCarthy (2004: 10)

defines the concept, 'property' is 'a network of social relations that governs the conduct of people with respect to the use and dispositions of things'. Others have offered similar definitions ranging from 'relations of persons to things', 'person-person relations mediated through things, and 'a bundle of rights' in things (Verdery 2003). Drawing on the work of Carol Rose (1994), a number of researchers have found value in the term 'property regime', meaning the structure of rights and duties characterizing the relationship of one individual to another with respect to a resource' (Sneath 2002a; Verdery 2003; Verdery and Humphrey 2004).

Critics of the former definition have argued that not all property is beneficial as such 'rights' also entail duties and obligations which may be viewed more as a cost than a benefit and particular configurations may not necessarily be more efficient than others. Moreover, such definitions neglect that resources are often made scarce by allocating property rights which ultimately support particular uses of resources and particular definitions of 'efficiency', thereby depoliticizing the property-making process (Fairhead 2001). As Wolf (1972) makes clear:

The property connection in complex societies is not merely an outcome of local or regional ecological processes, but a battleground of contending forces which utilize jural patterns to maintain or restructure the economic, social and political relations of society.

Verdery (2003:15), critiquing anthropological definitions, argues, property is a concept to be studied rather than redefined as an analytical concept, as "we should concentrate on the power and operation of the property *idea* not look for better definitions." Moreover, as Hann (1998) observes, if we define property in such broad ways, we ultimately expand property to include nearly all social relations. Other researchers have questioned the definitions themselves, arguing that such 'property' definitions do not include non-person actors and assume that actors are unified subjects themselves. In Mongolian terms, an *ezen* or 'master of land' must maintain reciprocal relations with local mountains and other environmental features in order to justify their 'mastery' (Sneath 2001). In this sense, land does not 'belong' to people per se or any one person. Although such work calls into question the way we use the term 'property', I do not argue along with Strathern (1999) that anthropologists should 'disappear' property or abandon the concept, but instead, following Verdery (2003) and others, focus on the ways property 'claims' compete and 'rights' are instituted.

Yet, in order to do this, I argue, along with Von Benda-Beckmann (1998), we must separate 'property' and its 'rights' from broader notions of access and entitlement. Consequently, we should view property, an institutionalized and/or claimed 'right' of access, as a particular point on a continuum of entitlements or the distribution of entitlements across society. In other words, property is just one aspect of access that simply has narrower, even though critically

important, implications. This is not a rejection of broader notions of ‘property’ in order to elevate the importance of native theories as others might argue or to distinguish them from Western definitions of property as simply another native theory (however, valid that may be), but a rejection for the sake of a more politically realistic and flexible view of the panoply ways in which people relate to things some of which are institutionalized and some of which are not. Subsequently, following Ribot (2001), property here is seen as the institutionalized ‘rights’, or potential rights voiced as *claims*, whereas access encompasses a broader sense of both de jure and de facto means of securing an ability to possess, use or dispose of some ‘thing’.<sup>11</sup> In other words, I see property as an institution, both in a formal legal sense and in customary terms (Moore 1986), that works as an ideological method of tying subjects to things.

Moreover, rather than focusing narrowly on ‘property’ per se, we should concentrate instead on the way property intersects with broader social fields, powers, and authorities, which is of greater practical significance than solely focusing on ‘institutions’ because changes in property rights are at times not as important as changes in the context in which one can effectively use those ‘rights’ (Hann 1998). In other words, we should expand beyond property not just to claims of ‘property’ and entitlements but also to the social, economic, political, and environmental conditions that underwrite those claims and entitlements by examining the overlapping hierarchies of authority, as they are deployed in social practice, regulating and controlling access to things and resources (Gezon 2006). Such work begins, as the dissertation does in chapter 3, by examining the flow and distribution of benefits from resource access (i.e. livestock and income). Beginning with resource use, researchers can then trace out the myriad social relations that support not only particular property ‘regimes’ but also in a broader sense the underlying politics of access and control. By examining the way in which property, claims, and other social relations shape access to and control over resources calls attention to the way shifts in property also shifts risks, obligations and liabilities within society (Dunn 1998; Verdery and Humphrey 2004).

Viewing property in this way requires, foremost, a framework that incorporates a deep understanding of the politics of institution building. Robbins (2006), drawing on Hegel, argues that property, like other kinds of social norms and institutions, is inherently a political process whereby property refers not to the material possession of ‘things’ but rather as meaningful symbolic exchange whereby the goal is *mutual recognition*. In this sense, claims of ‘property’ (or other norms and institutions for that matter) compete, as a symbolic exchange because they are imbued with meaning, until they are mutually recognized by previously antagonistic actors or

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<sup>11</sup> This would be very close to Sen’s (1983) notion of entitlement as discussed above (i.e. the command or power over the channels of access).

groups of actors, and in that process legitimated. Yet, I argue, we cannot elevate such symbolic exchanges above the material world in which they take place. As chapters 5 and 7 will demonstrate, this process often involves external forces that elevate particular claims above others, such as the state or in the case presented here also by development NGOs and their state-based allies. In this sense, mutual recognition is neither external to materially-present ‘modes of domination’ nor devoid of coercion, pressure, or even violence. In this sense, property, a technology of power (Foucault 1975) and institutionalized set of social boundaries that intentionally excludes others from the possession, use, and alienation of particular things, has significant material effects (Dunn 1998).

## **Research Design and Methods**

As I discussed earlier, the research phase of this project began with a different goal in mind. The intention was to examine whether absentee herd-ownership had a critical effect on the ability of local resource management institutions to effectively monitor, sanction, and enforce the codes and rules of resource use. Consequently, the research design was geared towards illuminating whether or not this was in fact the case and therefore the project site selection and methodology were shaped around these sets of questions and data needs. Yet, it became clear in the first few months of research that most herders were part-time absentee, and full-time absentee herd-owners were few in the region selected. Moreover, the differences in resource use between those who were absentee and those who were not was minor and other more important variables seem to be at play.<sup>12</sup> For example, the differences between classes of herders in regards to resource use were large and important. Regardless, I maintained the original research design understanding that it would produce data for other possible questions and research needs as outlined above.

### ***A note on scale***

The research presented here is a ground-up study of the politics of resource access, control, and use. Researchers must decide the scale both temporally and spatially from which to examine these politics. While some may work at the level of local institutions themselves, others may look at state policy and administration, and still, others, as this research primarily does, look

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<sup>12</sup> Only one of the households in the sample was significantly ‘absent’ enough that I would call him an absentee herd-owner. Amongst the wealthy part-time herders and the wealthy full-time herders there was not sufficiently consistent difference in resource use patterns to warrant writing about here. Moreover, many herd-owners, poor and wealthy alike, are absent for periods of time, although this depends largely on their ability to find additional labor. I describe this in chapters 3 and 4. Because there is such diversity amongst those who are part-time or not-quite-full time, the differences were largely attributed to other social phenomena and not absenteeism.

at these issues from the point of view of the actors engaged in the use of resources and securing access to them. From this entry point, dictated by the framework outlined in the previous section, this research examines both how social actors navigate the conditions of access and also how they manipulate those conditions to either individual or collective advantages shifting the process of institutional bricolage to their favor. This requires investigation at other levels as well, appreciating the multitude of actors and institutions that condition access and the ways in which they may overlap. This requires a gradual process of studying up through different scales from households to large kin-groupings to local administration to national ministries. Nevertheless, this is a study of many institutional powers interacting not necessarily at a single site, because these are mobile pastoralists, but in the experiences of a single group of people delineated by their mutual connection to a single site – Uguumur – as citizens.

### **Site Selection**

Site selection was based on finding the presence of absentee herd-ownership in order to test the research hypotheses. It was assumed that larger numbers of absentee herd-owners would be found in regions with high levels of economic inequality between households. In looking at statistical data obtained from the National Statistical Office in 2006 during preliminary fieldwork, I determined that Bayankhutag had one of the highest livestock per person ratios in the country (93 head per person) and significant levels of poverty (15 per cent). Preliminary fieldwork confirmed this. Moreover, two colleagues who have visited nearly every aimag in the country both stated that Bayankhutag was, according to their impressions, highly unequal. Without more specific data, it was presumed that Bayankhutag had high levels of socio-economic inequality. In 2006, preliminary fieldwork demonstrated that the soum did display high levels of inequality. Consequently, in 2007 I returned to the soum and more specifically, the 3<sup>rd</sup> bag or Uguumur, to conduct the research presented in this dissertation.

The primary site for this research was Uguumur. However, because the population studied was highly mobile, the research was also mobile, following herders to other soums, some of which were nearly 200 kilometers from Uguumur itself, a great distance for any mobile community. In the summer, my field-assistants and I traveled well over a thousand kilometers locating households for this study.<sup>13</sup> A considerable amount of time was also spent in the other

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<sup>13</sup> My field assistants were critical in the field work. One of my field assistants who was with me throughout the research phase was from the region studied. The other assistant was a student in the Department of Anthropology at NUM and accompanied us as only for a short time during the summer. Although they did not assist in conducting actual research, they were very helpful in facilitating the day to day logistics.



two bags of Uguumur as I went on *otor* with my host family during the winter of 2008 and joined their relatives there again in the fall. Truly, this research was multi-sited. Conducting research in this way allowed me to witness and record the ways in which different scales and levels of authority and individual strategies interact, conflict, and compete both for recognition and legitimacy in a highly contested landscape marked by uncertainty and insecurity. These opportunities highlighted the ways in which post-socialist state-society relations are dizzyingly complex, often contradictory, and always context-specific.

I have been questioned by a number of researchers working in the Mongolia context as to why I chose to do research at the bag level. The results of the research presented here demonstrate why doing anthropological research at such small scales can be so illuminating. Much of what is reported here has evaded other researchers and the reason lies with the differences in scale. This is the first study by a foreign researcher in the Mongolian context to be carried out solely at the bag level and much of what is described here, particularly the importance of kinship in herders' territorial strategies, could not have been observed and recorded if the project had been conducted at the *soum* or even multi-*soum* level as most research has been done.

## **Methods**

The primary research method guiding the data collection process was participant observation. Data collected from participant observation, ranging from such practical matters as combing cashmere goats to the ritual importance of mountain worship practices, proved extremely valuable in presenting the researcher with a firmer understanding of the complexities of herding livelihoods in Mongolia. It also deeply improved the other data collection methods utilized here by refining terminology and the framing of questions posed to participants. Participant observation was achieved by living with a series of herding families (4) over the course of the research period, visiting with other households in the research sample, and by attending community events such as local *naadam* festivals, wrestling competitions, horse races, administrative meetings, herder conferences, and school events.

From June to early August of 2008 I administered a household survey to 68 households registered in the *bag*. The survey collected a range of data including: (1) household demographic data including household size, kin relations, educational levels of members, ethnicity, and religious affiliation, (2) economic data on assets, subsistence and market-oriented production activities, herd management, marketing, labor and herding employment, non-pastoral income opportunities, livestock exchanges, and gifting and (3) resource use data with migration tables. The survey had three major goals: (1) establish a base of knowledge of the local pastoral economy and the households in the *soum* in order to inform later interviews, (2) to measure the

level of socio-economic differentiation between households and examine herd dynamics, and (3) collect base level data on migration and settlement. A total of 34 households were again sampled from this sample population for the second interview portion of the survey research. These interviews and surveys focused on: (1) herd management practices, (2) migration and other resource use decision-making processes, and (3) collection of genealogical data. Migration interviews focused specifically on how herders selected locations for settlement and the methods by which they secured access to those locations. Resource use practices for the purposes of this study were limited to those practices which concern the use of pasture for livestock grazing and settlement, the use of water points such as rivers, lakes, ponds, and wells, and the use of salt-licks for livestock.

Interviews were conducted on property and resource management institutions with key informants such as bag and soum governors, administrators, extension agents, members of resource management institutions, elders, and prominent members of the local community. Questions in the survey also supplemented this. The interviews focused on determining: (1) how access to resources is organized at the institutional level, (2) the major rules, ethics, principles and social norms that guide resource use, (3) emic definitions of appropriate and inappropriate kinds of resource use, (4) the rules of in/exclusion, (5) the ways in which resource use is monitored at each level including informal forms of monitoring by institutional members, (6) the kinds of enforcement mechanisms and sanctions that are utilized to ensure appropriate use and how the sanctions are applied (7) the kinds of situations when rules can be bent and by whom, and (8) the kinds of dispute resolution options available.

Case studies of resource disputes and conflict were collected through semi-structured interviews with sampled households. Resource conflicts have been argued to be an appropriate lens through which to examine changing patterns of resource use and control (Gezon 1997). Moreover, disputes and conflicts allow researchers to examine the claims actors deploy and via conflict or dispute resolution, the way in which power operates in institutional settings. The 34 re-sampled households were asked to recall resource disputes or conflicts that occurred within the prior three years and during migration data collection households were asked to state whether disputes or confrontations had occurred during the period of settlement in a particular location. Although herders were extremely reluctant to discuss such issues, in a number of disputes case histories were collected through semi-structured 'narrative' interviews with principal actors (or sets of actors) involved including bag and soum governors.

## **Data Analysis**

Upon returning from the field gathered data was entered, coded, and analyzed. Interview, field note, and case study data were coded and analyzed using ATLAS.ti. The maps that are featured in this dissertation were mostly created using Adobe Illustrator. I used a variety of data sets to ‘rectify’ the borders and locations of resources, settlements, campsites, and other important data variables. These included satellite images from Google Earth ©, locally produced maps, official soum maps, and participatory mapping exercises which were entered and layered to produce the maps seen here. I also became very familiar with the landscape and names of important features and locations of campsites; this familiarity was reflected in my field-notes and was helpful in creating the maps. A few of the ‘herd loss’ maps were created using ArcGIS from NSO Data. Other maps featured here but not created by the author are properly cited. Kinship data was analyzed using Genopro, an easy-to-use genealogy database system for amateur genealogists. I found the program user friendly and extremely helpful in coding social relationships between households. Survey data was entered into Excel and analyzed.

## **Chapter Overview**

Chapter 2 argues that zud is a nature-society hybrid rather than solely a meteorological hazard and that the history and place of zud is integral to its reality as a material phenomenon. I trace out this logic by exploring the weather-based risks and disasters that herders face and how governance shapes not only risk (or sensitivities) but the events themselves. Clearly, herders are vulnerable to a range of environmental hazards that are constantly in ecological flux. Yet, more than these phenomena, which have long been facts of life in the Mongolian steppe, the current socio-political and moral economic framework of governance and administration poses an even greater source of uncertainty and frustration. I demonstrate this by exploring the history of Uguumur and the emergence of institutional uncertainty in the pastoral economy since the collapse of the socialist state and decollectivization.

Chapter 3 examines the herd dynamics of sampled households looking at livestock acquisitions, livestock management, and livestock ‘disposal’ through various sources of ‘loss’ whether as sales, consumption, or zud-based losses. This chapter argues that the unequal distribution of livestock and exposure to the consumption ‘squeeze’ alters livestock asset cycles and can render households with fewer livestock disproportionately vulnerable to total herd loss. In particular, I argue that because of the various pressures poor households face and their inability to manage the risk of zud-based losses, the occurrence of zud poses a grave threat to their livelihoods. Data is presented on household herd management and household wealth cycles including livestock acquisitions, breeding practices, and slaughtering and sales decisions. Lastly,

this chapter will look at meanings of wealth and the influence of these cultural framings on contemporary understandings of rural political economy.

Chapter 4 examines the increasing commodification of labor in Uguumur and the decline of kin-based labor cooperation. The data presented here represents a marked departure from earlier studies that demonstrated the pervasiveness of cooperative labor relations and kin-based economic coordination. Increasing socio-economic inequality amongst herding households has provided a labor base from which wealthy herders can support their large herds and intensify their herd management strategies through the use of hired and contract herders. Moreover, the flexible nature of hired labor allows some greater flexibility in movement while others who are labor-poor and unable to recruit additional labor find themselves incapable of moving great distances.

Chapter 5 examines recent shifts in ‘property’ dynamics. In this chapter I look at the variety of claims herders make on campsites, the various ways they exchange complex rights to use resources, and the ways they monitor, defend, and enforce those rights. Moreover, this chapter examines how certain rights become legitimate and how this process intersects with shifting fields of authority and administration.

Chapter 6 continues to look at the social relations surrounding access to land. I examine the micro-politics of authority and control over pastoral resources in Uguumur and adjacent soums. In particular this chapter describes how territorial kin groups and mobile collectivities (*buleg*) organizing around elder male patrons have emerged in the context of institutional uncertainty generated by post-socialist reforms. These new modes of organizing intersect with state-led measures supporting partial privatization of campsites in the 2002 Land Law and development initiatives headed by IFAD that attempt to further sediment decentralization policies by promoting the creation of herder cooperative groups. These projects, by issuing possession contracts to wells and requiring acquisition of campsite possession contracts by cooperative members, have reinforced the territorial nature of these collectivities, promoting divisions and encouraging new modes of thinking about locality, belonging, and property.

In Chapter 7 data on mobility and settlement are presented. This chapter the various ecological, economic, political, and social factors that influence how, when, where, with whom, and why herders migrate and settle in certain locations. Various configurations of these factors and conditions, I argue, influence the range of migration strategies that households employ, much of which has not been reported in any systematic way in the literature. In particular, otor, or non-customary migration, and satellite camps will be discussed in detail and how they relate to wealthy herders herd management and resource use strategies. This chapter looks at migration

and settlement as outcomes of complex processes that both enable and constrain herder movement.

Chapter 8 examines the formal administrative apparatus for emergency management. In particular I focus on the actors and legal institutions involved in mobilizing households from affected regions to non-affected ones. It is clear that vulnerability to hazards is at times shaped in the moment by the governing strategies and legal deployments at play. These findings point to the strategic nature of law. In some instances mutable and interpretive, law is also material as a function of real state power. Those who can ‘work the law’ or ‘who the law works for’ are important questions because law can have exigent impacts. As this chapter shows, the law only worked for some of the households during the zud of 2007-2008.

Chapter 9 sharpens the focus on the differential capacity of households to both manage the risk of hazards and cope with the consequences of such disastrous events through mobility. I aim to connect the importance of the factors discussed in Chapter 6 that make mobility possible with individual households’ attempts to adapt to shifting ecological and political conditions. This chapter accomplishes these goals by profiling the household migration and settlement practices of 4 households from July 2007 until July 2008. From these migrations profiles we can see how various factors limit or enable herders’ most important risk management practice: mobility. Moreover, by comparing these strategies with household livestock mortality rates and statistical comparison of households within and between categories we gain a deeper understanding of the effect of mobile capacity on asset accumulation and loss. I argue that understanding how this occurs requires the use of quantitative and qualitative data in laying bare the shifting, yet forcefully ‘real’ structures of access, entitlement, and property that differentially distribute the resources which make mobile livelihoods possible.

## Chapter 2 Putting *Zud* in its Time and Place



*Figure 2.1. UNDP hired local herders to dispose of carcasses following the 2010 zud disaster. (Photo taken by Gilles Sabrie for the New York Times, permission given to reprint).*

### Introduction

In this chapter I re-examine the ‘nature’ of zud by exploring weather data from various sources including from Uguumur. I argue that contemporary interpretations of zud and current scientific endeavors to ‘locate’ it as an object of analysis have fundamentally misunderstood the nature of this phenomenon. By repositioning zud in its original Mongolian meanings I aim to demonstrate the importance of viewing zud as a product of history. By putting zud in its place and time, I hope to make it clear that it is critical to lay out the history of institutional change and uncertainty produced through post-socialist political economic transformations. In doing so I hope to show that zud, rather than being an “external threat” or hazardous weather phenomenon, is the result of a massive revolution in property, entitlements, and new forms of social inequality that have emerged in the last fifteen years of neo-liberal inspired rule. As institutions are critical not just in mitigating risk but in producing it, zud, in this sense, is a social ‘thing’ as much as it is ecological.

In the last half of this chapter I introduce Uguumur as my ethnographic entry point into understanding the place and time-based nature of zud. In particular I focus on the decollectivization of Temtsel collective, the primary social, political, and economic unit in Bayankhutag county from 1958 until 1993. This crucial juncture in the history of Mongolia set the stage for what I and the many herders in Uguumur witnessed during January and February of 2008. In the following chapters, I pick up from this massive state-society shift to demonstrate the concomitant transformations in local institutions and household decisions concerning livestock, labor, and land in Uguumur and beyond.

## Mongolian Climate and Zud

Herders in Mongolia face a variety of environmental risks that pose periodic, concentrated threats including predation by wolves and birds-of-prey, disease, lightening strikes, flash floods, and others. On a grander scale, households also confront drought or *gan* and a phenomena referred to as *zud*. Unlike the former, these latter risks are often widely distributed geographically and typically are slow-onset. In the grey and academic literature they are generally treated as weather-based phenomena and an outcome of Mongolia's harsh, unforgiving, and highly variable extreme continental climate.

The Mongolian calendar is marked by long, extremely cold winters with temperatures dipping below -40 C and short but hot summer growing seasons where temperatures occasionally will break 40 C. From November to March temperatures almost always remain below freezing allowing the permafrost to extend over the northern half of the country, although Uguumur is just south of the line. During this time all precipitation falls in the form of snow and the surfaces of lakes, rivers, and streams are frozen solid. Summers are hot and dry, although rain storms are not infrequent in the early month of June. Temperatures in the day stay typically around 90 F. Fall is pleasant and the temperature drops gradually. Spring on the other hand is a period of great uncertainty, as forage is lacking, animals are weak and birthing, and the weather is unpredictable. A variety of storms, rain, wind, snow, ice, and most frequently dust, can appear in a matter of minutes. April dust-storms are an almost daily occurrence and can literally blot out the sun. Herders must navigate such environmental vagaries almost on a daily occurrence.

Overall, the country is arid with the majority of precipitation falling in summer. Despite the extreme temperature swings, Mongolia is quite sunny with 257 cloudless days a year on average due mostly to its central location in a region with high atmospheric pressure. The different eco-zones within Mongolia, however, experience wide differences in precipitation and temperature (see Figure 2.2 below). The taiga (2) and *khangai* or forest-steppe region (3), which are located in the central Khangai mountains, the far west, and along the northern Russian border, can accumulate 20-35 centimeters of precipitation annually. The dry steppe (4) and desert steppe (5) that make up most of the east and central region of Mongolia where Uguumur is located accrues 10-20 cm on average. In the southern and western gobi or desert (6) only very little falls in most years. In addition to this variation in precipitation, these eco-zones are also marked by differences in temperature as well with the gobi being generally hotter and the *khangai* and taiga of the northern border being typically colder.

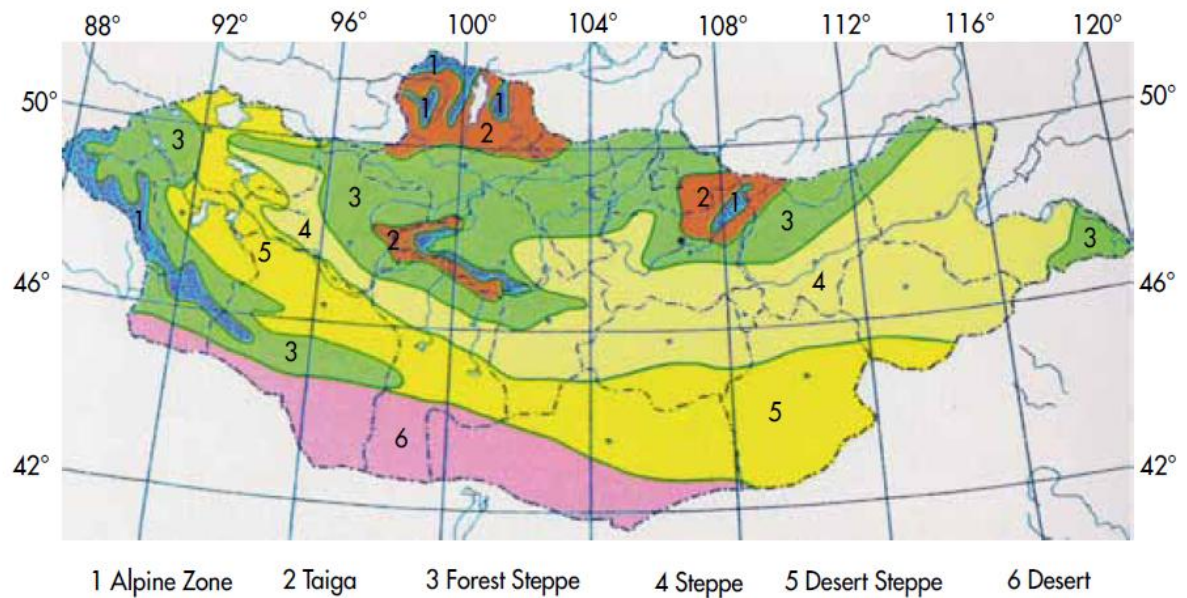


Figure 2.2. The major ecozones of Mongolia (Batima et al 2009).

Despite this general picture, Mongolia's weather is also characterized by extreme variability and unpredictability and the annual averages do not reveal the wide fluctuations in precipitation and temperature from year-to-year or even within seasons. Moreover, occurrences of sudden weather events such as snow, dust, wind, hail, and rain storms make weather prediction an uncertain affair. Annual shifts in temperature and precipitation combined with these periodic events can result in conditions referred to as *zud*, a complex phenomenon which threaten both livestock and human populations.

In Uguumur and elsewhere in Mongolia, herders recognize a variety of different kinds of *zud*, each an outcome of various weather events and ecological processes including overgrazing. Here I describe the major distinctions.

### Types of Zud

#### *Tsagaan Zud* (White *zud*)

Tagaan *zud* occurs when extreme snowfall (i.e. a blizzard-like condition) prevents livestock from successfully grazing on available forage. Typically this kind of *zud* is not dependent on the pre-winter forage tiller height as snowfall heights of up to more than a meter would obscure any available growth. Because of the extreme cold conditions of Mongolia, if the snowfall occurs early enough in the region the cover could last until the March thaw.



#### *Xar Zud* (black zud)

Xar zud results from the lack of snow rather than the overabundance of it. Typically in winter herders water their animals by snow rather than wells because the widespread availability of snow allows for a greater range of pasturage than in the immediate vicinity of wells. Both humans and animals suffer from this lack. Xar zud is also typically associated with drought conditions in the proceeding summer. In other cases, xar zud can result from *otogono* (voles) and other pest invasions such as grasshoppers or even forest or steppe fires that eliminate critical winter pasturage. My first host household went on winter otor in 2005 because of *otogono* infestation that destroyed winter pasture.

#### *Tumuriin zud* (iron zud)

Tumur zud or iron zud occurs when massive temperature fluctuations in winter melt snow cover and then refreeze it creating a hard ice sheet that prevents animals from grazing. The temperature differentials between shaded and non-shaded areas means that tumur zud can often be patchy in its effect on pastures, although clearly it weakens livestock.

#### *Xuiten zud* (cold zud)

Cold zud or xuiten zud occurs when winter temperatures drop for a short period of time, sometimes only a few days. According to Batima et al. (2009) temperatures 5-10 C below the local mean for a period of 3 days or more can result in serious weakening and in many cases high rates of mortality. Extreme air temps in such situations are often combined with freezing winds and animals, prevented from grazing, weaken in the attempt to maintain body temperature.

#### *Xavsarsan zud* (combined zud)

At certain times the above conditions will be combined in a single winter leading to massive die-offs of livestock. The infamous zuds of 1944-45 and 1999-2000 were the combination of tsagaan zud with xuiten zud leading to massive reductions of the national herd.

#### *Tuurain zud* (hoof zud)

Unlike the zud conditions described above tuurain or hoof zud is quite different because of the human induced conditions that lead to such situations. Tuurain zud results from overgrazing or pasture degradation resulting from trampling. Such conditions can be combined with tsagaan, xar, tumur, or xuiten zud-like factors, but the human element as a root cause

distinguishes it from the others. My host household, for example, experienced a tuurain zud or a zud caused by the overgrazing of a specific territory in which snowfall exceeds pasture height.

### Temporal Frequency and Geographic Extent of Zud

How frequently and where are such events more likely to occur? Diaz and Fernandez-Gimenez (1999) have demonstrated that much of Mongolian pastureland, particularly the desert, desert-steppe, and steppe regions would qualify as non-equilibrium rangeland because of the stochastic variation in biomass production which is highly dependent on variable rainfall and temperature. Yet, as the presence of stable eco-zones attest, such as in the govi, steppe, or khangai regions, there is a degree of regularity within those regions. Batima et al (2006; 2009) and the Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology have attempted, using historical data, to show that some regions of Mongolia are more susceptible to *zud* and drought occurrence demonstrating that such events are largely predictable in their geographic and temporal variability. In Figure 2.3 below from Batima et al (2006) we see that according to the weather data collected from over 300 weather stations during the period of 1973-2001, certain regions have had high frequency (red) of white and black zud and others have had lower (green) frequencies of such events.<sup>14</sup>

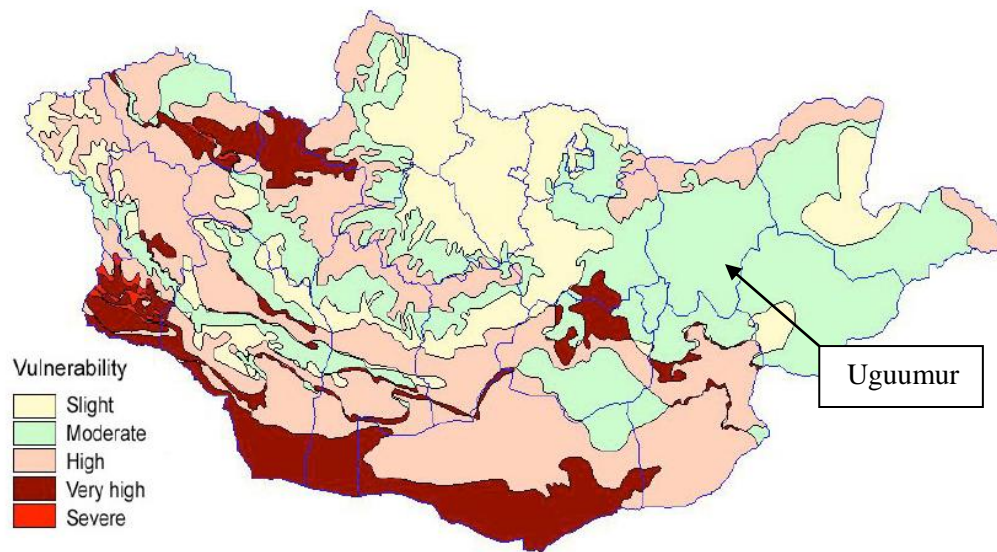


Figure 2.3. Geographic variation of frequency of white or black zud 1973-2000. (Batima et al 2006)

<sup>14</sup> The data indices consisted of temperature, snowfall, wind speed, and pasture measurements. The data are highly problematic for a number of reasons. As I discussed below, these conditions do not necessarily infer zud. For example, the regions rated as severe along the Chinese border are generally uninhabited during winter. Consequently, following the definition of zud I provide below, these areas would not have experienced zud even if conditions were bad.

In Figure 2.3, it is clear the western and southern regions of Mongolia, according to the index of weather-based variables used by the Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology, are significantly more prone to *zud* events. Moreover, in the second map below (Figure 2.4), we see the frequency of *zud* coupled with the frequency of drought (*gan*). In many cases, drought is the precipitating variable in the occurrence of some types of *zud*. As we can see in both these maps, Khentii aimag and Bayankhutag, where Uguumur is located, are rated as having ‘moderate’ vulnerability to *zud* and ‘slight’ for *zud* combined with drought.

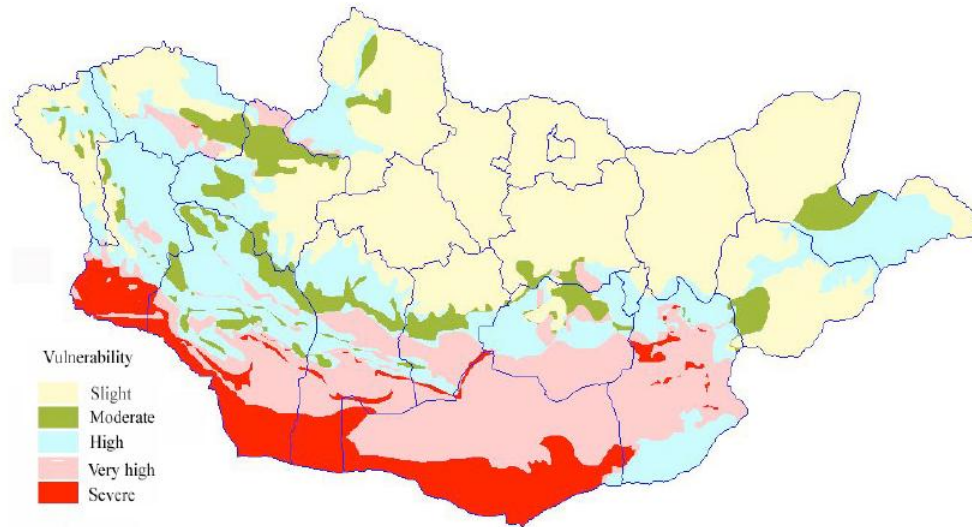


Figure 2.4. Geographic vulnerability to white or black *zud* combined with drought 1973-2000. (Batima et al 2006)

This picture, though, is complicated by wide variability. In Figures 2.5 and 2.6, Batima et al (2009) show that the severity of both winter conditions and drought, although increasing over time, are also highly variable. Such fluctuations point to the ever-shifting nature of weather in Mongolia. In Figure 2.5<sup>15</sup>, compiled by the Institute, the dramatic shifts in their winter weather index demonstrate the massively variable nature of the Mongolia climate. The drought index<sup>16</sup>, shown in Figure 2.6, also shows a wide range in annual conditions.

<sup>15</sup> The winter index consists of measurements of winter weather conditions including precipitation (i.e. snow), temperature, wind speed and depth of cold snaps.

<sup>16</sup> The drought index consists of temperature, precipitation, and forage data.

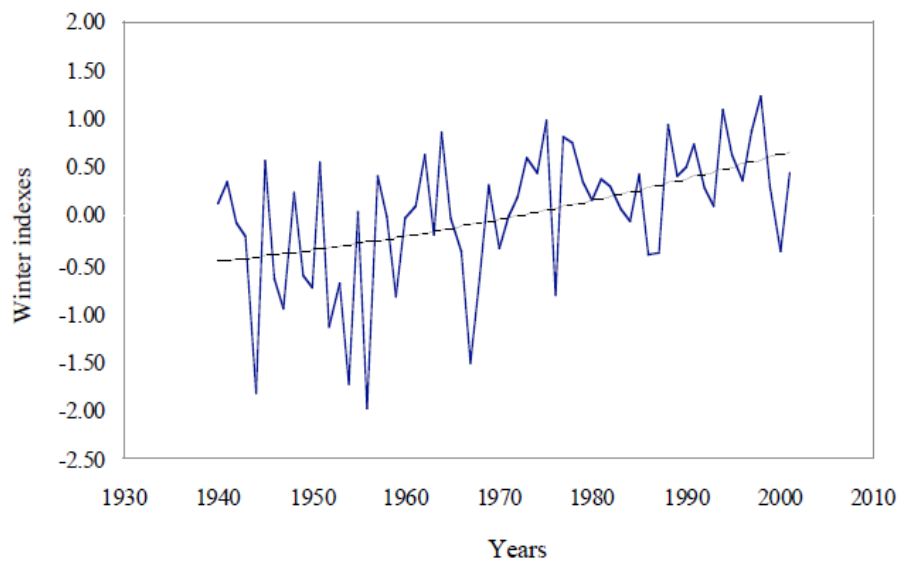


Figure 2.5. Changes in severity of winter conditions for Mongolia. (Batima et al 2006)

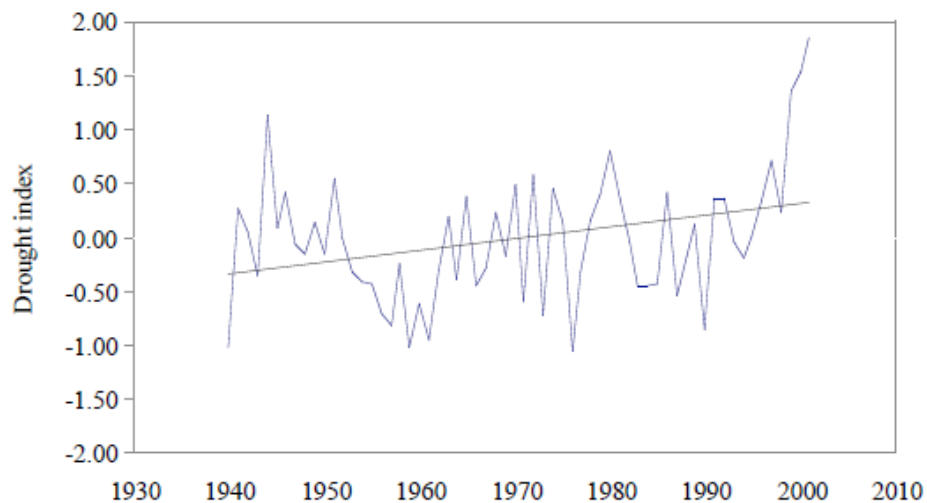


Figure 2.6. Changes in severity of drought for Mongolia. (Batima et al 2006)

In data I collected from the Provincial Institute for Meterology and Hydrology in Undurxaan, which is situated adjacent to Uguumur, the data show similar patterns of wide winter temperatures, fluctuating precipitation, and a less variable but rising average summer temperature. In the graph below (Figure 2.7), we see the average January and July temperatures for Undurxaan which borders Uguumur bag. Similar to the indices in Figures 2.5 and 2.6 above, clearly there is a rise in temperature for summer pointing to climate change factors due to global warming or other possible causes. July temperatures for instance have risen nearly 6 degrees Celsius over a 14 year period. Yet, the January temperature is more interesting because it

demonstrates the stochasticity of winter temperature, a prime variable in producing *zud*.<sup>17</sup> Yet, there is no linear change in January temperatures over time.

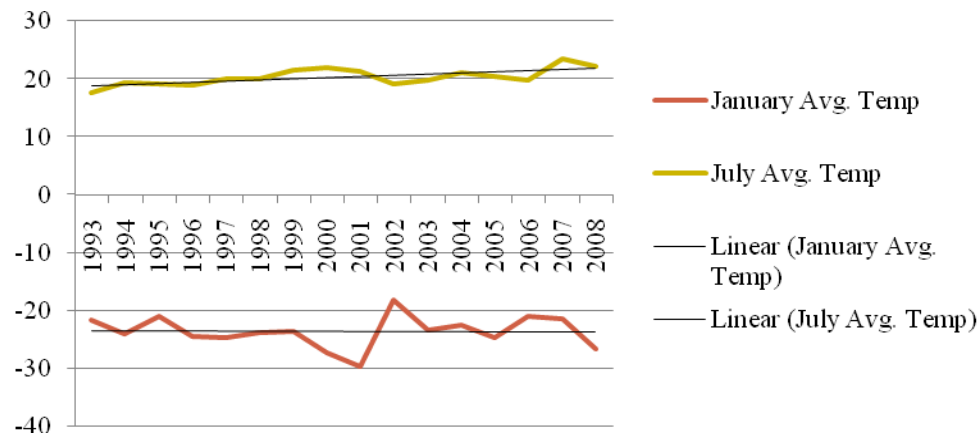


Figure 2.7. Changes in mean January and July temperatures from 1992-2008 (Data collected by Xentii Aimag Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology) .

Although such temperature swings are extreme, more convincing of the variable nature of Uguumur weather is precipitation (see Figure 2.8), the lack of which leads to *gan* or drought conditions, a potential root cause in many bad winters, and excess which can come in the form of increased snowfall. The variation between years from 313 millimeters total precipitation in 1993 to 147 in 2007 and 100 days of precipitation to 70 is quite wide.

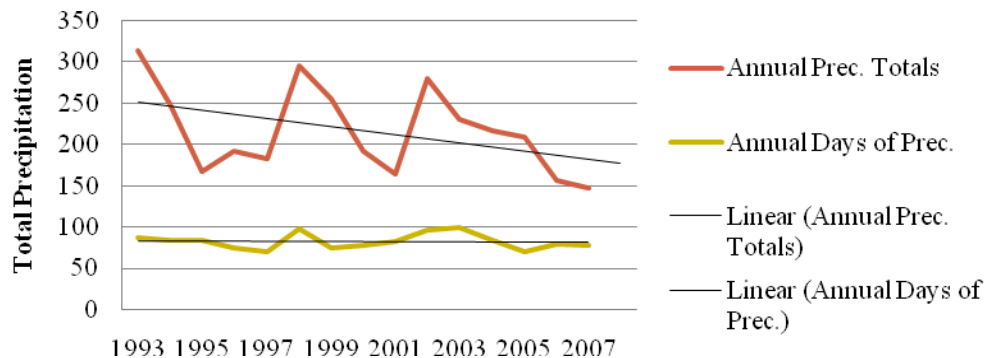
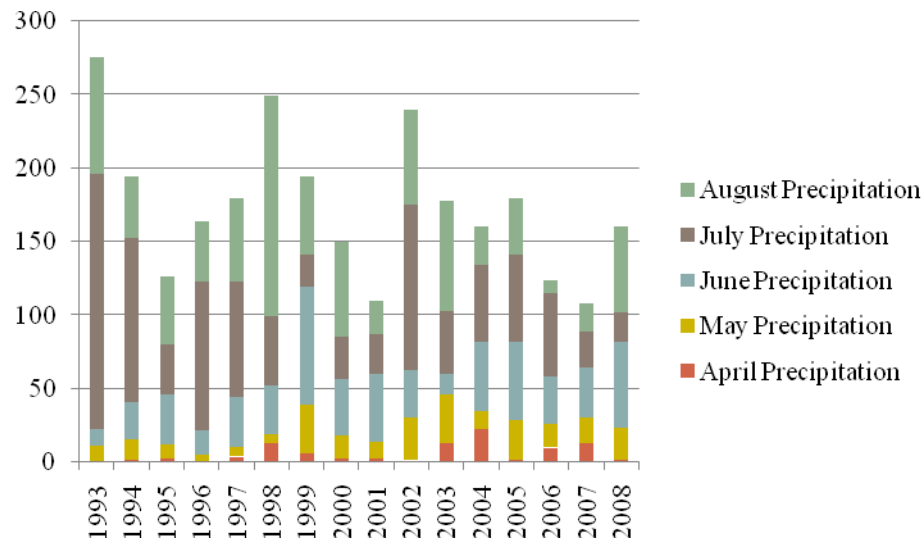


Figure 2.8. Total annual precipitation and days of precipitation 1993-2008. (Data collected by Xentii Aimag Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology)

Additionally, in Figure 2.9 below, if we look at that precipitation within years we see that there is extreme variation in the timing and monthly distribution of rains particularly in the

<sup>17</sup> The difference between the highest average annual winter temperature (-18.2 C) and lowest average annual winter temperature (-27.3 C) is nearly 9 C or 20 F.

growing season. There are trends downward for late-season rains in July and August and trends upward for early season rains, but the year to year variation makes prediction of rainfall conditions highly uncertain.



*Figure 2.9. Total monthly precipitation during growing season 1993-2008. (Data provided by Xentii Aimag Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology)*

This also makes the prediction of *zud*, drought, and other hazards also highly uncertain. In some years a drought may occur but no *zud*. In other years droughts may happen and a *zud* still occurs.

These measures are only complicated by the spectre of climate change. Data collected and compiled by Natsagdorj (2006) clearly demonstrate warming trends across the various regions of Mongolia (Figure 2.10), including the east, and a decrease in annual precipitation (Figure 2.11) in the period of 1940-2005. These dramatic shifts in climate further complicate the picture presented in Batima et al (2006; 2009).

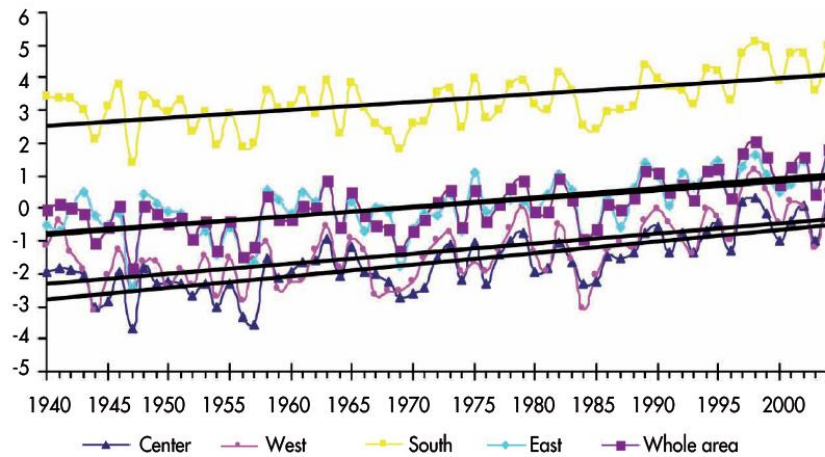


Figure 2.10. Annual mean temperature for economic regions of Mongolia (1940-2005).  
(Natsagdorj 2006)

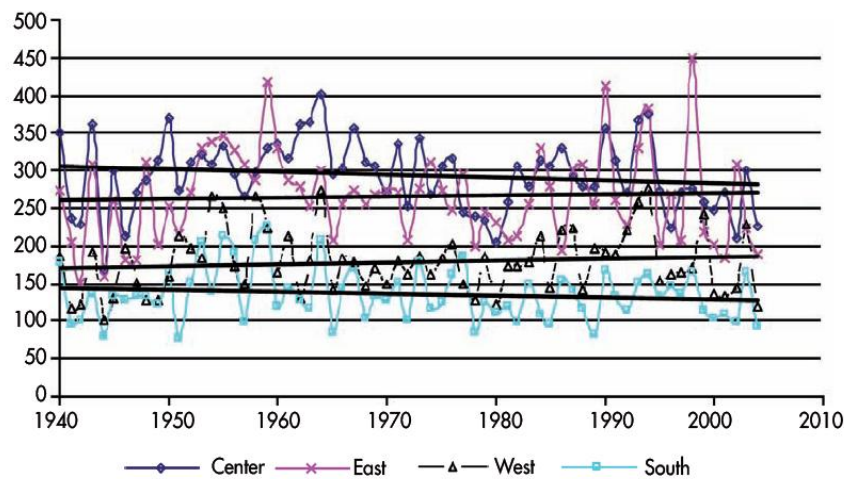


Figure 2.11. Annual mean precipitation for economic regions of Mongolia (1940-2005).  
(Nastagdorj 2006)

In fact, if we look at another, and more appropriate, proxy for zud, livestock mortality, we see that weather variables in fact may tell us little about the temporal and geographic variability of such events. Although the Figures 2.3 and 2.4 from Batima (2009) show the geographic distribution of vulnerability to certain weather variables, it does not equate with the historical data on livestock mortality. In the map below (Figure 2.12) we see the average livestock mortality rates for each soum from 1972-2008. Bayankhutag, interestingly, is a high risk soum with an average mortality rate of 5.83%, well above the national average of 4.51%. This is interesting because Figures 2.3 and 2.4 rate Khentii and Bayankhutag as low risk regions for the



weather conditions that are presupposed to not only cause zud but are considered to be zud themselves.

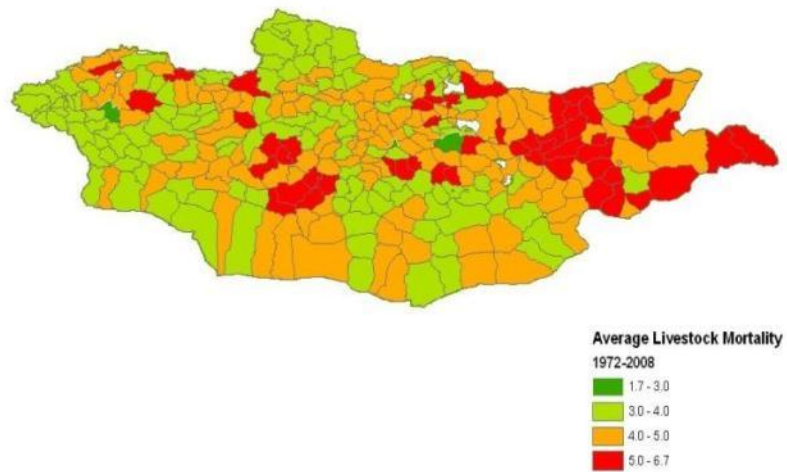


Figure 2.12. Average livestock mortality rate 1972-2008. (Data provided by NSO, Mongolia; compiled by author)

Yet, if we look at the graph below (Figure 2.13) we see that although Bayankhutag's livestock mortality rate is trending downward, the soum has experienced significant events over the course of the last 26 years. Other regions may have experienced more frequent poor conditions, but Bayankhutag is clearly in a region where both frequency and severity have combined to produce highly difficult conditions for livestock-rearing.

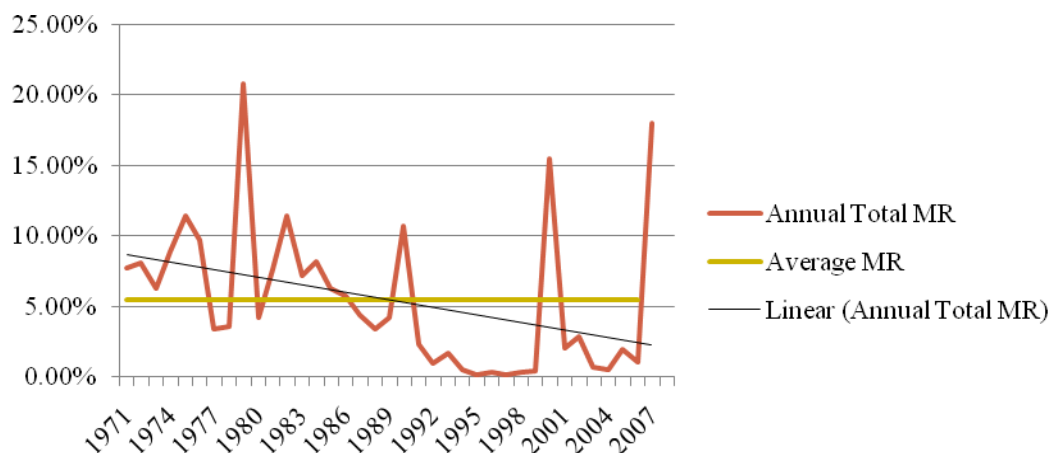


Figure 2.13. Bayankhutag soum annual livestock mortality rates 1972-2008. (Data provided by NSO and Bayankhutag soum Archives. Compiled by author)



This graph also raises some serious questions. If we look at the years 1972 to 1992 we see that the average mortality rate is 7.4% for Bayankhutag, a result clearly demonstrated by the consistent, year-on-year high rates of mortality during that period. Since privatization in 1992, however, we notice a different pattern that more adheres to the boom and bust cycles in pastoral societies around the world (Borgerhoff-Mulder et al 2010; Lybbert et al 2004; Sanderson 1983).<sup>18</sup> Undoubtedly, the underlying causes are rooted in the different management regimes in these two periods. During the collective period there were limited incentives for good management of herds and the focus on breed improvement may have led to higher natural culling rates.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, the collective incentives for managing potential losses during a major *zud* event were stronger and it is clear that socialist methods for risk mitigation were more extensive and highly coordinated compared to contemporary ones. Due to the mixed incentives in individual herd management and high investment in catastrophic risk management systems by the collectives in ‘good year’ mortality rates were higher and lower in bad years when harsh conditions would have drastically reduced herds.

One would expect different patterns in the post-socialist period. As I demonstrate in chapter 3, institutional and market conditions in the post-socialist period encourage higher rates of saving and self-insurance through increased herd growth. The shift in management authority from collective to individuals and the emergence of herding as a household livelihood activity rather than occupation has altered the way herders respond not only to deleterious environmental factors but also to broader incentives. Consequently, it would follow that the combination of greater incentives for increasing herd growth and the reduction in access to risk management techniques such as those practiced in the socialist period would produce lower mortality rates during less severe years and higher rates of catastrophic loss in the most difficult. It is interesting to note that the most severe *zud* disasters occurred before the collectives (1944-45) and after the collectives (1999-2000 and 2009-2010).

## **Zud as Hybrid**

This finding calls into question the nature of *zud*. I argue that *zud*, ontologically, has been misunderstood. This is partly because of the inappropriate frames others have used to describe this phenomenon, rooted largely in western cosmologies that view nature as something out there.

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<sup>18</sup> I calculated data for all the soums in Khentii and in various soums across the country and the pattern remains consistent.

<sup>19</sup> Negdels were probably more accepting of higher loss rates for a variety of reasons. Loss rates to begin with were probably already high, even before collectivization. The politics of overly criticizing herders was also a sensitive issue.

Economists and other social scientists describe risks as being situated on some sort of continuum between idiosyncratic risk and covariate risk. Idiosyncratic risks are those faced by individuals and are typically a product of some attribute of that individual in the context of an event. Covariate risks are those faced by a population and, in the case of weather risks, tend to exhibit geographically wide distributions. These risks are typically a product not of populations but rather external threats such as excessive snowfall, El Nino, hurricanes, or earthquake. Most events are defined somewhere along this continuum. In social science terminology, *zud* is typically viewed as a covariate risk in that it is widely distributed, externally-derived, and confronts whole populations. Yet, using the distinctions between covariate and idiosyncratic risk, *zud* is defined linguistically in the Mongolian experience largely in an idiosyncratic way. Moreover, it is not something that exists ‘out there’ but is something uniquely socio-ecological.

*Zud* refers to the death of livestock, not to any one weather-based variable or environmental event, and has often been defined by Mongolians as ‘livestock famine’ or *maliin ulsgulun* stemming from hunger (*ulsgulult*) and exhaustion (*zuderex*). But unlike human famine the phenomenon seems to be, in the description given by research participants, an individually-experienced event dependent on one’s own livestock and experience. For example, despite the conditions in Uguumur, some households faced *zud* this winter while others did not. Moving away from a region that exhibits the possibility for severe consequences means that the household will not face *zud* (*zudand nuurlexgui*) – in fact, *zud* for them cannot exist. When I asked households that did not lose stock if there was a *zud* in the winter of 2007-2008 they replied no there was not. Perplexed, I asked why this was the case. These herders explained that they moved so therefore they did not experience *zud*. Those who stayed saw their animals die and therefore experienced *zud*.<sup>20</sup>

*Zud* in this sense is different from, for example, a hurricane. When a hurricane strikes a deserted island, it is a hurricane none-the-less. A *zud* is only *zud* when someone’s animals die; it cannot exist outside of such loss.<sup>21</sup> In this sense, *zud* is a quintessential nature-culture hybrid (Latour 2004). In other words, *zud* cannot be broken down or dissected into elemental parts;

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<sup>20</sup> This does not mean that there is no such thing as *zud* risk. It simply means that *zud* is not something out there – it is attributable to the people, livestock, and ecologies involved. Latour (2004; 2009) uses the term assemblage to describe such events. In this sense, *zud* is inseparable from individuals.

<sup>21</sup> In other words, a *zud* is not a weather event; rather, it is an event of mass death at some kind of social level whether household or otherwise. The process begins with exhaustion and wasting and leads to death. All *zud* is typically associated with the lack of some resource as I explain below and may not be weather based or induced.

rather, its very nature is always simultaneously human and non-human.<sup>22</sup> As such, it is also contingent in the sense that no zud is the same. This is part of the reason why it is highly unpredictable. Although herders in Uguumur faced zud in 2007-2008, they did not all face the same zud. The households in the sample who faced zud in 2008 also claimed they faced different kinds of zud. Some claimed they faced xar zud, others tuurain zud, and still others xuiten zud. Clearly, a number of different combinations of weather and human-ecological conditions can result in a household losing livestock.

Yet, large scale zud events can happen over wide geographic areas and presumably across social groups. In 1999-2002, 12 million animals perished and in 2010, in just one year, over 8 million animals perished in what has been described as a large scale white zud. One can argue that these were covariate events<sup>23</sup>, but there are still a number of problems with viewing these events in such ways.<sup>24</sup> It would be difficult to make a case for describing zud as covariate when, for example, in the World Bank's 2006 'Mongolia Poverty Assessment', the report makes it clear that there is not only high variation in mortality rates both between years and between soums, but more interestingly between households within years and within soums. In the two figures presented below from the report (see Figure 2.14), we see the distribution of soum livestock mortality rates from 1971 onward. Each red dot represents the mortality rate of a single soum that given year. It is clear that there is a great deal of variation in most years. More interestingly, the second graph shows considerable variation between households (each household is represented by a red dot) within each affected soum during the 2002 zud. Even in soums with high mortality rates, the household rates are extremely varied. For example, even in soums with mortality rates in excess of 60 per cent there are households that experience little to no mortality loss at all! My data show very similar distributions, albeit less severe.

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<sup>22</sup> This very much accords with Mongolian notions of nature or *baigali*. *Baigali* refers not to some external reality or environment but rather to the general state of being (Humphrey and Sneath 1999). Rather than the dichotomous cosmologies of the west, the world consists of 'being' and 'beings'. Such notions render the landscape a very 'lively' space in which numerous interacting forces and agents make-up 'nature'. These landscape perspectives have deep roots in the shamanist and hunting past, before the time of Chinggis Khan.

<sup>23</sup> This is still difficult to tell from the current data because the data has not been examined across social categories. But clearly, following massive disasters, some households are still herding while others are not. One can presume that there are mediating factors resulting in this distinction.

<sup>24</sup> Large aggregations of individuals may experience similar losses but that does not mean they experienced zud as a population. Moreover, there is great regional diversity in the ways zud develops and impacts households. Further ethnographic research must be done to examine how zud are locally and individually constructed.

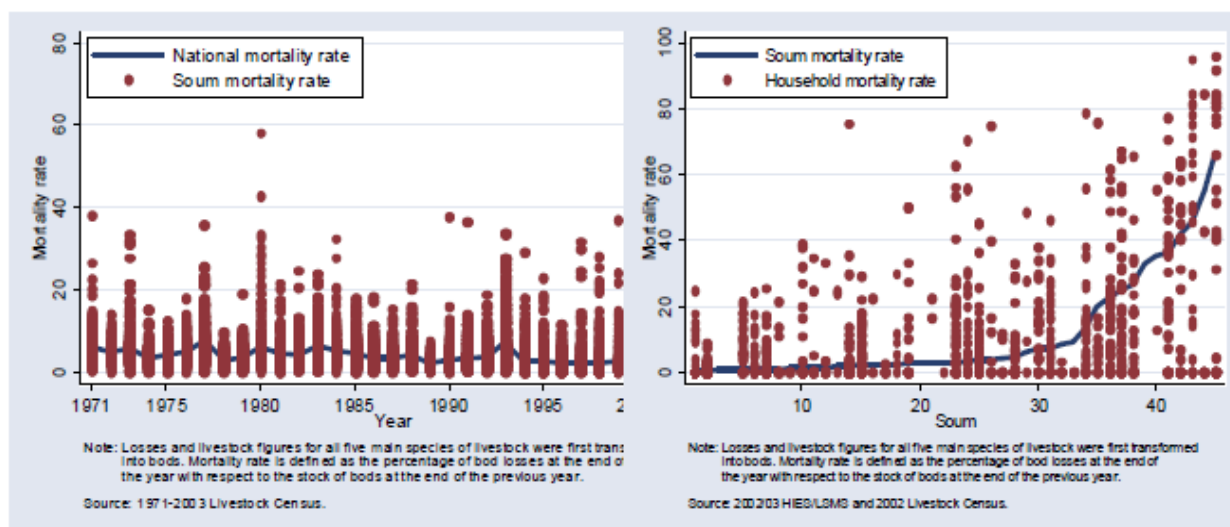


Figure 2.14. On left, annual distribution of soum mortality rates from 1971-2003. On right, 2002 distribution of household rates in each soum. (From World Bank 2006)

If *zud* is by its very nature a hybrid, ‘idiosyncratic’ event, in other words its genesis cannot be construed as an externally-derived ‘act of God’, then we must understand how individual households come to ‘face *zud*’.<sup>25</sup> As the second chapter argues, the production of disaster is rooted in the structural inequalities and power dynamics that shape access to resources. In this sense then, *zud* is a product of history; as such, we must explore the broader social, political, and economic transformations that have engulfed Mongolian society and the wider post-socialist world in the last 18 years since the collapse of one-party rule. In the following section, I situate the production of *zud* not only in the institutional void and social uncertainty generated by the imposition of stringent neo-liberal policies like privatization and decentralization but also in the complex process of institutional bricolage that has occurred in its place. In doing so, I examine the two major *zud* of the last decade and consider how these events have been interpreted in the broader Mongolian society and the ways they have impacted policy-making. *Zud*, like all disasters, has a double effect: the initial event and the ways in which those events become appropriated in the process of making the next event (Button 2010). As I demonstrate in chapter 8 and 9, this is critical to understanding who faces *zud* and who does not.

## The Making of Uncertainty and the Production of Disaster

In many regions of the former socialist bloc and elsewhere, rural agricultural producers have been forced to adapt to the political and economic instability and uncertainty resulting from

<sup>25</sup> *Zud* is also perceived to be a reflection of one’s relationship to the spirits in the land. Upsetting these spirits through improper resource use or offensive action can rile their anger and bring about the various conditions which pose considerable risk for *zud*.

the implementation of neo-liberal shock therapy reforms which have removed or diminished, in many cases, significant state institutions and welfare functions.<sup>26</sup> These ‘transition’<sup>27</sup> reforms, depending on the region or country, typically combine large-scale privatization of state property, devolution and decentralization of administrative responsibility and authority from a central state apparatus to regional and local governments, and the liberalization of the economy. The goal of such reforms was and is to roll back the state in economic, social, and political life thereby setting in motion the ‘transition’ to capitalism.

In Eastern Europe, the successor states of the USSR, and in other former Soviet satellites such as Mongolia these reforms were initiated almost overnight in the early 1990s. Despite minor regional differences and country-specific deviations, these drastic changes were founded to a large degree on neo-liberal views concerning the limited role of government in the ‘economy’ and the relation of citizens to the state. Neo-liberal ideologies, couched in terms of the two channels of ‘freedom’, i.e. democracy and the market, were a drastic rupture from socialist ones. In material terms, as a wide body of literature has described, these reforms severely ruptured the channels of social and economic life thrusting citizens of the post-socialist world into a situation where the problems of accessing resources necessary to their livelihoods became an everyday problem. The ‘normal’ channels through which people access food, services, land, and other resources were gone, replaced with the vicissitudes of the market, and in the void post-socialist citizens were forced to find or create new avenues for everyday survival.

A growing body of research has focused on the ways in which these reforms transformed property rights and entitlements and how citizens have adapted to these transformations in novel ways. In rural agricultural regions where decollectivization included the reframing of formal property regimes including the privatization of state assets such as land or, in Mongolia’s case, livestock, rural agricultural producers faced an environment marked by immediate institutional uncertainty. Farmers, pastoralists, and even non-agriculturalists in some regions were able to cope with these conditions not through markets as liberal economists argued, but by drawing on

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<sup>26</sup> See Hann 2006 for an extensive bibliography.

<sup>27</sup> Most people I encountered during my research situated themselves as being in ‘transition’, neither completely capitalist like the United States (their comparative frame of reference) but not socialist either. What is interesting is that most people did not frame the idea of transition in the differences between socialism and capitalism, but rather, like broader development discourses, between a wealthy country and a poor country. Since most of the people interviewed view themselves as ‘betwixt and between’ I have chosen to use the term ‘transition’ in two ways. The first is in the way they use the term as a way to frame the current position of Mongolia in relation to the rest of the world and the second way, which will be used in quotes, refers to the sets of practices and ideologies that people draw on in order to enact their vision of ‘transition’.

remnant moral economies such as through the remaining vestiges of collectives, informal gift economies, through kin ties, or through emergent patron-client relations (Humphrey 1998; Celarius 2004; Cooper 1993; Creed 1998; Sneath 1993; Synkiewicz 1993).

For example, in Mongolia, as the economy contracted, a large scale urban to rural migration ensued as unemployed urbanites and non-agriculturalists took advantage of livestock privatization and de facto open access to pastureland (Mearns 1993; Fernandez-Gimenez 1999; Humphrey and Sneath 1999). These new herders relied to a great extent on rural-urban kin ties maintained during the socialist period by a network of food (*idesh*) provision based on a moral economy of mutual aid (Fernandez-Gimenez 1999). The active embedding of economic practices and relations in new social orders goes beyond dependency on pre-socialist social and cultural forms. As Ledneva has shown, Russians both rural and urban relied to a great extent on social relations built in the shadow economies of the socialist period as means to cope with the sudden uncertainty created by the collapse of formal institutions and the growing insecurity of daily lives. Referred to in Russian as *blat*, these informal channels filled a void left by the retreating state as the poor and non-poor alike attempt to ‘make do’ (Caldwell 2004).

Not all were or are able to engage effectively in these relations or involve themselves creatively in new ones. Consequently, without the institutional support of the collectives, these reforms produced a context that seriously threatened the livelihood security of many farmers and herders (Verdery 2003; Templer et al. 1993; de Waal 1996). In rural Russia and the Ukraine, rural producers, in the absence of the economies of scales provided by the collectives and lacking the social capital to engage in cooperative enterprise, responded by selling their land back to the collectives (Allina-Pisano 2006; Wegren 2004). Similarly, in Lithuania, farmers found themselves unable to cope with the lower prices of agricultural products and consequently sold their land to the entrepreneurial few and migrated to the cities (Schwartz 2005). Moreover, as this dissertation makes clear, the institutional problems of post-socialist social change have had critical implications for rural agricultural producers who must contend with the vagaries of environmental shocks, stresses, and hazards. As the example of my host household demonstrates, those who are incapable of mitigating risk and coping with uncertainty and loss invariably suffer greater than those who can. It is therefore no wonder that many observers of the post-socialist world report high levels of rural poverty and economic decay (Sikor et al. 2009).

Clearly, there were significant numbers of ‘losers’ following the ‘democratic’ and ‘market’ reforms, but, what the anthropological literature often neglects, there were also ‘winners’. In many cases, people were not just coping with uncertainty in order to eke out a living. With the opening of new economic and political spaces, or what Zhang (2001) calls ‘the

privatization of power', the growth of mafia, gangs, patronage, feudal modes of domination, and other new social hierarchies emerged as a means not only to cope with the great deal of uncertainty, but in many cases to take advantage of the possibilities that the coupling of market opportunity and political instability offered (Humphrey 2002; Ries 1997; Verdery 1996).

The re-embedding of economic practice away from centralized state-society dependencies towards informal social ties consequently did not produce some kind of utopian community, but rather re-constituted a variety of forms of vertical power whether novel or from repertoires of ideology and practice attributable to re-imagined pre-socialist and socialist pasts (West 2008; Rodgers 2008). Moreover, as in the case described here, even so-called horizontal political orders, such as kinship, that are often touted for their cooperative and moral economic functions, instead become the medium through these hierarchies are framed and expressed. These emergent political economies, undergirded by the simultaneously dislocating and empowering effect of the market, have served as the primary basis for the formation of new social orders (Humphrey 2002). Absorbing powers previously afforded to the state, it is these new forms of authority and domination that in many cases, have determined whether individuals and households fail or succeed in the new economies of the post-socialist world and in the disasters produced by them.

The pervasive condition of uncertainty, instability, and insecurity in the post-socialist context has provided social spaces for new forms of authority, hierarchy, and privilege to emerge and reconfigure the social orders that control access to resources. In particular, this window into social-change sheds light on post-socialist processes of property-making. The emergence of new property regimes, founded on a complicated and often contradictory mix of formal and informal institutions pose significant problems. In the case of post-socialist Mongolia, questions concerning the effects of reform on the micro-politics of access, authority, and control have been largely neglected. In response, this dissertation aims to describe the evolution of new powers on the steppe and the material implications of these new regimes for resource access, control, and use and, ultimately, the production of *zud* and vulnerability to herd loss.

### **Uncertainty and Response in Uguumur**

The current pervasiveness of uncertainty and herders' responses to it in Uguumur have, as in other post-socialist contexts, a particular genealogy deeply embedded in the historical processes of state building in late socialism and more recent state-society 'transitions'.<sup>28</sup> The shift

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<sup>28</sup> Transition as it used in this dissertation implies not some naturalized, unquestioned path to capitalism envisioned by neo-liberals but rather the practices that attempt to *produce* such a path.

to more competitively structured, quasi market-based economic institutions commonly referred to in the west as *perestroika*, or *uurchlun baiguulalt* in Mongolian, in the late socialist world began in earnest in the late 1980s (Griffin 1995; Sanders 1991). In rural Mongolian agricultural cooperatives, for example, herders began herding state-owned livestock under contract (*gereetei*) rather than for wage remuneration as they had done since 1960 (Goldstein and Beall 1994; Luvsandorj et al. 2006). Yet, the collapse of one-party rule and the instituting of capitalist and democratic reforms (*shinжилгээ*) often referred to as shock therapy in the early 1990s thrust Mongolia and other post-socialist states into a situation marked by the near virtual society-wide collapse of state-based institutions, entitlements, social services, and property regimes rupturing the channels of social and economic life. Collective and state property was privatized, product prices were liberalized, the economy was deregulated, administrative authority was devolved and decentralized, and entitlements such as health and social security were reduced not only in total as tax revenues sunk but also a percentage of the state's budgetary expenditures (Griffin 1995; Korsun and Murrell 1995). As the state retreated and the social sector virtually collapsed, severe economic decline ensued as food prices skyrocketed, economies of scale in industry and agriculture dropped drastically, social service jobs were lost, large sectors such as mining came to a standstill, and unemployment on a massive scale forced many urban workers into poverty or, by taking advantage of livestock privatization, to the countryside.<sup>29</sup> Poverty, bouts of food insecurity, and overall economic malaise made life, especially in urban Mongolia, visibly worse.

In the rural countryside, the institutional backbone of the collectives disappeared in a consecutive series of legal and administrative reforms beginning with the complete decollectivization of the *negdels* immediately following the 'democratic revolution' (*ardchilaliin xuvsgal*). These reforms materialized a vision of local governance in rural pastoral regions based on decentralized, weak state models of resource distribution and management promoted heavily by neo-liberal institutions such as the IMF and the Asian Development Bank (Enkhbat and Odgaard 1996; Korsun and Murrell 1995; Mearns 2004, 1996; Nixon and Walters 1999). It was this withdrawal of the state through the dismantling of collectives, the devolution of authority and decentralization of administrative responsibility to the local level, and the fiscal centralization of taxation and budgetary responsibility which left rural administrative organs as near defunct institutional shells. At a national meeting of the newly formed Democratic Party in 1991 the committee chairman argued that the *negdels* must be dismantled arguing that "the free market will take of" everything (Goldstein and Beall 1994: 76). Pastoral households, although benefitting

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<sup>29</sup> See Janes and Chuluundorj (2004) for effects on health service provision and especially maternal mortality.



for a short period of time from a de facto open access resource regime, were now exposed to a large degree of institutional ambiguity and uncertainty. Without reliable institutional means to organize resource access such as through clear and defined property rights, particularly in times of stress, herding households were left exposed to greater amounts of environmental and climatic risk (Swift 1995; Templer et al 1993).

### **Building a ‘Neo’-Mongolia**

These economic and political decentralization reforms in both city and countryside, however, were not the implementation of a singular and all-encompassing neo-liberalism as many portray such forms of restructuring in Mongolia (Bruun 2006; Campi 1996; Sheehy 1996), but were, rather, an outcome of an array of logics operating and competing under shifting material conditions (Ferguson 2007; Ong 2006; Tsing 2006). This can be seen most clearly in the government’s approach to rural land administration. Unlike many other post-socialist states, despite attempts by the Asian Development Bank and the Democratic Party (Goldstein and Beall 1994; Sneath 2000), Mongolia did not initially privatize land and it was not until 2002 that the government passed laws recognizing private claims to use campsites in pasture lands (Fernandez-Gimenez 2004). Understanding the history of these early post-socialist rural administrative policies is critical because the retention of pasture lands as state property coupled with administrative decentralization promoted a continuity of property forms, i.e. the ‘commons’ aspect of state pastureland, while at the same time removing the structures of authority and control that had regulated access to and use of those very ‘common’ resources. Why Mongolia did not privatize pasture land, a primary factor behind the emergence of new political spaces in the countryside (*xuduu*), and why formal private claims even today are so limited can only be explained by viewing neo-liberal governance as one forcefully compelling, but fragmented, logic competing among many others. Moreover, the eventual material outcome of these competing logics, the conspicuous absence of the state in resource management and novel sources of power, emerged from a tangled convergence of quite different discourses and material conditions.

Among many urban Mongolians following the collapse of one-party rule, nationalist sentiments fostering an essentialized image of herders as naturally free and unburdened, an image of pure Mongol (*tsever Mongol*) ‘tradition’, became a viable discursive strategy upon which politicians and other urbans drew to promote the new democratic and market freedoms of the *zax zeelin uye* (age of the market) (Dashbalbar 1999; Germeraad and Enebish 1996).<sup>30</sup> Goldstein and

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<sup>30</sup> The importance of tradition and history in the post-socialist period has been studied quite thoroughly by Bulag (1996) and Kaplonski (2001). Clearly, such sentiments are largely a response to the socialist suppression of history and state attempts to transform the ‘traditional’ herder (*malchin*) as nomad

Beall (1994:26) quote Academician Sodnam's sentiments in debates concerning livestock privatization: "We need to return the animals to the nomads and let them operate as they did traditionally – in a free market economy." These essentializing representations, i.e the countryside as a *common* reservoir of tradition and essential Mongolness, beneficial to both sides of political equation (left and right), were and remain a critical influence in agriculture and rural land policy-making in Mongolia. They played a critical role in the opposition to urban land privatization in 1996, the land law reforms of 1998 and played a strong role in opposing the provision of possession contracts for winter and spring campsites outlined in the 2002 Land Law.<sup>31</sup>

Similar notions found favor in academia and across the development spectrum. Within academia many social scientists inspired by research on social capital, common property, and community-based resource management argued along with development experts from institutions such as the World Bank that privatization of pastoral lands would be ineffective and could possibly lead to many problems witnessed in pastoral regions of Africa and elsewhere (World Bank 1997). Rather, common property and the institutions that support it could be seen as emanating from aggregations of rational choices (Ostrom 1990). It was argued that the retention of state ownership of pasture lands (a functioning open access regime), the privatization of herds and other resources, and the devolution of management authority to the local scale would provide the necessary incentives for cooperation and collective action (Templer et al. 1993). Such policies would expose households, equally, to the 'proper' amount of risk thereby 'coordinating interests' and setting the stage for "the re-emergence of pre-socialist" communal institutions and organizations (Mearns 1998; Templer et al 1993).<sup>32</sup>

Other social scientists including anthropologists proffered notions of moral economy, customary social relations, and almost innate community ethics that were reflected in Mongolian traditionalist discourses (see Bold 1997; Fernandez-Gimenez 1993, 1999; Sheehy 1996; Sneath 1993; Synkiewicz 1993; Volker-Muller 1997). The ultimate applied formulation of these visions, community-based resource management, found favor with development experts and politicians alike as seen in the promotion of 'herders' cooperative groups' (*malchdiin buleg, xoroo* or

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(nuudelchin) into a settled, western rancher. Moreover, the dislocating and disorienting affects of capitalist emergence in Mongolia has also contributed to the strength of such discourses.

<sup>31</sup> See the writings of former parliamentarian, anti-land privatization activist, and nationalist poet Dashbalbar (The Battle for Our Land Has Begun). His writings on land reform and Mongolian land customs, demonstrate quite vividly the importance of 'tradition' and 'nomadism' in Mongolian political discourse.

<sup>32</sup> This is still the primary argument for herder cooperatives despite their ineffectiveness.

*xorshoo*) in the World Bank's Sustainable Livelihoods Project (SLP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development's (IFAD) Rural Poverty Reduction Project (RPRP) discussed in chapter 6 of this dissertation. However, the influence of development 'experts' and academics should not be exaggerated even though they have held an inordinate amount of sway among civil society actors, NGOs, and policy-makers; ultimately though, with varying degrees, they have discursively influenced the shaping of 'reforms' (see Bruun 2006 and Rossabi 2005 for concurring impressions).

The resulting policies, however, would largely be dependent on two exigent factors: (1) the political parties and their constituents, the herders themselves, and (2) the sudden loss of Soviet aid and implementation of hard-budget constraints outlined in structural adjustment loans (Griffin 1995; Korsun and Murrell 1995; Mearns 1996, 2004). Herders in Mongolia make up a significant voting bloc and political parties spend a considerable amount of money and time attempting to curry their favor through various forms of gifting, emergency services, and clientage, largely due to the over-representation of rural citizens in the *Ulsiin Ix Xural* or National Parliament. In fact, the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP), which controlled both parliament and the presidency for most of the last 18 years, is highly dependent on rural representation. Consequently, the privatization of pasture land in 1991 and in the years since has remained politically infeasible. Herders in most regions of the country are wary of such a venture and the parties are tuned into sentiments expressed by herders such as "*dain bolno oo!*" or "there will be war!" when pasture privatization is discussed.<sup>33</sup> Although, as will be demonstrated in some detail here, these attitudes are clearly changing.

Moreover, the government in the early 1990s was simply incapable of continuing its role in resource management at the local level (Enkhbat and Odgaard 1999; Mearns 1996, 2004). With the concomitant fall of the Soviet state and the immediate withdrawal of subsidies to former Soviet satellites like Mongolia, multi-lateral financial institutions stepped in to fill the fiscal void with structural adjustment loans similar to those perpetrated on African and Latin American economies and polities in the 1980s (Goldstein and Beall 1994; Rossabi 2005). With the severe need of loans to replace Soviet subsidies and the structural adjustment requirements dictated by multi-laterals, budget outlays could not cover the continued full involvement of the state in pastoral resource management. The fiscal reforms instigated in this restructuring not only abandoned funding for rural administrative tasks, it also has centralized fiscal responsibilities

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<sup>33</sup> Even though herders expressed this sentiment I have seen nothing that would imply they would in fact rise up arms against the state if this happened. Moreover, as will be discussed in this dissertation, many herders already, to different degrees, recognize aspects of 'private' rights in land.

removing the power of local administrative to raise tax revenues (Mearns 2004). As such the resource management institutions that undergird property regimes withered while the legal designation of pastureland and many other pastoral resources remained ‘common’ or ‘state’ property, in effect creating a partial open access regime with only a shell of formal institutions to manage resources.

Nevertheless, the over-arching assumption behind such policies, despite a diverse range of alternatives, was that retaining pasturelands as state property, despite primary causes, was preferable because herders, amongst whom it was assumed little inequality would emerge, would cooperate, whether through some kind of latent traditional moral economy (Fernandez-Gimenez 1993; Sneath 1993), through the aggregation of rational choices in the face of environmental and economic risks and uncertainty (Mearns 1996; Swift 1995; Templer et al. 1993), or as some kind of collective action built up with untapped reservoirs of social capital (World Bank 1997). The merging of these multiple viewpoints in the policy-making process came together to influence the production of a rural administrative reform called *bus tuvluulult* or decentralization, the primary framework for rural resource management in Mongolia (Enkbat and Odgaard 1999).

### **Making Do in the New Mongolia**

The effect of the triple shock of decollectivization, privatization, and decentralization on herder households and communities has been well documented particularly for the years immediately following their implementation. Decollectivization drastically reduced the economies of scale achieved during the socialist period (Humphrey and Sneath 1998). Mobility, despite the de facto open access regime created through the reforms, decreased as households could not maintain trucks or obtain parts nor afford the costs of gasoline (Fernandez-Gimenez 1997; Humphrey and Sneath 1998). Instead, households began using older forms of technology including camel and yak wagons to move their household items and driving livestock rather than trucking them to new campsites. Consequently, households began settling closer to population centers and roads, localizing over-grazing (according to herders), and compounding already complex resource distribution issues. Hay and fodder production decreased as households did not have the labor power available to operate hay-making equipment and tractors. Moreover, the collective organization, with the secretaries, accountants, transport specialists, mechanics, and other technicians and administrators that were fundamental to *negdel* operations, was dismantled as the collectives shifted from *negdels* to companies and then, in the second privatization, to individual private household operations.

With the loss of collective organization, technology, and labor power, the pastoral economy became increasingly ‘atomized’ as individual households were now herding private

livestock on which their livelihoods now depend (Sneath 2002a). This loss meant also that households were exposed to greater amounts of environmental risks as they could not effectively mitigate nor cope with the difficulties posed by the Mongolian climate without the socio-technical means for doing so (Sneath 2002b). In response, many researchers have noted, individual herders and households have fallen back on a variety of so-called ‘traditional’ or ‘customary’ pre-socialist forms of ‘cooperation’ and ‘community’ as risk mitigation and coping strategies.<sup>34</sup> Researchers have pointed out the re-emergence of past social forms such as the *khot ail* as evidence (Bold 1997; Humphrey and Sneath 1999; Sneath 1993; Synkiewicz 1993; Volker-Muller 1997). The *khot ail*, researchers argue, consists normally of 2-6 households depending on local ecology and members cooperate on productive tasks such as milking, shearing, combing, birthing, herding, shelter repairs and organizing migrations. Others have even argued for the presence of much debated larger social groupings such as *neg nutgiinxan* (people of one territory) and *neg goliinxan* (people of one river). These groups, it has been argued, organize campsite rotation throughout a wide migration territory (Mearns 1993). A number of works have also focused on a range of reciprocal labor exchanges (FAO 1997; Ozaki 2005; Sneath 1993), forms of gifting (Sneath 2006), and mutual assistance (Fernandez-Gimenez 1999) to demonstrate how herders have rebuilt their livelihoods on a deep-seated ‘pre-socialist’ moral economy.<sup>35</sup>

### **Facing Zud**

These cooperative arrangements and other local institutions built in the absence of the state were severely tested in the period from 1999-2002 when a consecutive series of *zud* struck the pastoral economy in Mongolia. During the 3 year period the total number of livestock in Mongolia dropped by over a third from 30 million in 1999 to just under 20 million in 2002. Different regions of the country were affected in different years. In Uguumur, the *zud* of 2000 was particularly severe as cattle numbers dropped by over 50 per cent. Large numbers of herders

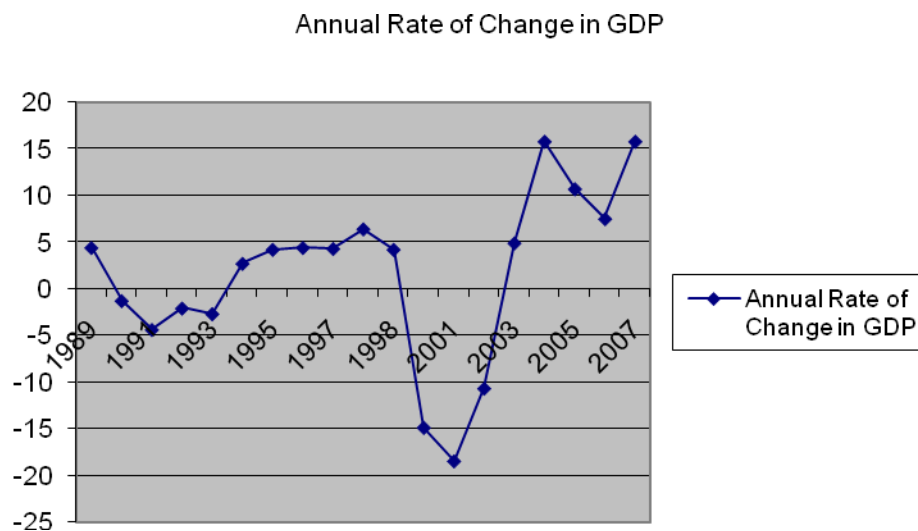
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<sup>34</sup> Humphrey and Sneath (1999) argue and I would concur that many of these social forms did not go extinct with the advent of the collectives but were rather transformed, mostly by name only, into only slightly modified social forms. The *khot ail* became the *suuri*. The *suuri* was the basic unit of collective organization consisting, in Uguumur, of two or three households at most who were responsible for herding one species of livestock. This *suuri* were, as Sneath (1999) argues, simply the *khot ail* in socialist guise. Consequently, contemporary *khot ail* are not really a re-emergent pre-socialist form but rather a continuation of the idea of cooperative campsites maintained in the form of *suuri* during socialism.

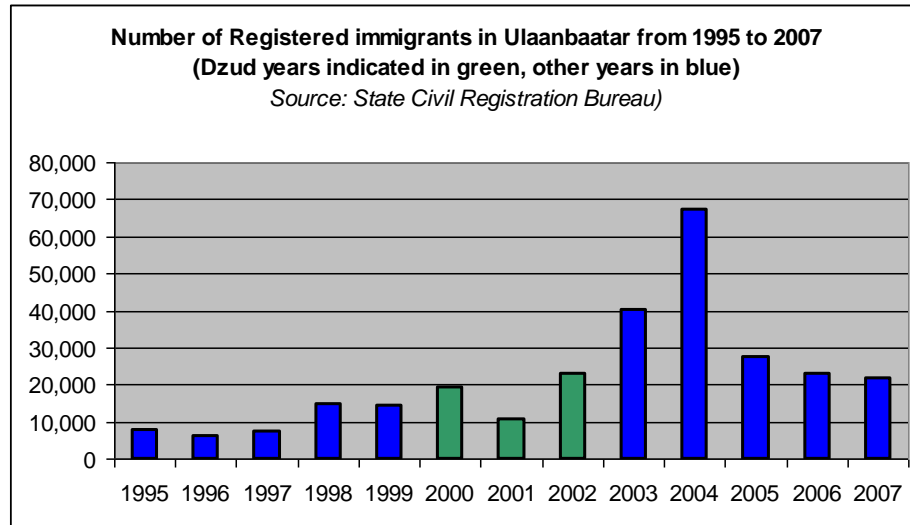
<sup>35</sup> The research presented in this dissertation seriously questions the above described forms of ‘cooperation’, ‘mutual assistance’, and reciprocity. For example, researchers have consistently defined *khot ail* as a grouping of 2-6 households whereas herders in the study region stated that the numbers of households does not matter, the term itself only describes the fact that there is a household (*ail*) and an area to the south of the *ger* for livestock (*khot*). Consequently, the use of the term to signify a kind of ‘cooperative’ institution seems somewhat misplaced.

were forced to exit from the pastoral economy and migrate out to settled areas or to even to the city to look for work. Across Mongolia, the number of households that exited the countryside totalled nearly 50 thousand (UNDP 2010). In Uguumur, every household interviewed knew someone who had lost all their livestock or enough to force them to give up the herding life. Though some households can return through herding employment as discussed in chapter 4, for most this is a final exit.

The effect on the broader economy was monumental. Thirty per cent of the national herd was destroyed and economic damages resulted in 369 million US\$ in losses which in turn precipitated a 4 per cent drop in GDP. This was also effectively 15 per cent of development assistance at that time. In Figure 2.15 we can see that huge impact of the *zud* on GDP growth during the period 1999-2002. UNDP reported increased rates of malnutrition, maternal mortality, depression and suicide (UNDP 2010). They estimated that roughly 50,000 migrants fled rural regions for urban ones. In Figure 2.16 below, we see a massive spike in rural-urban migration in the years following the *zud*. Nearly all of this can be contributed to the *zud* disasters. This massive migration demonstrates that many herding households were simply not able to cope. Youth were particularly affected as many migrants were young, married families. The rural population fell by 4.2 per cent roughly the growth rate of the capital Ulaanbaatar. Reports of violence against women, alcoholism, alcohol-related crime, and theft rose dramatically.



*Figure 2.15. The massive drop in GDP, despite economic growth in other sectors, was largely due to the *zud* (NSO 2008).*



*Figure 2.16. Rural-to-urban migration (UNDP 2010).*

As nearly ten thousand families lost their herds and migrated to aimag centers and the capital Ulaanbaatar, observers noted that roads into the city were packed with households fleeing the effects of total herd loss. Many sold all their animals, rented trucks, packed up their ger and belongings and left to find a new livelihood. In a 2003 study of an urban ger district in Ulaanbaatar, Janzen et al. (2005) found that 36 per cent of residents listed loss of all livestock as the primary reason for moving into the district and many others listed unemployment in aimag and soum centers as the primary causal factor but many of these former herders had also lost their herds. 62 percent of the households sampled arrived between 1999 and 2003 and they overwhelmingly came from the west and central khangai regions where the zud conditions had been the worst. Janzen et al (2005) reported appalling conditions in these ger ‘ghettos’. Some of the worst air pollution in the world, burning dumps, water quality issues, disease and higher rates of health problems, violence, gang activity, alcoholism, and crime are constant features of ger district life.

In most years though, smaller, less widespread and lower magnitude zud like that described in this dissertation occur in specific locales across the country. As in the context of major zud, poor herders face similar issues when they lose their herds, exiting the pastoral economy and migrating to the city. The growing poverty and social unrest faced by the rural poor, recent urban migrants, and disaffected youth has increasingly lent to a boiling political context. In the summer of 2008, following parliamentary elections, a protest at the Mongolian Peoples’ Revolutionary Party building resulted in the ultimate burning of the headquarters and ensuing riots across the center of the city. In short order, martial law was enacted and the military were sent out atop tanks to restore peace in the city center. The conflagration and riots were not the

result of political squabbles or some kind of herder movement, but rather the result of the in-pouring of poor, disaffected, rural youth, rampant alcoholism, and gang-violence. Because the ger districts are inextricably linked to urban poverty and social unrest, these events were the result of the marginalization and abjection felt by many new rural-to-urban migrants in the wake of post-socialist 'transition' politics and zud disasters.

Without fail, these conditions continue to produce zud. In the early months of 2010, Mongolia experienced the worst winter disaster in over 100 years. Sixty percent of the total landmass of Mongolia was covered with 20 to 40 centimeters of snow and temperatures dipped below -40 C, and in some regions below -50 C, over a ten day period (UNDP 2010). Such inhospitable conditions pose grave threats to the livestock upon whom over half of the population depend in some form whether as herders, traders, or processors of livestock products. Each month the Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Light Industry (MoFALI) gathered estimates from affected soums (counties) and by January the total loss seemed small, 45,831 head of stock out of a national total of 44 million. A month later the estimates rose dramatically to nearly 2 million; however, because these data reflected only limited knowledge, it portended much worse. By March the number had risen to 4 million and by the end of spring the official estimate (based on reported loss estimates) would total over 9 million animals. In all, 21% of the national herd was wiped out in a matter of months affecting nearly half a million people in rural regions. 32,700 families lost half or more of their herds and 8,711 families lost all of their livestock. The government estimated that approximately 20,000 people would migrate to the capital of Ulaanbaatar. As of 2011, the total economic loss is still not fully understood.

Although similar catastrophes have occurred throughout Mongolian history, for many the scale of these zud and the social problems have seemed disproportionately greater in recent years. In the popular press, on internet blogs, and across academic circles, various people have offered a range of explanations as to why these zud disasters seem to occur so often at such magnitudes. Rather than seeing these environmental events as part of the normal ebb and flow of Mongolian climate and weather, various actors have argued that desertification and environmental degradation are root causes. Some argue that desertification is the result of dramatic climate change processes with increasing frequency of drought and dramatic swings in annual temperature while others have argued desertification is the result of degradation from overpopulation, overstocking, and grazing mismanagement. Those who subscribe to the latter interpretation point out the increasing total livestock numbers, goat herd, and bad management or "carelessness are to blame" (Swiss Development Agency 2010). Blame is shouldered consistently on herders themselves for either laziness and poor management or greed and aggressive over-use.



A number of solutions have been offered. Those who view climate change as the primary culprit have largely ignored changing resource use practices and institutional dynamics and have sought instead technical solutions such as building a ‘green wall’ of trees across the country. This ‘green wall’ (*nogoon xerem*), it was argued would halt the advancing sands of the Gobi desert and prevent desertification. The portion that ‘stretches’ across Khentii, where I conducted my research, is sporadic and most of the planted trees have simply died. Another venture the government has undertaken is cloud-seeding. Cloud seeding involves shooting rockets full of silver iodide into clouds and high-moisture concentrations in order to stimulate rain cloud formation. By giving the water molecules particles to attach to, the water will then descend into drought-stricken regions. Herders complained that this was largely a waste of money and hazardous to the environment. The rain produced from these clouds is sporadic and geographically restricted posing little help to herders. Critics have also pointed out that this robs other regions of rain and shifts drought to other areas. Many herders also felt that shooting rockets at the sky to make it rain was spiritually unclean and offensive.

For those who see degradation, over-grazing, and livestock overpopulation as the root cause of increasing drought and *zud*, formal legal reforms have been sought to curb ‘bad’ behavior (i.e. moral hazard).<sup>36</sup> Chief amongst these has been a series of laws and rural policies most namely the 2002 Land Law and the 2003 Disaster Law. These two laws were largely a response to the 1999-2002 *zud*. Many argued that privatization would solve these problems.<sup>37</sup> It is no surprise then that immediately following the *zud* of 2010, new laws calling for the complete privatization of rural pastoral lands has been circulating in the halls of the Ix Xural.

Development institutions, donor and aid agencies have also proffered a number of remedies. Although most rooted the *zud* effects in their literature and press releases to the primary problem of poverty, which is positioned as a result largely of ‘inevitable’ economic collapse of socialism and the unmediated presence of external environmental ‘risks’, the solutions were legitimated by narratives of climate change and herder-induced degradation. For example, the majority of projects and programs centered on risk management and reducing vulnerability were geared towards improving the rational and efficient use of pastoral resources, building up social capital in cooperatives and associations, and facilitating infrastructure improvements. These ‘sustainable livelihoods’ projects simultaneously address economic and environmental problems,

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<sup>36</sup> Moral hazard refers to a condition when an economic actor does not bear the appropriate brunt of the risks and costs of a decision and therefore acts in ways that are ‘hazardous’ to others.

<sup>37</sup> I address this history more fully in chapter 4.

but as chapter 6 argues, largely ignore the root causes of vulnerability to zud and in some cases even amplify it.

In particular, there has been significant and increased focus on community-based solutions. In fact the drafts of a new land law raise the possibility of designating pastureland for formal cooperative herder groups, another potentially massive shift in local resource management. Yet, the exodus of households from the pastoral life following these zud poses some serious questions as to the effectiveness and the importance of cooperative mechanisms, the mutual benefits of moral economies in rural life, and the increasing vulnerability of households to zud-based herd loss. The narrow and selective focus on the communal aspects of rural life by many scholars and development practitioners, part of what Fernandez-Gimenez (2001) calls the ‘moral economy of the steppe’, renders an incomplete picture of social life in rural Mongolia. In contrast to this research, this dissertation shows that in Uguumur, post-socialist rural reforms have not only led to a major reconfiguration of formal institutions and their connections to rural livelihoods but also have created social space for the emergence and development of new loci of rural privilege and authority built on social inequalities in terms of kin, class, gender, and ethnicity. The materialization of these inequities in new regimes of power has fundamentally altered the conditions by which herders access resources and consequently, the ways in which zud are produced. As I show in later chapters, the integration of the Uguumur herding economy into increasingly deregulated global and regional markets for livestock products and the divergent effects of ecological stress and hazards on households have fostered the emergence of a class of wealthy herders. These wealthy herders and other social actors who have carved out niches of power and privilege in rural society have, with the assistance of state-based actors and NGOs, become the foci of novel informal networks of patron-clientage and territorial-based social groups. As I show these new hierarchies have critical implications in shaping mobility and who faces zud.

## **Uguumur in Transition**

Uguumur has been embroiled in this political economic revolution as well. In this section I briefly introduce the district, its people, the ecology, and its history. In particular, I focus on the process of livestock privatization and how this has set the stage for the dynamics and transformations I discuss in this dissertation.

Uguumur, nowadays officially referred to as the 3<sup>rd</sup> bag or Tsantiin Ovoo, is located in Bayanxutag soum in southern Xentii Aimag on the eastern steppes of Mongolia.<sup>38</sup> The soum center is approximately 350 kilometers from the capital city by paved highway and 26 kilometers by dirt path from the provincial capital, Undurxaan. Uguumuur is the western bag of the soum making up 6,029 square kilometers of territory. This proximity to large towns and access to the highway make Uguumur a rather easily accessible field-site compared to many regions in Mongolia, especially the extreme west. Nevertheless, one must access the campsites in Uguumur by unforgiving, deeply grooved dirt roads and navigate the nameless paths, apparently monotonous mountain valleys, and desolate salt pans. Like anywhere in Mongolia, if one ventures a kilometer outside of a town, village, or even the city, you have gone far enough to be in the vast steppe and are remote enough to make travel difficult.



Figure 2.17. Location of research site (Authors map).

The ecology of the bag is diverse with vast stretches of open dry desert-steppe broken up by mountain ranges and valleys, several lakes, salt pans and licks, and along the northern border stretches the famous Kherlen River. The local plant ecology is dominated by the typical stipa-caragana mix of forages found throughout the desert-steppe regions of Mongolia, in mountain

<sup>38</sup> My use of the name ‘Uguumur’ is somewhat arbitrary. The area is typically referred to as ‘gurav dugaar bag’ or third district in local speech and on official documents as Tsantiin Ovoo. But ‘third district’ is too cumbersome and many would not recognize the name Tsantiin Ovoo. In the past, however, much of the area was referred to as Uguumur owing its namesake to a large mountain in the middle of the bag. Each area of the bag has its own place name and many of these overlap into other bags and soums. Taking the middle path, as my Buddhist friends would advise, I have chosen Uguumur.

valleys other species dominate, and along the river, a five kilometer wide expanse of extremely valuable mixture of *ders* and other valuable forages runs for nearly 50 kilometers. Wild populations of gazelle, marmot, rabbit, fox, wolf, badger, hedgehog, and numerous varieties of bird including steppe and golden eagles, griffons, hawks, falcons, several species of vulture, cranes, and a number of passerine species add to Uguumur's rich biotic mix.

Uguumur currently has a total population of 609 registered citizens divided into 166 registered households. Many of the citizens and households that are registered in Uguumur do not currently reside there nor do they actively herd. Only 139 households actively herd livestock. Moreover, not all households that reside in Uguumur are technically citizens and therefore would not be registered in the soum center. The reason for this is that many households have hired herders from other soums or the aimag center and do not encourage them to register. There are also other households that are on *otor* from other soums or other bags that are not registered. The converse is also true: herders from Uguumur may be away on *otor* in another soum. Lastly, even if household heads have registered all their unmarried children, some of the children and even their wives may in fact live in other areas including the soum center (Bayan), aimag center (Undurxaan), or the capital (Ulaanbaatar). Consequently, the population statistics of Uguumur do not represent the current number of residents at any one time. Nevertheless, there is a stable core of households that make up the population of the bag.

Uguumur households are quite ethnically diverse for this region of the country which in neighboring soums is dominated by the majority ethnic group the Khalkha, of the eastern branch of the Mongols. Uguumur is fascinating in that a large number of minority Uriankhai and Durvud, ethnic subgroups of the Oirat or Western Mongols, were resettled here in the mid 1970s. Western Mongolia, where many of the minority ethnic groups reside, is noted for its high labor-to-livestock ratio whereas Eastern Mongolia, dominated by the Khalkha, pockets of Buriat in the north and small minorities such as the Dariganga in the border regions, has low labor-to-livestock ratios. During the socialist period, *negdel* collectives would submit requests to the central *negdel* committee for additional herders or workers if they were deficient in labor resources. In 1975, four families from Bayan-Ulgii in the extreme west on the border with Russia and China volunteered to move to Temstel *negdel* (Bayankhutag) in Khentii Aimag. The Uriankhai and Durvud, who are culturally similar Oirat groups, intermarry and recruit additional kin from Bayan-Ulgii, Ulaanbaatar, and other small industrial towns such as Nalaix. They now make up a significant portion of the bag population (35%). In chapters 3, 4, and 5 I discuss other aspects of households in greater detail.

## Uguumur in History

Uguumur is also situated in a region with a deep history. Turkic balbal stones and gravesites dot the landscape and evidence of the imperial period can also be found. Next door in the second bag, the famous *seven khalga* stone tablets were uncovered in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century by Mongol and Russian archaeologists. The stones detail the rise and triumph of Chinggis Khan's armies against rival clans. It is clear from a variety of historical records that the Kherlen river region was a primary organizing ground for the armies of the Golden lineage both in their conquest over rival clans and tribes and for eventual forays into China, Manchuria, and central Asia.

Following the collapse of the Yuan dynasty in 1368 and the emergence of the feudal period in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the region we now call Uguumur became the central pasturelands for the Tsetsen Khan, a noble descendant of Chinggis Khan who ruled over territory that now includes Khentii, Dornod, Suxbaatar, and parts of Dornogovi province. After the accession to Manchu rule in 1691 the surrounding area became the Tsetsen Khan's personal *xoshuu* or fiefdom. For nearly two hundred years the area remained as his personal territory. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the Tsetsen Khan gifted the area of Uguumur to the Jebtsundamba Xutagt, the Bogd Khan (Holy King) and High Lama of Buddhism in Mongolia. Consequently, the area and its herders became the sole property and fief of the Xutagt. The area, part of the *shavi* (disciple) estate or monastic estate, was administered by the central monastic authorities in Ulaanbaatar or what was then called Urga.

After the rise of socialism in the 1920s, the central state authorized a territorial re-shuffle of the aimag and khoshuu in order to disrupt allegiances to lamaistic and former feudal authorities. Uguumur became incorporated into what is now called Bayanxutag soum in the early 1930s. In practice, though, the new re-shuffle had limited effect as there was limited administrative capacity to enforce borders. In the latter 1950s Uguumur and the rest of Bayankhutag was collectivized into the Temtsel negdel or 'Struggle' collective. It was during this time that the bag or brigad as it was then called received the name Uguumur after the mountain near the brigad center. The herders of Uguumur became official negdel employees herding for wages and bonuses. Pasture management and resource use were dictated largely by the successive levels of leadership within the negdel and production targets were set in the Ministry of Agriculture.

By the 1980s, it was clear that the negdel system had stagnated and the state introduced new reforms. Herders volunteered to herd livestock on a lease system arrangement and then in 1989 on the contract system. Within 2 years, however, as *il tod* (perestroika) swept up the urban

youth, the party's grip on the mantle of the state was severely threatened. In the early 1990s, as the democratic revolution precipitated the collapse of one-party control, Temtsel was over time decollectivized into Bayan *kompani* (company). In less than a year though the *kompani* was disbanded and livestock and other assets were privatized. Understanding this process of decollectivization sets a critical stage for understanding the transformations in livestock, labor, and land discusses in this dissertation.

### ***The Struggle is Lost***

The wholesale transfer of state-owned livestock in the 1992 'small privatization' has had innumerable effects including those on herd management, resource use, and mobility that are discussed in this dissertation. Yet, privatization was not the only source of herds. The private ownership of livestock as a legal property right in Mongolia existed prior to and even during the socialist collective period from 1960-1992, but it was capped depending on the ecological region of the country. In Temtsel, herders were allowed 50 head of stock. In other regions, private herds could be as large as 75. Nevertheless, participation in privatization for many households, particularly those who were not herders during the negdel period, has provided the basis for their herding livelihoods today and understanding the process by which they built their herds beginning from this process is critical. Moreover, those who participated also obtained other critical assets including winter shelters, wells, trucks, and wagons.

### ***Decollectivization in Uguumur***

Decollectivization began in Uguumur in 1992 as part of the nation-wide small-scale privatization. Although 88% of herders in the country wanted to keep the negdel, there was vast urban opposition to their maintenance, particularly from the newly formed Democratic party. The separate *brigad* (brigade)<sup>39</sup> of herders and *negdel* workers, Uguumur being one, gathered in their local *khurals* or official meetings to discuss and ultimately vote on the path of privatization in Uguumur. There were essentially two possible paths to privatization – one in which either brigades or negdels as companies (*kompani*) assumed control and ownership of livestock or the more extreme option, the wholesale individual privatization of livestock.

There were benefits to the company option. The collectives had been more than livestock-rearing operations; collectives were the central focus of social life within bags and soums. Herders and other negdel workers received social support and accessed services through their negdel. Herders and others who might benefit from livestock privatization argued that companies could continue these practices in a kind of 'plantation' style operation and continue

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<sup>39</sup> Brigad are equivalent to bag or districts in territorial and administrative terms.

sales to the state through fixed price systems.<sup>40</sup> Negdels also provided the means for certain kinds of herd management and resource use practices such as organized otor, vaccine provision and veterinary care, hay and emergency feed services, well maintenance, and shelter repair. Negdels also had a monopoly on other kinds of capital beside herds, including the wide array of technologies that herders had become accustomed to using such as winter shelters, trucks, and wind breaks. As individuals, herders could not have possibly arranged for or purchased such things on their own; consequently, they were ultimately dependent on the distribution of such items. The company option, in herders' minds, would simply have continued the lease-herding system that had been operating in Temtsel since 1989. This was a favored option because it allowed for the private building of herds and properly rewarded those who worked hardest. In this light herders would not be exposed to the numerous risks inherent in a pastoral livelihood as they had access to the same technologies and resources they did under the collective but in addition, they would benefit personally from their own hard work and proper herd management.

The individual privatization option had positives in that herders would not be beholden to others who were bad herders. Herders additionally could make decisions on their own particularly when it came to herd management and resource use decisions including migrations, and evidently, they would then reap the rewards of those decisions: increased herd growth and income. However, the private herding option had a number of significant downsides. Primarily, it would expose herders to significant risk since otor would not be organized, trucks and transport would not be provided, and other services would have to be obtained privately. Herders would also be losing the primary framework for social organization for over the last 32 years. There were also other broader social concerns. Goldstein and Beall quote a herder from Khovd province in the far west who stated "in the market system the more capable will do well and take advantage of it and become rich, and those who are less capable will become poor. We have to watch out so that we don't return to the past feudal system" (1994: 108).

Many herders expressed similar concerns, for example, that if the negdel was disbanded the rich herders would start hiring the poor to herd, returning to the old days. One official told us, 'We here do not like the idea of returning to having laboring slaves. We know this is what happened in Inner Mongolia after communes were ended and that is why we are opposed to simply ending the collective.' We asked Altangerel, chairman of the negdel, about the possibility of rich nomads hiring poor herders to do all the work, and he asked us what the herders were saying. When we said they spoke negatively of this, his face broke out in a triumphant smile and he said "yes, we here do not like hiring others as laborers – it is a step backwards to the old system". (Goldstein and Beall 1994: 110)

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<sup>40</sup> This is my translation of what they described.

Every citizen in 1992 was provided 10,000 MNT in vouchers so they could participate in privatization. Each person received 3,000 in 3 pink vouchers and 7,000 in the form of a blue voucher which could be used for large purchases such as factories or even the negdel. Like most areas of the country, in 1992, Uguumur herders, joining herders from the other two brigades and other negdel workers including administrative officials, voted and opted for the first option to turn Temtsel negdel into a shareholding company or *xuvitsaat*. In this process, negdel herders turned in their blue vouchers to buy into the new company as equal members. Seventy per cent of the negdel's assets were transferred to the shareholding company. The remaining 30 per cent were privatized through pink vouchers to negdel members and retirees. In the same fashion as that witnessed by Goldstein and Beall (1994) the negdel sold 50% of the stock equally to all current and former members, 35 % went to members based on years they worked, 5% went to founding members, and 10% were set aside for non-herders who were limited to the use of a single pink voucher. Although none of the former negdel members I interviewed chose to simply begin herding privately, Goldstein and Beall (1994) point out that in other soums some herders chose to go it alone. In this case they only received animals from the 30 per cent that were privatized and were excluded from company livestock.

In a subsequent vote by the shareholders, the herders of Temtsel voted to turn each individual *brigad* into individual companies, retaining most of the features of collective operation simply at a smaller level. Uguumur brigade, in that vote, became *Bayan Kompani* (Wealthy Company). The 3 companies in turn organized the division of shareholding assets including livestock, trucks, and shelters much in the same way as the negdel had done. Moreover, during the socialist period, each brigade had specialized in a particular breed or breeds of livestock. Uguumur had specialized for the most part in sheep with some *suuri(s)* herding horses as well.<sup>41</sup> The companies negotiated and then divided these stock according to their needs and business plans. In some cases, companies provided additional animals to poor households fearing the effect of small herd sizes. Goldstein and Beall (1994), during their fieldwork found that companies in Khovd stopped this practice because poor households, as I will explain in the next chapter, simply eat or sell the stock. The company voted to continue the lease system with significant price increases on state purchase contracts. However, survival payments and raised production targets made these price increases difficult to translate into greater incomes.

All this was for naught as the companies, like most of the companies that had formed in that initial year following the privatization law, failed within a year of the vote. Rising prices for

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<sup>41</sup> *Suuri* are roughly equivalent to khot ail. Most *suuri* were collections of related households. In Uguumur these often consisted of one to three households.



other goods (i.e. unfavorable terms of trade) meant that stock were worth little.<sup>42</sup> Although the companies raised prices and meat prices in urban areas soared during these years, they did not keep pace with hyperinflation. The terms of trade forced herders to withdraw from the marketplace. Without income from state contracts, the government passed legislation allowing the companies to sell stock to herding households who wanted to leave. In most companies, herders left immediately. The seventy per cent owned by the company and other assets were further privatized to individual households. Those who had already gone independent were not allowed to benefit from this second privatization.

The three companies cooperatively auctioned off the livestock and collective assets in this second 'small-scale' voucher privatization. In a process similar to the first privatization, the three companies and their directors, voted on by the company members, opened up the auction to a variety of differently qualified households albeit with the goal of complete divestment of livestock and company assets. Moreover, like the first privatization, there was a significant amount of jockeying for additional vouchers, but overall the process was considered fair. A large number of non-herders also acquired livestock through the privatization; some became herders while others did not. Interviewed herders stated that the large number of absentee herding households and a large in-flux of new herders drove down the average, but herders stated no one was especially entitled to unfairly access livestock over another. Many absentee households who came from non-herding occupations would otherwise not have been able to acquire anything through the privatization process as they could not compete in the large scale privatization and most other property, other than livestock, acquired through the small-scale privatization had no immediate value. Livestock, however, during this period of uncertainty became a critical store for both savings and household consumption. Even for those who became herders through privatization, most feel it is a Mongolian's right to herd to livestock if they feel inclined because the herding lifestyle is so closely identified with Mongolian ethnicity.

Clearly, though, some benefit from this process more than others. Herders with greater numbers of years working in the negdel were able to garner significantly more livestock than young households who had worked only a few years under the contract and lease systems. I discuss this in some detail in the next chapter. Moreover, campsites and shelters were transferred to those households who had occupied them during the collective period. In most cases, these campsites belonged to lineal relatives prior to the socialist system. The collectives maintained these customary practices setting the stage for their effective 'privatization' (or restitution) following the collapse.

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<sup>42</sup> Although livestock prices also rose, they did not increase at the pace of other goods.

There were other problems, however. Some households either sold off vouchers for cash or other goods in the widespread barter economy that developed after the collapse of the socialist state system or they used their vouchers to purchase other collective or state-owned goods such as trucks or hay-cutting equipment. Herders were asked whether they perceived the privatization process as fair or not and whether they had experienced any problems or encountered any difficulties in acquiring livestock or other goods they intended to get. A few herders stated that they personally did not make good decisions on the kind of stock they had purchased from privatization. Although herders in Uguumur did not herd cattle during the collective period they had access to purchase them through the negdel privatization from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> bags which had predominantly cattle and goats. However, the voucher prices for livestock were based on the traditional Mongolian distinction between *bog* (small) and *bod* (large) livestock. Consequently, the prices of cattle and horses (*bod mal*) were not equal to sheep or goats (*bog mal*). Presuming that herding such animals could be a profitable venture, a number of households forewent buying large numbers of small stock and instead bought higher-priced but fewer cattle. However, collective rates of cattle loss were augmented by increased supplemental feeding and housing cattle in actual barns. Cattle, now a high risk and low productivity animal, proved to be a very poor investment as cattle were disproportionately vulnerable to cold and less resilient in the face of reduced grazing. Moreover, they reproduce at slower rates than small stock.

There were other problems as well. Several herders stated that they purchased trucks and hay-cutting equipment rather than livestock, a poor investment as they did not understand the economics of maintaining such equipment. Shortly after privatization they realized that to use a truck one needed gas and to use hay-cutting equipment one needed labor, both of which were in short supply and exorbitantly costly. Consequently, trucks were left to rust and fall into disrepair. Some even sold these items as scrap metal. Humphrey and Sneath (1999) describe the resulting technological involution and its implication in some detail. Amongst households in Uguumur, I found a number of households that had sold these kinds of assets. A number had even sold the wood that made up their winter shelter or used it to build houses in the soum or aimag center.

The problems associated with decollectivization, despite its place in memory as ‘fair’, set the stage for a vast transformational shift in the dynamics of herding in Uguumur and elsewhere in Mongolia. As I describe in the pages that follow, differential herd sizes, although minor in retrospect, laid the groundwork for a massive bifurcation in wealth in the last 19 years. The unequal distribution of other assets, particularly winter shelters, also has played an important role in the increasing socio-economic differentiation. The informal transfer of campsites and wells, described in chapter 5, to former negdel members and their recognition by new administrations

has also proved critical. Moreover, for some, the social networks and kin ties in which negdel herders were embedded when they emerged from decollectivization have significantly shaped the evolution of forms of territorial control and patterns of migration. Other forms of social difference along kin, ethnic, gender, and age have also laid the foundation for building the matrices of power that now undergird the sedimented political economy of rural Uguumur. These various transformations in Uguumur all emerge from the unfolding of the twentieth century's great social experiment.

In the immediate years following decollectivization, the number of households in the herding economy had risen drastically. Yet, as *zud* hit in the ensuing years the number began to drop. For those who could not make it, households either placed their animals with relatives or outright sold them to other herders. In fact a number of the wealthy herders described here purchased animals from these 'failed' herders. Following the *zud* of 1999-2002 the numbers of herders plummeted by over 50,000. In Uguumur, the *zud* of 2000 saw a number of households exit from a herding livelihood. Every household I interviewed stated that they knew households who could not make it in this *zax zeeliin uye* or "age of capitalism."<sup>43</sup> Even for those who participated in privatization, the void created by this near total institutional collapse drastically altered the world in which they were living. *Zud*, itself a product of this new world, has played a critical role shaping in it.

## Conclusion

In short, this chapter has demonstrated that *zud* is not an entirely meteorological phenomenon because it cannot be detached from its socio-ecological roots. In order to understand the occurrence of *zud*, then, the event itself must be understood in its time and place. *Zud*, in this sense, is a historical and place-based production emerging from institutional politics and dynamic socio-ecologies. The last twenty years since the collapse of the socialist state has witnessed a barrage of neoliberal reforms that have fundamentally sought to reshape the social contract between citizens and the state. In turn, it is abundantly clear that these shifts have reformulated the actual materiality of *zud* itself. Consequently, understanding vulnerability to such event calls for in-depth ethnographic explorations of institutional transformations. In the chapters that follow, I describe the vast institutional transformations occurring in Uguumur today. In particular I focus on how vast shifts in access, control, and use of livestock, labor, and land have produced conditions in which some are significantly more vulnerable and sensitive to the impacts of such

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<sup>43</sup> *Zax zeel* (capitalism) literally refers to 'market' (*zax*) and 'loan' (*zeel*) signifying the importance of market transactions based on sales or prices which are akin to 'lies' in Mongolian and *xuu* or interest in loans.

co-produced conditions. Additionally, I trace out the administrative and governing apparatuses that work in tandem with informal institutions in producing this vulnerability.

## Chapter 3 A Herder's *Biznes*: The Dynamics of Wealth and Poverty in the 'Age of the Market'

*If you are not a businessman you cannot 'enter' many animals 'into the turn'<sup>44</sup>. Selling them, you enter them into the turn. You turn livestock to get money of course. In this way, one is required to be a businessman.*

*You cannot not be a businessman. One must do sales and trade. Market and sell livestock, but you cannot buy and wear beautiful things. You must buy new transport and be a businessman. How can one do trade but not be a businessman. It is required of life!*

Herders from Uguumur, Summer 2008

### Introduction

This chapter examines the rates of herd growth and loss that render households differentially vulnerable to disaster loss. In order to do this I track the primary productive asset of herding households in Uguumur: livestock.<sup>45</sup> How herders acquire, manage, and dispose of herd capital is dependent on a variety of factors. For example, market pressures, inheritance rules, and ownership dynamics all have varying degrees of importance in the capacities of individual households to effectively manage the growth cycles of their herds.<sup>46</sup>

Understanding the differential rates of growth and loss is critical in a context like Uguumur where rising herd sizes are coupled with increasing socio-economic differentiation. This pattern, however, is not unique to Uguumur. Since 1992, one of the most apparent changes in the pastoral economy of Mongolia is the increase in herd numbers following privatization. In the period 1992-1993, when privatization began, national livestock levels were approximately 27 million head (NSO 2008). By the most recent census in 2008 the national livestock total has increased to 44 million head. This increase can also be seen in Bayankhutag *soum* where

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<sup>44</sup> The 'turn' is slang for trade or market. It refers to turning animals for a profit.

<sup>45</sup> In many cases, I count livestock simply as one head regardless of species. Where it is critical, such as with sales and breeding rates, I separate herds according to species. The standard sheep unit (SSU) and local measures such as the *bog* and *bod* distinction are important measures but do not affect the arguments made here. This is primarily because these measures are important as units of metabolic consumption rather than as economic units. Moreover, in Uguumur the most important form of wealth are small stock and herders in many conversation simply refer to livestock in general as *mal*. Consequently, in many local contexts, the distinction between *bog* and *bod* are not always salient.

<sup>46</sup> Although I occasionally show the conversion from tugrug to dollars, for references, the rate I use is 1200 ₮ (MNT) = \$1 US.

Uguumur is located. In 1993 stocking levels were approximately 70 thousand head. Yet, by 2008 the stock levels had surpassed 206 thousand head of stock, a near tripling in 15 years. Although the national and local stocking rates have increased dramatically, the *distribution* of that increase has not been uniform as pastoral communities have become increasingly marked by a greater concentration of livestock in fewer hands.<sup>47</sup> The distinction is even more pronounced when we look at the data from Uguumur in Figure 3.1 below. The *myangat* class of herder households, who make up only 13% of the population, own approximately 43% of the stock in the bag. The poorest two classes who make up roughly 25% of the herder household population own only 6% of the total livestock in the bag. The resulting Gini co-efficient of asset inequality is roughly .46, while income inequality, as discussed below, results in a Gini co-efficient of .57.<sup>48</sup> For a populous pastoral society these are somewhat high measures of inequality (See Borgerhoff-Mulder et al 2010 for an overview of inequality and Gini measures among pastoralists).

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<sup>47</sup> In this data I show herd size without regard to species. In everyday discourse herders refer to all livestock equally as *mal*. In discussions of wealthy people (*bayan*) or poor people (*yaduu*) references were not made to particular species unless that was the topic of conversation. In other words, a person with a thousand animals regardless of what kind they were, are considered *myangat* or herders of a thousand. The standard sheep unit or SSU is the species ratio that scholars use to convert animals into a single unit, although herders traditionally use bog or bod to distinguish between small and large. There are different measures depending on what scholars are trying to show. Here, for conversion purposes: goat and sheep = 1 SSU, horses and cows = 5 SSU, and camels = 7 SSU. However, conversion for the purposes of overall herd size makes little difference in representing wealth across the population. Moreover, these conversion rates reflect forage use per live animal weight rather than their value socially and economically. Cattle are largely subsistence animals and are not highly valued beyond their dairy. Horses are important prestige animals but make up little of household incomes. If conversions were used, only amongst the poorest are herd compositions different enough to make an impact in measurement. This can however distort their positions because they tend to have higher proportions of horses and cattle which in this case would be valued more despite that they are high risk, low productivity, slower breeding, and low marketability livestock. As I will show, the greatest differences in wealth are in small stock as excess wealth is held in small stock because they are lower risk, highly productive, faster-breeding, and highly marketable livestock. In discussions where I explore these aspects of herd composition I divide herd numbers according to species. In discussion where Mongolians would use the word *mal* I too use it. In the appendix I include a graph of herd sizes in SSU (Figures A.1 and A.2).

<sup>48</sup> I utilize the Gini coefficient because livestock are the primary and, in many cases, only productive asset of Uguumur households. Moreover, local distinctions in wealth rest almost entirely on livestock holdings.

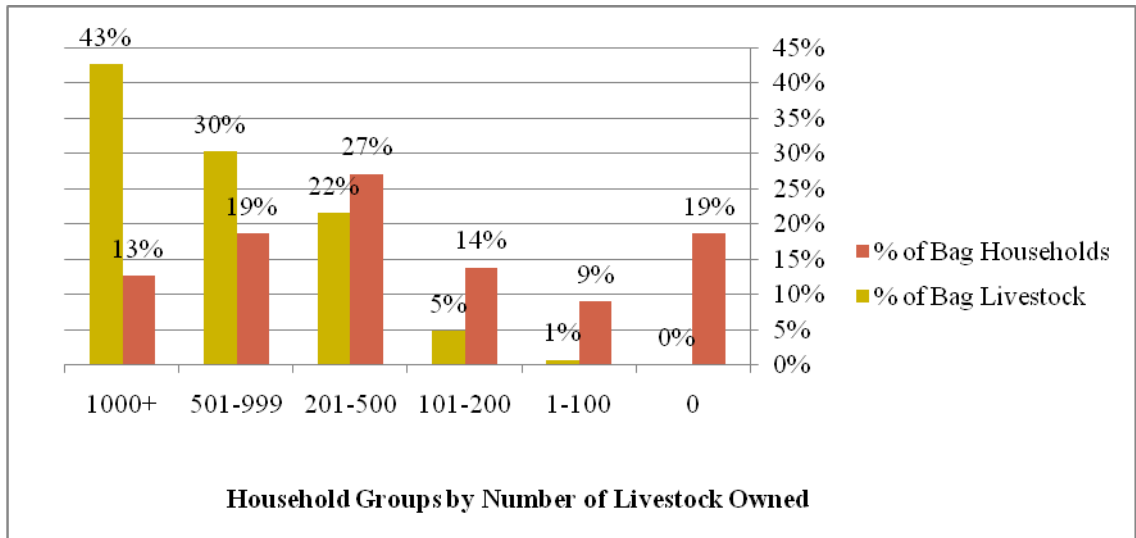


Figure 3.1. Distribution of livestock amongst Uguumur district households (Data gathered from soum statistical office; compiled by author).

Following privatization, it is often assumed, households in Uguumur were seemingly near parity in livestock holdings. However, there were differences. Some households had personal stock remaining from the negdel period when individual herder households were allowed to retain small private herds to supplement household consumption. In the last few years of the collectives, a number of households were permitted to exceed this number through lease and contract herding. Nevertheless, the distinctions were not similar to the current level of differentiation. Clearly, since that time, some households have been able to increase herd size while others have not. Although this chapter does not address these historical factors to a large degree, it does address some of the dynamics that would lead to such divergence in livestock assets albeit from a synchronic perspective. The primary argument I make here is that households of varying livestock wealth are differentially enabled to increase herd size, optimize herd composition, and manage risk. More importantly, though, I intend to demonstrate how current inequality in livestock holdings impact future rates of herd growth and loss which in turn render households differentially vulnerable to disaster<sup>49</sup>. Of prime importance, then, is to understand how households manage their herds and how management is constricted by various loss pressures. Evidently, this can have important implications both for understanding vulnerability to disasters like zud and processes of socio-economic differentiation.

In the graph below (Figure 3.2) we see that four out of the five categories of households suffered negative herd growth rates in the period of July 2007 to July 2008. Only the very

<sup>49</sup> See Fratkin (1990) for a discussion of how drought impacts socio-economic differentiation among the Ariaal of Kenya. See also Mariam (1991) for Ethiopian case.

wealthy category was capable of increasing herd size. Even if we subtract herd losses due to zud mortality, the poorest two categories remain in negative growth. As I argue below, the occurrence of zud herd losses can often pressure household to further divest stock through sales and consumption. For example, poor households must either continue to draw down stocks to satisfy consumption or they must restrict consumption levels. Consequently, simply subtracting zud losses from other kinds of loss does not equal a normal year growth rate for these groups. Yet, even in good years poorer households must confront the consumption-production squeeze by ‘eating’ (*idex*) into their herds to a greater degree than wealthier households which in turn limits the degree to which they can accumulate stock through reproductive means. As we can see, the wealthiest group did not suffer a negative growth rate even in the context of disaster. Clearly, this has implications for a growing wealth divide and points to a clear distinction in household vulnerability to zud-based livestock mortality.

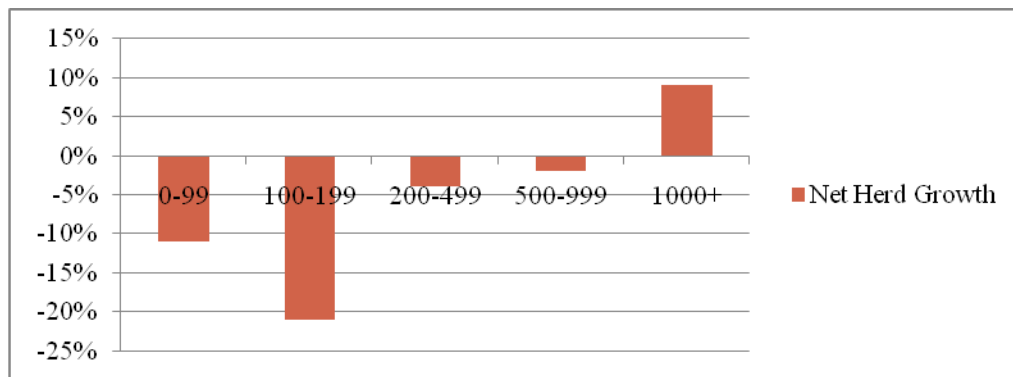


Figure 3.2. Mean herd growth rates of wealth categories from July 2007 to July 2008 (from household survey data).

Understanding asset cycles is only part of the story though. As I argued in the introductory chapter a broader range of factors including the social relations that mediate how households deal with risk and the effects of disaster are here considered prime causes. Nevertheless, examining herd management and asset dynamics serves as an important starting point for such argumentation. In order to do this I track household livestock assets and the management practices and conditional factors that influence the growth and loss of those very assets.

### **Background: Asset Dynamics and Management**

In order to understand differential rates of herd growth and loss within pastoral communities and how these rates can affect a household herd’s vulnerability to shocks, I draw on current asset-based approaches in poverty research, Barth’s (1969) observations of ‘livestock as capital’, and recent studies on asset dynamics in pastoral economies.



### **Asset-based Approaches and Poverty Traps**

New approaches in poverty research carried out under the label of ‘asset-based approaches’ or ‘poverty trap research’ argue that there are critical minimum thresholds of asset-holdings above which individuals or households can continue to accumulate and below which individuals or households are either in a stable position of chronic poverty or caught in a cycle of disinvestment leading to extreme poverty (Carter and Barrett 2006; Moser 2004). Others argue for an intermediary ‘stage’ called ‘transitory poverty’ where accumulation is possible but under threat. Proponents of this approach argue that asset accumulation trajectories bifurcate above and below this point called the Micawber threshold (Carter 2008). It has been found that those below this threshold point are more vulnerable to the effects of asset shocks such as drought. Asset losses are often irreversible and can take years to recover if at all (Carter 2007). A number of studies have found that those above the threshold point in fact shed assets in order to maintain consumption signifying confidence in accumulation capacity. Conversely, those below this critical asset threshold have been found to asset smooth or restrict consumption in order to maintain asset levels and reduce continued or future losses. However, in conditions where asset-smoothing behavior is constrained, shocks can force those below the threshold to continue to drawn down assets even further. Basic consumption requirements and immediate income needs remain in the face of shocks and can force these individuals or households to exacerbate the spiraling downward trajectory. Additionally, repeated disasters and incremental threats to asset-holdings can create a ‘ratchet effect’ deepening and worsening the position of the chronic poor into extreme poverty (Shipton 1990).

When such conditions are recurrent a poverty trap can be said to exist (Fafchamps 2003). In other words, when conditions below a critical threshold are such that accumulating sufficient assets to exceed the minimum point become increasingly more difficult, those individuals or households are considered to be caught in a poverty trap. Additionally, those above the threshold could be said to be in an accumulation trap. This is in contrast to past assumptions that the poor will over time, given the right conditions, accumulate enough assets to move beyond such thresholds. Such ‘convergence’ has been shown to be elusive.

Asset de/accumulation behaviors, however, are strongly affected by non-asset factors and access to other sources of capital (Fafchamps 2003). Safety nets such as social support mechanism (kin support or patronage), self-insurance, savings, credit, gifting, and other pathways for smoothing income significantly shape households exposure to shocks and poverty trap effects. Strategies like income diversification and remittances can also affect asset dynamics. Additionally, as I argue, a number of mediating factors such as ownership rights, property

regimes, structures of resource access, terms of trade, and broader political economic factors such as market integration and state incorporation are critical. All of these factors shape, to varying degrees, how households manage, mitigate, and cope with asset loss. Clearly, asset cycles depend to a great extent on the ability of households to manage the risks that threaten those very assets including the mediation and manipulation of various socio-political factors. Understanding asset dynamics through asset-tracking, I argue, is an important entry point for understanding the dynamics of wealth and poverty and household vulnerability to zud-based livestock mortality.

### **Asset-based Approaches in Pastoral Research**

Asset-based attributes can also affect the ways in which asset dynamics operate. In a number of studies (Carter et al. 2006; Barret et al. 2007; Dercon 1998; DeVries; Fafchamps et al 1998; Esilaba 2005; Little et al 2006; Lybbert 2003; Lybbert et al. 2004; and McPeak and Barrett 2002), asset-dynamics in pastoral societies have served as a testing ground for such theories. In pastoral societies, livestock are the primary productive asset upon which household wealth and status depend (Little et al 2006). In Uguumur, livestock are, by far, the primary productive household asset and source of income. Consequently, livestock assets serve as an important proxy for examining ‘threshold’ and ‘poverty trap’ theories. Although such studies do not draw on his work, I find Barth’s (1969) description of livestock as ‘capital’ particularly helpful in delineating how livestock asset cycles can be viewed in such ways. He makes four major points concerning livestock: (1) all productive capital (i.e. livestock) is in consumable form, (2) a significant fraction of the income is in the form of capital gains (female stock), (3) livestock are perishable therefore there is a continual risk of total or partial loss of capital, and (4) the rate of income decreases with increased capital, meaning, especially in the case of Uguumur, that with more animals the cost of management rises. Livestock assets are also subject to severe climatic shocks and herds have both high expected returns, high variability in returns, and can also provide as insurance against shock.

These attributes of livestock and the central importance of livestock in pastoral economies render the dynamics of pastoral wealth and poverty especially amenable to asset-based analyses. Moreover, Mongolian understandings of rural wealth and poverty also make such analyses relevant. Household and personal wealth amongst livestock herders in Uguumur is assessed largely by the size of their overall herd, regardless of composition. Participants used terms like *ix maltai* (has many animals = over 500 head) or *baga maltai* (has few animals =

usually under 200-100), *bayan* (wealthy) or *yaduu* (poor)<sup>50</sup>, and *myangat malchin* (herder of one thousand animals) to describe the relative wealth of people in the community. The most common are those terms that expressly describe livestock holdings. Terms like *bayan*, although they can apply to certain herders in the community who are extremely wealthy, are often reserved for those who are wealthy within the broader nation-state such as business owners, politicians, and others in the upper-class of modern Mongolian society. *Yaduu* is also a term that has broader application. Livestock holdings, as signs of wealth, are also signs of *chadal* or personal power and capability. As I describe at the end of this chapter contemporary interpretations of wealth mystify the realities of the herding poor and the highly contingent rise of the wealthy in ways that are oddly similar to those in strong capitalist economies.

Asset-based approaches along with Barth's delineation of livestock as capital are an important starting point for understanding not only vulnerability to disasters like *zud* but also for understanding the very production of poverty and inequality itself. In this chapter I take from these approaches a focus on asset dynamics. In order to understand how asset-dynamics render differentially endowed households more or less vulnerable to *zud*-based livestock mortality in the sections below I look at the ways in which herd-owners: (1) acquire stock such as through inheritances, loans, wages, gifts, etc., (2) manage stock through breeding, providing forage, reducing threat of hazards and shocks, watering, selective culling, etc., and (3) dispose of stock through consumption, payments, gifts, sales, and losses due to environmental shocks, hazards, and stresses. In short, I argue, that in order to fully understand how disaster affects herding households, we must understand how households manage herds.

### **Being Malchin: Households and Herd Management in Uguumur**

Pastoral herd management in Uguumur is acutely preoccupied with (1) manipulating the biological capacity of different species of livestock to reproduce and (2) minimizing the vagaries of arid steppe ecologies that detrimentally affect the benefits of herd reproduction to household livelihoods. The extent that herd management affects household livestock wealth is determined by the underlying factors and conditions that shape household capacity for particular management practices. The factors and conditions include: (1) the biological requirements of individual livestock species, (2) ecological processes and dynamics, (3) the social and institutional context that shapes access to resources including labor and land, and (4) market access and conditions. This overview of pastoral herd management in Uguumur describes the focal points that are

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<sup>50</sup> These terms are classed with other words according to the root 'bay' and 'yad'. *Bayan* has the same root as *bayar* which means happy. *Yaduu* has the same root as *yadarax* which means to tire or exhaust. It is also related to the term *yadaragaa* which translates as psychological exhaustion (Kohrt 2004).

critical to cycles of growth and loss among individual households: (1) acquisition of herds, (2) building and managing a herd, and (3) disposing of herds and their products while managing loss.

Yet, as anthropological research has made abundantly clear, households are not unified and authority over these aspects of household herd dynamics is not distributed evenly. Consequently, cycles of accumulation and loss must be seen through the prism of ownership and authority within households. This is critical, for example, in understanding how men accumulate power in the rural political economy of Uguumur which has important implication not only for household herd management decisions but for the broader institutional context that mediates household vulnerability to disaster. In the section that follows I take a closer look at the rural household and the distributions of ownership rights over livestock.

### **Households and Herd Ownership**

Mongolian herders defined the household or *ail* as ‘the people of one *ger*’ and this equates in many ways to the nuclear family or in some instances, the stem family.<sup>51</sup> A number of different people may in fact live in any one particular *ger* just as members of the household may be absent for a considerable period of time living elsewhere. In some cases, younger brothers, sisters, grandparents, nephews/nieces, adopted children or other unmarried relatives from the extended families of both sides may live in the *ger* and be considered members of the *ail*. However, once a member marries they are no longer considered a member as ‘one household cannot have two masters’ as the Mongolian saying goes.<sup>52</sup> After marriage, the new family will be provided with their own *ger* and start their own ‘ail’.

### **Household authority**

Authority within the household is not distributed evenly. The household head is recognized as the ‘ezen’ or master (or, in religious language, ‘lord’) and, ideally, has corporate authority over most decisions the household makes.<sup>53</sup> In the countryside, this is almost always a male except in the case of a few female-headed households which are extremely rare on the steppe for reasons to be explained below. In the absence of the ezen his wife assumes authority as head until their youngest son marries at which point he will assume the position of ezen of the

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<sup>51</sup> The stem family is defined as the combination of the nuclear parent household and the nuclear households of one or more children.

<sup>52</sup> There are many informal sayings that repeat this sentiment and refer not only to men’s roles but also women’s. For example, ‘there cannot be two hearths’ or ‘two braziers’ are also common sayings. Such ideas are an important part of practice as well. For example, two households should not cook one meal in one *ger*. Each household separately must cook something. This does not prevent the people from eating in each other’s households though.

<sup>53</sup> Literally *geriin ezen* or master of the yurt.

household. Older siblings fission from the core household of their parents and form new households with their own ger. Yet, much of this portrayal, common in both the academic and development literature, is largely discussed in ideal terms; in fact, household membership and the distribution of authority within the household can assume a variety of different forms. Over the research period, it became increasingly apparent that women make a large number of important decisions, including those related to herd management, even though, in most cases, they may not be the one to actively pursue those decisions publicly. For that reason, in some cases the data was collected largely from wives rather than husbands because wives often knew more about the decision making process and could recall in greater detail.<sup>54</sup> It is important to also note that the both husbands and wives in herding households are *malchin* or ‘people who live by livestock’, which is often translated as herder.

In ideal terms, gendered authority in the household is delineated by a public/private distinction rooted in the separation of ‘productive’ tasks (*malchnii ajil* or herder work) from ‘reproductive’ ones (*geriin ajil* or house work). Although the distinction is at times blurred, this ideal is performed to varying degrees in practice and is exemplified in the spatial geography of the ger and the tasks performed in that space. In the diagram below it is shown that the west or left side of the ger is gendered male while the east or right side of the ger is gendered female. The separation of space is further dissected by an age distinction whereby elders occupy the head of the ger towards the north and the younger members or guests sit to the south. In the course of fieldwork, one astute herder, a la Levi-Strauss, argued that the distinction between female and male sides of the ger could be also considered north and south as the north is the more respected (*xundeldeg*), spiritual side of the ger and the south is more everyday (*jiriin*). However, these distinctions are rooted more in generation and age-based distinctions as senior guests sit closer to the north of the ger and the junior guests sit closer to the south. Yet, at the head of the ger (*khoimor*) on the household’s altar are usually pictures of deceased males, particularly fathers and grandfathers, and statues or paintings (*zurag* or *thongka*) of various Buddhas and Buddhist deities (collectively called *burxan*). Towards the south are more rudimentary objects such as tack for herding on the west side (men’s side) and cooking equipment and food supplies (women’s side).

### ***Authority and Ownership of Household Herds***

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<sup>54</sup> Most interviews with wives were in the presence of their husbands. In general in Mongolia and in the sample population discussed here women on average attain a higher level of education than men. Many men had never finished grade school, while I found a number of wives who had even attended college. In many households, I found that wives keep accounts of herds including births and sales (even weights and prices).

Within the household, gender and age distinctions of authority and respect have material implications in that members have differing degrees of ownership and authority rights over certain kinds of property including livestock. The ezen, typically the male head of household, has corporate authority over livestock (as *maliin ezen* or herd-master) and decisions regarding livestock including management and disposal though sales or consumption, even if wives are doing the calculating and planning the productive calendar.

However, the ezen's corporate authority is not total. If wives brought livestock into the marriage, those livestock belong to her even if her husband assumes a greater degree of authority over the use of her stock during the course of the marriage. Married women typically own cattle which are symbols of fertility and form the most important reproductive activity for a household – milking. If a husband and wife divorce, then, according to custom, the husband takes 75 per cent of the households stock and the wife takes 25 per cent.<sup>55</sup> The logic here is that the husband brought a greater number of stock into the marriage as opposed to the wife and the wife will return home to her father or brothers, whereas the husband cannot do so. However, according to official legal codes, the split should be 50/50. Nevertheless, many rural couples never legally marry but rather *suux* or sit with each other.<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, these couples follow traditional rules for divorce if they should split.

Children may be gifted livestock at different times of the year over the course of their childhood. Male children typically receive horses and sheep and female children receive cattle and goats. Each over time accumulates their own xuvi or share. Children, when they leave the household at marriage, will take their xuvi with them. Their xuvi may be in the end more or less than the number of stock gifted to them over the years depending on the growth of the household herd as a whole. This is generally left to the decision of their father, whose control over the distribution of livestock amplifies his paternal power.

The dominance of men's rights in livestock over women's and other members' rights, is critically important to understand how male authority is reproduced over time and through generations through livestock exchange and herd growth. Via exchange, some of the primary ways are through marriage, gifting, and inheritance. As described above, when a child marries they acquire their xuvi. This xuvi can also be received as inheritance or *uv xurungu* when the

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<sup>55</sup> Divorce of legally married couples seemed to be rare. However, many couples do not marry (*gerlex*) but rather co-habitate (*suux* or sit). I knew several, particularly younger people, who had co-habitated with others they referred to as *nuxur* (husband) or *avgai* (wife). Yet amongst older generations, particularly 35 and older, there were few cases of divorce.

<sup>56</sup> To marry is *gerlex* or 'to form a ger'. In rural communities, there is currently little demand for state-sanctioned marriage practices.

parents die. Sons on average always receive more than daughters and faster reproducing stock, mostly sheep and goats. The cultural logic of this concerns the importance of patrilineal ideals and male virility in intra-kin transactions of livestock and authority. Typically, households inherit their herds from patrilineal relatives usually from fathers but also from paternal uncles. Fathers tend to give their sons sheep, goats, and horses and occasionally camels. Women, however, typically receive cattle or goats as milch stock.

Moreover, when acquired herds enter the household, they are treated differently as well. Horses are given a ritual and social power well above their economic importance to the household. The gifting of horses, particularly stallions, from fathers to sons recreates the transmission of patrilineal authority and descent. Additionally, during community ovoo rituals, horses are the preferred 'sacrifice' to the mountain spirits rather than other livestock. In pre-socialist times, cattle in some regions, associated with women's fertility, received an important ritual and social importance. This is not the case in contemporary Uguumur. Cattle, in contrast, a less marketable animal due to its high mortality rate, have lost significant importance, mirroring women's falling position in the rural political economy. Moreover, the stock that typically enters the household sphere also takes on the division of labor. Sheep and horses, signifying malchnii ajil or herders work, are associated with the 'productive' aspects of the household which have become increasingly important in the 'age of the market'. Cattle, on the other hand, signify geriin ajil or house work which is associated the 'reproductive' aspects of householding that have diminished in status.

Yet, many of these distinctions are softened in practice. Women can acquire varying degrees of control over the operation of the household and, often due to their increased levels of education, serve an important role in herd management. Moreover, the actual on the ground dynamics of livestock exchanges may act against the position of men in the household. In some cases, women's fathers provide the bulk of the household herds. This can in fact temper the tension within the household over corporate rights. Yet, in some circumstances the son-in-law may take on the position of a 'son' becoming a client to this father-in-law, thereby counteracting to a degree his wife's position vis-à-vis the household.

The differential distribution of ownership rights within the household is critical to understanding how a household manages herds. Evidently, in the 'age of the market', there are increased incentives to want to limit the extent that others, even in the household, can lay claim to livestock. In situations where ownership claims over livestock are complex and collective the individual profit motive is muted. In these contexts people are tied to each other vis-à-vis their rights in livestock and, consequently, when the use and benefit of herds are distributed widely

there may be less drive for individual gain. When herds are held under a strong corporate authority by male heads the possibility for individual motivations to reign supreme become paramount.

It is clear that such household dynamics have important implications for herd cycles. The influence of such factors can be most vividly seen in the pathways for herd acquisition. Some households are disposed to acquiring herds in viable ways while others are not. I explore these dynamics in the section below.

### ***Household Characteristics and Wealth Categories***

The 68 households included in the sample population have been divided into categories based on livestock holdings (refer to Table 3.1). Although Mongolians make various distinctions in terms of livestock species, such as between bod and bog, or between individual species, sex, and age, in terms of wealth and in everyday social discourse, one livestock equals one livestock. For example, if a herd-owner owns 500 sheep and 100 horses (600 total), this would in everyday language be considered the same as owning 300 goats, 100 sheep, and 200 cattle. In other situations and contexts, making distinctions are evidently more important. Additionally, the difference between family size and household size is calculated by subtracting family members who are not part of the household. For example, older children, children in university, and those who live elsewhere are rarely active participants in the household's herding activities. This is important for a number of reasons as will be explored here in chapter 4 on labor.

*Table 3.1. Sample household characteristics by wealth category (data collected in household survey).*

	Average Age of Heads	Average Years Herding	Family Size	Household Size
0-99	50	23	5.2	4.6
100-199	41	18	6.13	4.75
200-499	36	14	4.83	4.38
500-999	43	17	6	4.53
1000+	43	17	6.26	4.73

The categories I use are based on Mongolian measures of wealth. These divisions have a long history, even pre-dating socialism (Bold 1996). The first category, very poor (6 households), are considered to be so poor that they cannot successfully herd independently. Many of these households are either elderly (hence the higher average age), live as hired herders, or are part-time herders leaving their meager holdings in the hands of relatives for a portion of the year. The second category is considered poor and at risk of being very poor (9 households), a condition



which would force them to either leave the pastoral economy or become dependent on other, wealthier households. The households who make up this category represent a wide cross-section of the community. Middle wealth households are not considered to be at threat of poverty and dependency (23 households). Moreover, this category, as demonstrated by the data, is made up largely of younger households as the younger average age of household heads, fewer years herding, and smaller family and household size point to this predominance. Most are in the early stages of the normative household development cycle with smaller herders. In the wealthy (15 households) and very wealthy (15 households)<sup>57</sup> categories households are considered to be wealthy enough that they face little pressure from consumption or other sources of loss, even some hazards such as the conditions that create *zud*. The very wealthy, though, are accorded a specific name, *myangat malchin* or ‘herder of a thousand’. These titles are accompanied with actual recognition from the *soum*. Moreover, the *soum*, province, and national governments organize *Myangat Malchdiin Zuvluguunii Chuulgan*, or Myangat Herder’s Advisory Conference in which they give lectures and develop plans to submit to MoFALI for future development and policy issues. These herders are so wealthy that they are considered ‘permanently’ wealthy. As I will demonstrate, their herds equal more than the sum of livestock.

### Acquiring Herds

In order for households to have a viable herd they must have access to a minimum head of livestock (Devries et al 2006). In Uguumur herders whose stock total hovered between 100 and 150 *bog* or smallstock, I found, frequently discussed leaving the pastoral economy.<sup>58</sup> Most of the households included in this sample who own below 100 animals are clients of wealthy relatives or are elderly. Having fewer than 100 head of stock poses serious risks as the rest of this chapter will make clear. The herd-owners (*maliin ezen*) of Uguumur, and the households to which they belong, acquired their livestock in a variety of different ways each of which has important implications for both herd growth and size. Uguumur herder households acquired stock in generally five important ways: (1) privatization, (2) inheritance, (3) gifting, (4) wage or share payments, and (5) theft. There are other minor means by which some households acquired livestock many of which were heard in conversation but were not collected as data during the household survey as herders were reluctant to speak of these methods because they do not

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<sup>57</sup> Bayankhutag at one point had more *myangat malchin* than any other *soum* in Mongolia, 47. Over half of those are in Uguumur. Although bag level statistics are not kept, it would not be a stretch to assume that Uguumur may have more *myangat malchin* than anywhere in Mongolia.

<sup>58</sup> Although there are distinctions in herd composition between different categories, they are similar enough that 100 head is assumed to be primarily small stock.

conform to the ‘normal’ methods for acquiring livestock. Some of these methods include bet collections, payments, rents, loan interest, retirement gifts, and *xaxuuli* (bribes).

Before I examine this data, I need to explain how I represent stock data. In the Mongolian language there are a number of ways to represent livestock. Since many of the data I discuss here are historical, many herders could not recall in any accurate way their herds’ composition before privatization or, outside the last 5-8 years, since privatization. Herders could, however, generally recall how many *mal* or livestock they had. Mongolia scholars tend to use a Soviet term of standard sheep units to convert livestock to a standard unit. This, however, I feel is important for certain conversations and not necessarily in all contexts, particularly historical ones. In later discussions, where herd composition is critical I look at each species.

### **Herd Acquisitions**

Herd acquisition is critical at two important points in the lifecycle of the household (McCabe 2004). The initial core herd, typically the largest single acquisition, enables a household to enter the pastoral economy as an independent household. Additional herd acquisitions are important as a means to remain in the pastoral economy when pastoral viability is at threat (DeVries et al 2006). Some means of accessing herd capital are not viable methods for establishing a household’s core herd, while other methods play a more important role for households coping with drastic herd losses (see Figures 3.3 and 3.4 below). For instance, stock obtained from privatization and through inheritance (*uv khurungu* or *xuvi*) are the most viable means of establishing a core herd. Wages and shares secured through herding employment are rarely large enough to establish a core herd. Initial contracts offer seemingly large shares of stock, but in the end, what an employee actually receives may be quite different as chapter 4 explains. Gifts and purchases of livestock, however, are not important means for acquiring a viable core herd.<sup>59</sup> Gifts and purchases of livestock instead play an important role in herd size and composition maintenance and consequently help households cope with risk of exiting the pastoral economy.

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<sup>59</sup> In only one case did I find evidence that a gift (*beleg*) of livestock could establish a core herd. Although the herder claimed that the transaction was a gift, there was some doubt amongst other herders whether such a case could be called one of a gift. The herder received a herd of livestock (95) from his wife’s uncle who had received stock from privatization. The uncle retired to the aimag center and ‘gave’ his stock to the herder interviewed.

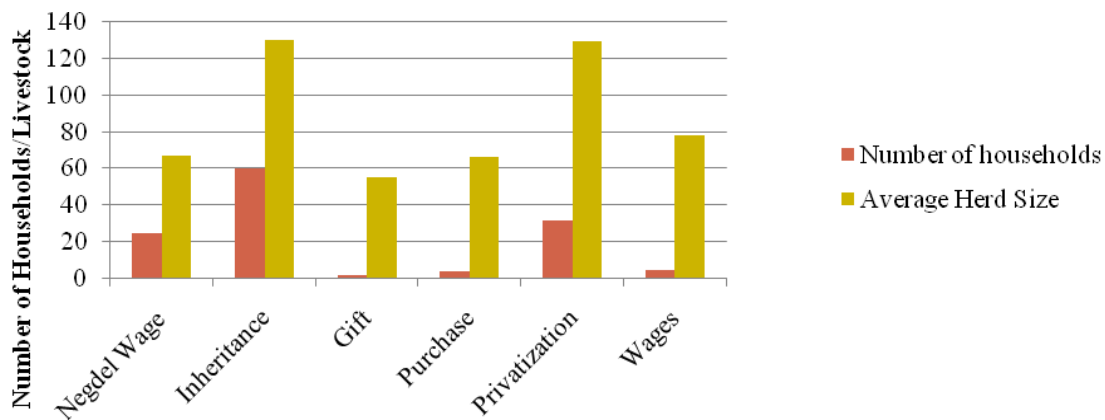


Figure 3.3. Primary herd acquisitions (data collected from household survey).

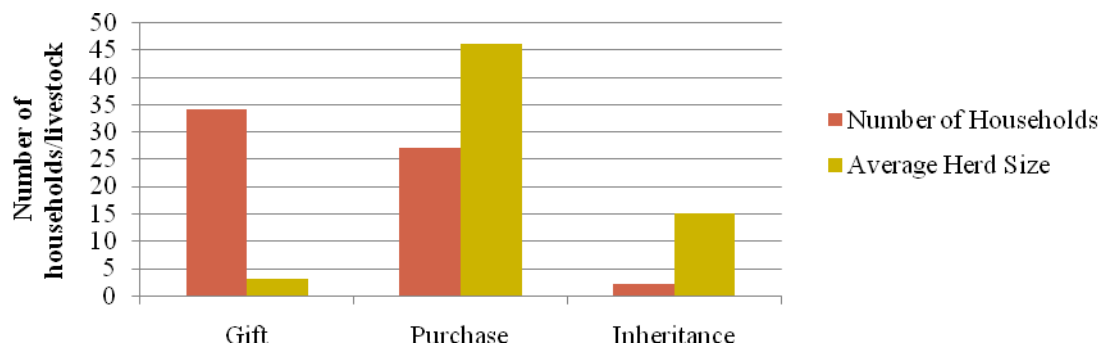


Figure 3.4. Secondary herd acquisitions (data collected from household survey).

### ***Privatization and the Negdels***

43 % of herders in the sample worked as members of negdels. These households benefited from herd additions in several ways. Most of these households, if they were married while working for the negdel, acquired private stock via inheritance from their parents. Secondly, they acquired herds during the introduction of the contract and lease herding programs in 1989. Although households were limited to 50 head of private livestock before these programs, the restrictions were eventually removed as long as households participated in the program. 25 herders participated in these two programs, adding on average 67 head to their herds. Yet, two years later in 1992, as part of the vast political and economic reforms being instituted in Ulaanbaatar after the collapse of one party rule, the negdels were decollectivized. The negdel political apparatus was disbanded and reformed as a company. The livestock and other material

capital of the negdel were delegated to the newly formed companies. Workers remained employees of the company herding stock. Only a portion of the negdel stock was immediately privatized. In 1993, the employees voted to disband the company and fully privatize the livestock. Employee households acquired stock again through this second privatization. 47 % of sampled households received vouchers and participated in privatization. The Uguumur brigad of Temtsel negdel herded primarily sheep and horse during the socialist period. Consequently, most share earnings from the lease period and privatized stock were in sheep although herders were able to access other species from the two other brigads in the negdel. Private holdings were more highly diversified, with cattle, horse, goat, and sheep. Not all households benefitted similarly from the privatization process. The range of acquired livestock ranged from 41 in one household to just over 300 for another household. The number of stock one received depended on the numbers of years one worked and number of dependents. However, number of stock received in privatization is not highly correlated with current wealth.

### ***Inheritance***

The data collected from Uguumur households also show that a major transition in herd acquisition is underway. Although privatization is discussed in the literature as the most important single acquisition for herding households and therefore whatever differentiation there may be is traced to that event, in the case of the households sampled in Uguumur it was not. Currently, inheritance or one's *xuvi*, either afforded at the time of marriage or at death of the parents, plays a much more prominent role in supplying new or stock-poor households with a core herd. If we look at Figure 3.3 one can see that 32 households participated in and benefitted from privatization while 57 households received livestock from either marriage gifts or inheritance following the death of their parents (their *xuvi* or share). The average for both privatization and *xuvi* is 130 head of livestock, a viable core herd size.

Part of the explanation for this concerns the emergence of a generational shift in the herding population as younger households who did not experience privatization enter the pastoral economy and older households who benefitted from privatization either shift out to villages or towns due to herd loss and impoverishment or transfer their livestock to their children when they retire or pass on. Additionally, there has also been a corresponding shift in the size of inherited herds. In the socialist period, inheritance, restricted as were private herds, averaged around 40 livestock per transaction. Now, however, some young households have inherited significant numbers of stock. In one case, a young herder inherited his father's herds when his father died, totaling well over a 1,000 head of stock. In many cases, marriage payments given to a young household (also called *xuvi*) by the parents of either side can total upwards of 400 to 500 head of

stock in some cases, a herd size well beyond the 200 average for the country. Nevertheless, this does not mean all *xuvi* are large. Children of poor households receive correspondingly small *xuvi* if they receive any at all. As the interview excerpt demonstrates, inheritance is largely dependent on the parents' own herds:

D: If your daughter gets married, you give animals right? How do you know how many to give?

Herder S: I give 50 head of small stock, sheep and goats. I will give 10 horses and cows, but in her case I will give cows. But there are many possibilities.

D: What does the number depend on?

Herder S: It depends on your own number of livestock. If you have many you will give many, yes. If you are poor you cannot give many, of course.

Young herders do actively attempt to garner large *xuvi* from their parents or parents-in-law. Young men will work for periods under their fathers helping to increase the household herd. When they finally get married and '*tusdaa garax*' or separate out on their own, they will inherit a portion of that herd. The importance of attaining a large *xuvi* is not lost on herders themselves. Herders actively attempt to gain large *xuvi*. In one case, I met a nephew working for his uncle in Uguumur even though his family is living and herding in Murun to the north. His family, however, is very poor and cannot afford to give him a *xuvi* if he gets married. Consequently, he has agreed to work under his uncle in return for a *xuvi* when he gets married. This practice is not uncommon in Mongolia. Even children who have separated out from their parents continue to work with their fathers in the hopes of gaining additional herds over time. Such inheritance practices are leading to an incipient stratification and class formation in the community. Subsequently, as I discuss in chapters 4 and 6 increasingly one finds wealth highly concentrated and equitably distributed in kin groups as opposed to the broader community. This should not, however, give the impression that kin are sharing stock or providing mutual aid beyond inheritance or an occasional small gift. As the other chapters make clear, this concentration of wealth is due to other factors including territoriality.

### ***Wages***

Wages like inheritance acquisitions and privatized *negdel* livestock acquisitions averages high enough to form a viable core herd. However, the herd numbers in Figures 3.3 and 3.4 above reflect only those households who are herding independently in Uguumur. In other words, it represents only those households who successfully completed hired herding or lease contracts and made the transition from dependent employee to independent herding household. As chapter 4 makes clear there are a significantly larger number of former employees who never received a high enough wage or share to formulate a viable core herd. In the sample only 5 households benefitted from such relationships. The average of 78 head of small stock, although viable as a

starter-herd, is also dangerously close to a minimum. All of these households benefitted either from continued dependence on former patrons or received stock from other sources like inheritance or purchase.

### ***Purchase***

A number of households purchased livestock either to start a herd or to supplement a small herd following a massive loss. 4 households purchased livestock to start their own herd. The average was 66 head of stock. Purchase, however, is more utilized as a secondary acquisition in order to supplement a herd. 27 households purchased stock in this way and averaged 46 head per purchase. There are two primary rationales for purchasing stock: (1) as a supplement to reduced herds and (2) as breeding stock to improve herd quality. Following a loss event, it is typically poor and middle wealth households who purchase stock. Some even take out loans in order to buy stock.<sup>60</sup> Purchasing livestock though is not a desired strategy. First, it requires a huge input of liquid capital or divestment in larger species like horses in order to acquire stock (almost always small stock). Secondly, there are serious information asymmetries that present buyers with risk. They have limited knowledge with which to evaluate the condition and fertility of stock. Consequently, herders purchase stock very reluctantly.

Some of the sampled households purchased stock in order to improve the breed quality of their herd. The majority of these households are middle to very wealthy. In the sample, households had introduced new breeds of sheep, goat, and cattle. Sheep had merino strains left over from the negdel period when wool quality was paramount. Now, with fewer means to manage risk and the vulnerability of foreign breeds to cold exposure, famine stress, and other hazards herders have introduced Mongol breeds like the 'iron-head' from Sukhbaatar aimag. These sheep have fatter tails and can cope with the stresses of the Mongolian environmental much better than other breeds. Their wool however is of significantly worse quality but the returns on increased meat makes up for this loss.

Herder M: So I want to improve livestock breed and strains. I am thinking of sheep with beautiful, fat tails. This is what I think because we market this nice tail fat. When we do this it is very useful for our needs so a herder must struggle to acquire such beautiful livestock. Only in this way can I improve my livestock.

Goats were not bred for cashmere production during the negdel period and so households have begun searching for and introducing highly productive and good quality cashmere producing ram-goats in their herds. All of the households who did this preferred the Galshariin Ulaan or Galshar Red from the soum to the south of Bayankhutag. These breeds, although red because of their hair,

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<sup>60</sup> I present an example below.

produce a fine near-white fiber that does not drop early. Only a few households have tried to introduce higher milk-producing cattle into their herds, but they said this has been unsuccessful.

### *Gifts*

Amongst the sampled households I only uncovered 5 cases where a household had received a gift of livestock of more than just a few animals. Households will often give gifts to teachers, doctors, nurses, and other friends.

D: This year you gave 5-6 horses, why?

Herder M: They were gifts to friends. One was building a new ger for his son and another's son was having his 'es' (first hair cut) taken, there are many reasons.

In most cases these gifts are single animals. Gifting in this way follows different sets of rules. When such gifts are *idesh* or for food, it is almost always sheep.

D: Why do you give sheep to relatives?

Herder M: I give sheep for food. They must eat.

When livestock gifts are exchange between men they almost always take the form of horses unless the household cannot afford to in which case they will give sheep.

D: This year you gave 6 horses and 3 sheep as gifts to relatives. Why did you give these animals?

Herder G: This is tradition. In Mongolian culture when there are ax-duu, you give horses to an ax [elder male] and cows to women. We almost never give goats. Cold-snouted animals [cows and goats] we do not give to ax. Hot-snouted animals [horses and sheep] we can give. So we give many sheep.

Such small gifts are numerous and are rarely given to other herders or accepted with the purpose of supplementing herd size. Here, I only present data on gifts received of more than a few head of livestock. In 2 of these cases the gifts (average of 55 head) served as part of an initial core herd and in 3 cases the gifts (average of 34 head) were secondary acquisitions to supplement a core herd. Only one household received a gift of livestock as a sole source of an initial core herd. For those who receive stock as a secondary acquisition, a gift can be critical.

The reasons for giving are various. Cases of restocking, however, were few.

Herder M: I will certainly give. If my one relative suddenly loses their animals I will give them a 'donation' (*xandiv*) according to gifting principles, of course. But for others who will say they do not give, they must know themselves according to their own reasons.

Although the herder calls this presentation of stock a ‘*xandiv*’ it is also understood as *maljuulax* or restocking.<sup>61</sup> *Maljuulax*, though, almost always occurs within in the context of employment relations. The idea of *maljuulax* without such strings attached, such as after a disaster, is very rare and not all households would give. In fact, many households I interviewed bluntly said they would not give animals to someone who had lost animals, particularly in *zud*. They said that there was a reason they lost animals and why should they just give animals to someone who will lose them. They argued that herders who lose animals are often lazy and not committed to the herding *biznes*. The respondent above is an *Aimgiin Sain Malchin* or provincial best herder. In 2008, during the field research, he was nominated for *Ulsiin Sain Malchin* or national best herder, the second most prestigious award a herder can receive and generally a big deal. One of the categories that qualifies a herder for such distinction is *maljuulax*, meaning the numbers of households he has restocked. In urban circles, this is interpreted as being a benevolent act of prestation when in fact these relations are almost always of the employee-employer kind or similar to patron-clientage. Consequently, he was trying to portray this act as one of aid and support.

In sum, gifting is not a generally reliable means of acquiring stock although a few have benefitted in this way. In those cases, only one household received a gift as a core herd. The reluctance of households to ‘give’ stock to others in effect means that gifting is not a recognized pathway for entering or re-entering the pastoral economy. Moreover, gifting is often a means of manufacturing obligation. In observation and informal conversation, I found that the balance of gifts was tipped to poor, dependent, client households, many of whom are generally young. Senior elders, I found, present gifts of livestock both to their children and to other dependents. Social equals I found, in contrast, mutually gift stock to each other. For example, in several cases, seniors will gift horses to one another, both to strengthen the herd’s breeding potential by keeping the blood from being too close (*tsus denduu oirxon*) and to signify a bond of friendship between them. Evidently, gifting for the most part plays an important role in the socio-political realm but little in the economic viability of households.

### ***Other means***

Other methods of livestock acquisition are not as structured nor are they as dependable as those described above. Additionally, these typically have negative connotations like theft, bet collections, and other kinds of payment with negative connotations such as campsite purchase or rentals. However, any addition of stock to a herd is critical. Additional fertile, female stock can

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<sup>61</sup> These activities often do not occur after disasters. As I describe later, in one interview a herder argued there is no basis for giving livestock to people who cannot keep them alive.



not only increase the pool of breeding animals, thereby increasing the growth potential of a herd, an added animal can stem the loss of other animals as it can offset consumption-based losses or pressures to sell stock. Theft is one of the most common methods for accomplishing this. Some of the wealthiest herders in the bag were notorious thieves in years past. Some, according to other locals and the police, have served prison sentences for livestock theft. My host household argued that because these herders never had to sell their own stock, they were able to increase their herds.<sup>62</sup>

There are 3 kinds of livestock theft: (1) professional livestock theft done by organized gangs, (2) theft as expulsion threat to force non-local households to move, and (3) as a means to supplement income. The first kind is a major threat but much less common than the other two kinds. When professional livestock rings sweep an area they often steal large stock, particularly horses, and drive the animals on towards a slaughter location. The stock are slaughtered and immediately driven on to UB markets. In the second kind, the animals are typically small stock and are either added to one's own herd or are slaughtered for food. The third kind is similar in appearance but different in motivation and can include all species of livestock, except camels. However, theft is a minor method of acquisition not practiced by all households. Moreover, it is only useful as a secondary acquisition and simply as an immediate salve to the consumption squeeze.

### **Socio-Economic Differentiation and Herd Acquisition**

There were clear trends in how households of differing wealth acquired their core herds. For example, the low percentages for the poorest category in all acquisition methods demonstrate the poor have fewer means by which to acquire stock. The wealthy however, have high percentage rates for all categories. Clearly, the wealthy have benefitted from increased channels for accessing and acquiring livestock. Moreover, within acquisitions, excluding again the very poor, we see other trends along socio-economic categories. For instance, the wealthier the household the more likely they are to benefit from inheritance and privatization. This is critical important because if we look at the average herds received via each of these methods, it is clear that is much greater than other pathways. Interestingly, it is the middle and wealthy groups who rely heaviest on purchasing stock.

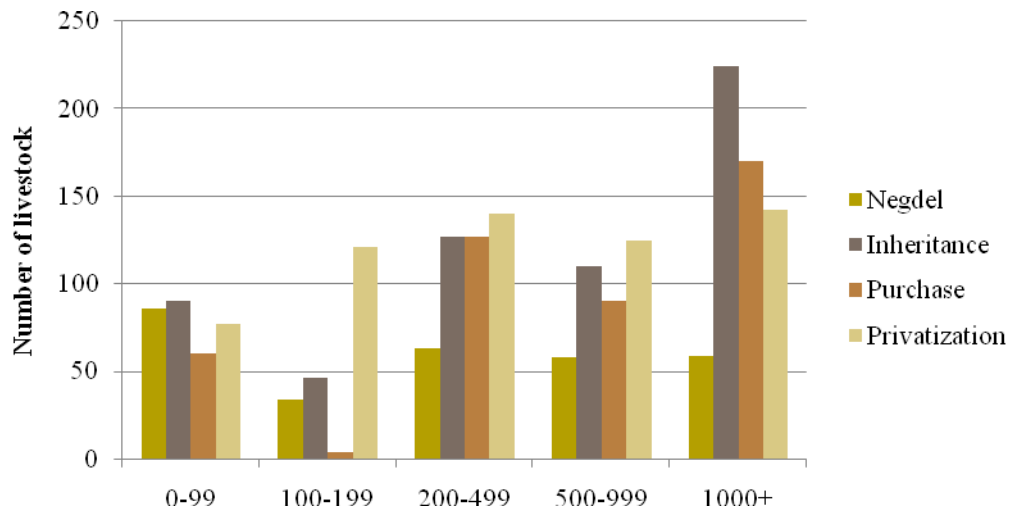
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<sup>62</sup> I describe one of these households below.

*Table 3.2. Percent of households by type of livestock acquisition (data collected from household survey).*

	Negdel Wage or Private Stock	Inheritance	Purchase	Privatization
0-99	50%	100%	50%	50%
100-199	50%	75%	13%	25%
200-499	21%	83%	46%	33%
500-999	40%	87%	60%	60%
1000+	47%	100%	27%	67%

Yet, this says little about the quantity of stock received via any of these methods. It is clear, though, in Table 3.2 that wealthier households obtain overall larger numbers of livestock from each of the methods. For example, the size of inheritance and purchased herds are overwhelmingly larger for wealthier herd-owners.



*Figure 3.5. Average herd acquisition by wealth category (data collected from household survey).*

Initial core herd size does present a number of problems for those in the poorer categories. But even for those who receive large herds, they must manage them. Poor management can easily lead to dramatic losses. Nevertheless, as I will demonstrate, *ceterus paribus*, low herd numbers intrinsically present particular problems for poor and even middle wealth households.

## **Building a Herd: Herd Size and Composition**

Pastoral households in Uguumur herd five different kinds of livestock: sheep (*xoni*) and goats (*yamaa*) referred to as *bog mal*, and horses (*aduu*), cattle (*uxer*), and camels (*temee*) referred to as *bod mal*. Although all five species are actively herded in Uguumur, not every individual household herds all five even though many do. In building viable herds, pastoralists must attempt to increase not only overall herd size but must appropriately manage the composition of their herds in order to satisfy household consumption needs, produce economically beneficial livestock products for the market or trade, and to effectively manage risk.

### **Herd Size**

Most households attempt to increase herds as much as possible while balancing household needs. Herd size is important for several reasons. First, an adequate herd size is necessary to satisfy household consumption and marketing needs. Without adequate stock, herding becomes an unviable occupation. Secondly, herd size is important as a buffer against environmental stress. A surplus of stock must be kept as self-insurance in the event of significant herd loss. Without sufficient livestock capital to rebuild following a loss event or significant improvements in risk management that would reduce the severity of loss, herders will be forced to exit the pastoral economy. Thirdly, herds represent a significant investment with high rates of return. Herding livelihoods are not just an opportunity to withstand poverty, food insecurity, and live out a 'traditional' lifeway; rather, herding in Mongolia is a viable business opportunity through which households can create significant wealth. Returns from livestock are easily invested in other business opportunities and allow herding household to partake in conspicuous consumption like their urban counterparts. In this sense, herding is opportunistic.

A household's herd size at any one point in time is largely dictated by the yearly cycles of gains and losses which herders attempt to manipulate to their advantage. The bulk of herd gains, despite the secondary herd acquisition strategies described above, are almost wholly dependent on the breeding capacity of individual livestock species. Moreover, as many herders say, in order to be a good herder one must '*tul sain avax*' or 'take newborns well'.

### **Animal Reproduction and Herd Growth**

Annual herd gains through breeding are dependent primarily on the species, sex, and age ratios of breeding stock in the herds. Different species of livestock have different rates of herd growth and different reproductive life spans. Small stock and sheep have faster breeding rates than horses, cattle, and camel. Small stock are generally able to breed once they have reached their first year and have high rates of twinning, particularly goats. Goats have a reproductive lifespan of 6-9 years and sheep 5-6 years. Camels are slow breeders with one calf every 3-4 years

as the camel cow's gestational cycle lasts nearly two years with approximately a year of milking and weaning. The camel cow reproductive cycle lasts throughout the life-course. Horse mares and cattle cows can produce a single offspring every year but a consistent rate of annual insemination is not guaranteed particularly amongst horses. Foals are also highly susceptible to environmental stress. Fecundity for both species drops as the stock age.

Maximizing the reproductive potential of a herd means that maintaining a large percentage of female stock throughout their years of fertility is critical to greater rates of herd growth. Reductions in the number of female breeding stock either through consumption, sales, or any other kind of loss are detrimental to the goal of increased herd size. Herders who 'eat' (*idex*) into this capital seriously compromise the future potential of their herds. The minimum requirements for male breeding stock mean that male stock are kept only until they have fattened enabling herders to satisfy consumption needs without disastrously affecting the viability (i.e. size) of their herds. However, households must weigh the decision to sell male stock before they fatten against the grazing effect that infertile surplus stock can have on the rest of the herd. Lastly, because of the importance of increasing herd size, young animals (lambs, kids, calves, and foals) are not 'edible' in the Mongolian context and are not sold to the market.

### ***Increasing Herd Growth***

In order to benefit from the natural reproductive capacity of livestock, herders must actively improve conditions so that 'stress' or 'loss' pressures do not adversely affect growth rates. By increasing the range of resources that encourage herd growth and lower loss rates households can more actively reap the benefits of a herd's capacity for growth. Households do this both prior to herd increases and after such growth occurs to accommodate new stock. In other words, households must provide their stock with beneficial conditions so that they properly fatten and remain fecund encouraging twinning. Additionally, after growth occurs (birthing), households must be able to not only accommodate the new numbers but also be able to recreate the conditions that made their original herd healthy, fertile, and fecund. The absence of stress on herds can result in increased rates of growth. Clearly, beside relieving 'loss' pressures on herds, households must also ensure that when herds do increase that they are able to provide a corresponding increase in resources to support a larger herd size.

Households do this primarily by increasing access to pastoral resources such as pasture, salt, water, and other forage supplements. Herd-owners broaden their access through increased opportunistic mobility and territorial practices that secure increasingly scarce resources and squeeze out other households. Others secure access through patron-clientage, hired herding

employment, or through various kin relations. The rest of the chapters in this dissertation discuss the capacity of individual households, of varying degrees of wealth, to obtain such resources.

One of the most critical elements is labor. Households must effectively supply enough labor to maintain high survival rates. As herd size grows and birthing numbers increase, labor must also correspondingly rise. Without strict management and deployment of labor, the numbers of newborns can overwhelm a household's capacity to tend to them and provide critical resources to ensure their survival. Households attempt to broaden their access to labor through a range of relationships: (1) *saaxlax* or *saax zoruulex* relations where lambs are exchanged for weaning, (2) contract and hired herding, (3) placing livestock (*mal tavix*) with households, and (4) various forms of patron clientage. By increasing the available pool of labor, such households can relieve the tension between herd size and labor. Conversely, if there is a surplus of labor in the household, consumption pressures, discussed in detail below, may overwhelm the herd's capacity to reproduce itself.

### ***Small versus Large Herds***

Clearly, increasing herd size does not just produce benefits for households, large herds are also costly. Many of the costs of increase herd sizes are due to the needs cited above: mobility, hay, labor, transport, and a number of other *zardal* or expenses. Some households, although potentially capable of pursuing such a strategy, instead opt to maintain a small sustainable herd.

Small-herd households maintain roughly 200-300 sheep and goats with a few cattle for milking and horses for work. These households are able to maintain a sustainably small herd size by relieving the sale-pressure on reproductive stock by keeping larger percentages of goats and benefitting from the sale of cashmere. With small herds they can minimize the need to move. This strategy is not costless, though. The diets of small, non-mobile herds must be heavily supplemented with feed and forage. Reserve pasture is critical and so defense of pastures requires constant monitoring. They are also susceptible to disaster loss risk.

### **Socio-economic Differentiation and Herd Growth**

Households of varying wealth, evidently, experience differential rates of herd growth. Herds grow exponentially not geometrically, and although households of different initial wealth may have similar birthing rates, the gains from those rates are highly varied. In Table 3.3 below we see that poor households on average gain 11 new lambs while the very wealthy gain on average 342. This is a huge difference when considering that in approximately 18 months the

wealthy household will have a massive new crop of birthing ewes whereas the very poor will have a small crop.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, as the table shows, even birthing rates vary.<sup>64</sup> Although the very poor benefit from their connections to wealthy and very wealthy households we see that the poor manage only an 18 per cent birthing rate with lambs while the very wealthy garner a 29 per cent birthing rate. There is a similar trend for calving rates as well. This is a significant difference in that a 4 per cent shift in birthing rates for a poor household results in a plus/minus of only 4 animals whereas for a household with a thousand or more stock this can mean numbers of 40 or more. If wealthy households have a greater ability to more strictly manage stock or '*tul sain avax*' they can accumulate at exponentially faster rates than others. Therefore, these births are not only important in themselves but also in the future yields herders can acquire from the breeding portion of the newborn stock. Yet, large herds do not in themselves produce high birthing rates. These rates must be manipulated by increasing the chances of newborn survival. Newborn and young stock survival depends on the labor and resources available to produce beneficial conditions.<sup>65</sup> Additional labor during birthing season is critical for a number of reasons. The spring is harsh with frequent duststorms, coldsnaps, wolf and eagle predation, and occasional snowfall, all requiring significant monitoring of stock. Pregnant animals also often refuse to allow for suckling and differential pasturing requirements all require vast pools of labor. This is discussed in some detail in chapters 3 and 6.

Nevertheless, as we see in Table 3.3, kidding rates are virtually the same for all categories. This could be due to the relative importance of goats in household herds due to the proportional importance of cashmere in household incomes. Yet, the equity in kidding rates shows not only that poor households may be focused to a greater degree on higher return stock (goats versus sheep) but also that large herd-owning households are able to relieve the management problems resulting from the tensions between labor and herd size. Maintaining higher birthing rates should be somewhat easier for households with smaller herds who tend to have high labor-livestock ratios. Wealthy and very wealthy households who are labor deficient, in contrast, must obtain labor elsewhere and apply stricter management regimes. Clearly, the birthing rate for the wealthy is intimately related to their ability to acquire and manage additional labor resources, particularly through contract herding. This is made even more significant by the

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<sup>63</sup> Female lambs make up on average a little more than 50 per cent of newborn stock. So in a crop of 300 newborns, 150 can be expected to become breeding ewes in 18 months.

<sup>64</sup> The birthing rate is calculated as the percentage of newborns in a herd.

<sup>65</sup> I address this in some respects in chapter 4.

fact that very wealthy households, in particular, selectively cull weak newborns. They do this by hardening young stock to the cold which promotes hardier breeding. Other households, particularly the poor and middle wealth households do not practice such culling methods and, in contrast, attempt to improve survival rates as best they can.

*Table 3.3. Average births and birthing rates for each household category (data collected from household survey).*

Household Category	Lambs	Lamb Rate	Kids	Kid Rate	Foals	Foal Rate	Calves	Calf Rate
0-99	11	28%	9	24%	2	8%	0	8%
100-199	18	18%	16	25%	0	1%	2	12%
200-499	60	24%	36	27%	3	7%	2	13%
500-999	116	26%	51	24%	3	4%	5	15%
1000+	342	28%	132	26%	12	9%	13	23%

### **Herd Composition**

In the Mongolian context herd composition is as important as herd size because some species are more marketable while others are more resilient in the face of risk. Clearly, each species has differential risk exposure and rates of return. Households that are not able to access certain kinds of stock are disproportionately exposed to risk of loss and conversely, those who can benefit from surplus growth in highly marketable species can garner increased income. Matching herd composition to the fast-changing needs of the market and ecologies can have important implications for households. The composition of herds in Uguumur depends on a variety of factors: (1) the ability of the individual household to acquire certain species of livestock, (2) the knowledge and expertise of the herder, (3) the consumption practices of individual households, (4) the market conditions for livestock products, (5) local ecologies and the exposure of the household to species specific risk, and (6) access to pastoral resources.

### **Acquiring Stock**

Although small stock can be purchased, received as gifts, or acquired through labor-livestock exchanges some households are incapable of accessing large stock because of a variety of socio-economic factors. Young households that have come from poor families are typically unable to inherit large stock. Poor households, more generally, are incapable of purchasing large stock because of the exorbitant cost of doing so. They would have to sell a considerable number of sheep or goats to purchase a milch cow or mare, for example. Moreover, wealthier households who have surplus stock are reluctant to depart with their cows and calves. The current going price

for cow/calf pair is well over 500,000 MNT. Although geldings are acquired rather easily through gifting between male relatives and friends, they offer no help in building a herd. Mares are not readily sold nor are they gifted. Accessing livestock through labor-livestock exchange requires a larger kin and social network than many poor households have.

Wealthy households though are more capable. One of my host households (over 500 head of stock) lost all of their 26 cattle save 3 cows and 1 calf. With such few cows and only one much stressed cow-calf pair they were suffering from a major lack of milk and dairy products. Without supplies they were forced to buy milk and dairy from the market place. To do so they had to sell stock. Over time this strategy could be highly detrimental to their herding success as they would be forced to sell animals in order to purchase milk products from other households or the market. So, they sought to purchase an additional cow-calf pair. They arranged a purchase from a cousin's husband's family in northern Kherlen soum. After inspecting the pair, they agreed on a price of 520,000 MNT. Yet, within a week the cow died in the middle of the night from choking on plastic feed bags. Because this household is relatively wealthy, they can cope with such a loss. For the poor though this would have been a major loss.

### ***Herder Expertise***

Individual herders also have species specific expertise. Most former *negdel* herders tended a single species and for Uguumur herders, they typically specialized in sheep, although a few households were charged with horse herds. Many households though have their own specific preference for one species over another. Some herders are quite knowledgeable about sheep, for example, but know little about horses. Herders, consequently, build herds around their comfort with certain kinds of livestock. In fact some herders refer to themselves or each other as 'xonichin' (shepherd) or 'yamaachin' (goatherd) rather than the more general term of 'malchin' (livestock herder). Although camels are less important economically than other species in current market conditions, herders are also extremely wary or even fearful of interacting with them as they have little to no familiarity with camels.

### ***Household Consumption***

Households typically eat mutton throughout most of the year with one steer and one horse for winter meat supplies or *idesh*. Among Khalkha, goat meat is enjoyed typically only for summer 'barbeques' or *xorxog*, although Durvud and Uriankhai eat goat more regularly. Even households that specialize in goat herds retain sheep for household consumption. For milk and dairy production households depend greatly on cattle; although, the poor will also milk sheep and goats. Every household, though, depending on numbers of members, requires a minimum amount



of meat and dairy for their diets. All households therefore attempt to maintain at least a minimum of each species in order to satisfy consumption needs. Yet, the effect of consumption on herd composition is seen primarily in poor households that must maintain a proportionately higher percentage of their herd with stock such as cattle.

### ***Markets***

Livestock markets have also had an important effect on herd composition as will be shown in greater detail below. In recent years there has been a great increase in goat numbers across Mongolia. A concurrent rise has also occurred in Uguumur. High cashmere prices have incentivized herders, particularly young households, to herd disproportionately large herds of goat. Last Spring the average price for a kilo of cashmere was 40,000 Mongolia *tugrugs* or roughly 36 US.<sup>66</sup> In price equivalency terms, one kilo of cashmere equals the price of a large female sheep. By my observations, herders can comb on average 250 grams of cashmere from a single female goat and 500-600 grams from adult male. Combined with the fact that combing a goat does not require slaughtering it, herders are greatly incentivized to maintain greater numbers of goats.<sup>67</sup> Additionally, the Mongolian government has recently adopted a price support program for cashmere in which the government agrees to purchase cashmere at 30,000 *tugrugs*. The government also recently passed legislation in which herders will be given 5,000 *tugrugs* for each goat. It is in fact poor to middle wealth households who largely depend on such programs and a larger percentage of goats in their herds as goats do not require the slaughter or sale of the animal, therefore requiring less management capacity on the herders' part while generating an income many times over the sale of the animal for meat.

Herd composition has also been altered by the near tripling of meat prices since 2000. In the Mongolian market mutton is in highest demand with beef and horse meat trailing behind. Market conditions have encouraged households, in the absence of other more pressing concerns, to focus on sheep. Sheep are more marketable because they are a smaller unit compared to cattle and are therefore more divisible, liquid, and adaptable to shifting market conditions and household needs. Sheep also retain higher prices than goat because goat is generally undesirable as a meat product.

In contrast to cashmere and meat markets, the market for dairy products, although growing, is miniscule. Dairy products are not marketed because of their association with poverty

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<sup>66</sup> Just to demonstrate the elasticity of product prices: in the 3 months after returning from the field in Spring of 2009, livestock product prices nose-dived 75%. Cashmere dropped to 10,000 MNT a kilo and live adult female sheep were getting approximately 10,000 MNT at market.

<sup>67</sup> A herd of 100 goats would generate yearly on average 1,350,000 Mongolian *tugrugs* (or 1,133 US).

and the competition from large-scale Mongolian, Chinese, and Russian dairy firms. Moreover, the vast distances between links in the marketing chain present a critical challenge to developing the dairy industry in Mongolia. Herders simply cannot get dairy products to market quick enough. Moreover, dairy is a critical consumption product for rural households and most urban households are able to acquire traditional products via their rural kin. Consequently, dairy markets have little effect on most herder households' market production. This has lowered the importance of cattle in most herds.

### ***Ecology and Risk***

Other 'push' factors have also lowered the importance of cattle. If we utilize the Mongolian SSU<sup>68</sup>, the total SSUs at the national and at the *soum* level for Bayankhutag demonstrates that the increase in herds although pronounced is not as dramatic as the overall stocking rates suggest. This transition from large stock and more mixed herds to primarily small stock specialization was exacerbated by the *zud* calamities of 2000-2002. Herders in Bayankhutag *soum* lost approximately 56% of cattle in 2000. Herders stated that the weakness of cattle in the face of *zud* as well as drought has made them risky (*ersdeltei*). Without the benefit of increased feed, the current breeds of cattle simply do not stand up well to the Mongolian winter. Clearly, different species have different levels of riskiness and herders, if they can, compose their herds accordingly. For some though this is considered a luxury.

The importance of ecology is tied to changes in the livestock product and labor markets. With increasing frequency of drought, cattle are not capable of putting on sufficient weight to be marketable in the fall sales season much less face the winter. Cattle also require higher inputs of labor because they must be taken out to pasture separately from the small stock and pasture of different forage. Yet, these 'push' factors do not fully explain the switch to small stock. Rather, 'pull' factors such as the rising price of cashmere on the world market and the increasing domestic demand for mutton have encouraged herders to increase goat and sheep stocking rates at the expense of large stock.

In Uguumur the greatest increase has been in sheep numbers. Herders argued that although western Mongolia's rocky soils may be more adaptable to goat-rearing, sheep were more closely adapted to the ecology of the bag. Goats for them are ecologically costly, as herds of a thousand goats or more compared with sheep, would quickly decimate local pasture and require the herder to be even more mobile. Moreover, as one herder pointed out the death of a lamb in the

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<sup>68</sup> SSU = 'standard sheep unit'. Although measures seem to differ depending on the source, roughly sheep and goats are equivalent, cattle and horses equal five and six SSU respectively, and camels are often rated anywhere from 7-9. The measure is based on forage use per kilo of liveweight.

context of *zud* or some other disaster is less risky financially than the death of any other livestock offspring because the lamb-skin sells for anywhere between 6,000 and 10,000 *tugrugs*, roughly a third of the price of a whole adult animal (including skin, meat, bones, and wool).

### ***Herd Composition and Access to Resources***

Different species of livestock have different resource requirements. Some forages are more palatable than others for each species. Cattle for example reproduce well in the northern Khangai regions of Khentii and do not fare as well in the dry steppe of Bayankhutag. Moreover, each species has different pasturing requirements. Camels and horses for example have large pasture orbits which require higher levels of monitoring than a labor-poor household can provide. Care for these stock often requires ownership of a motorcycle in order to herd them and *xotluulax* or bring them back to camp.

### **Socio-Economic Differentiation and Herd Composition**

In the household herd data collected, there is a clear distinction in herd composition between households of different wealth categories (see Figure 3.6 below). Poor households clearly demonstrate a preference for highly diversified herds while wealthy households prefer a concentration of a particular species, typically sheep. These divergent patterns are a result of household consumption needs and species marketability balanced with household exposure to species-specific risks.

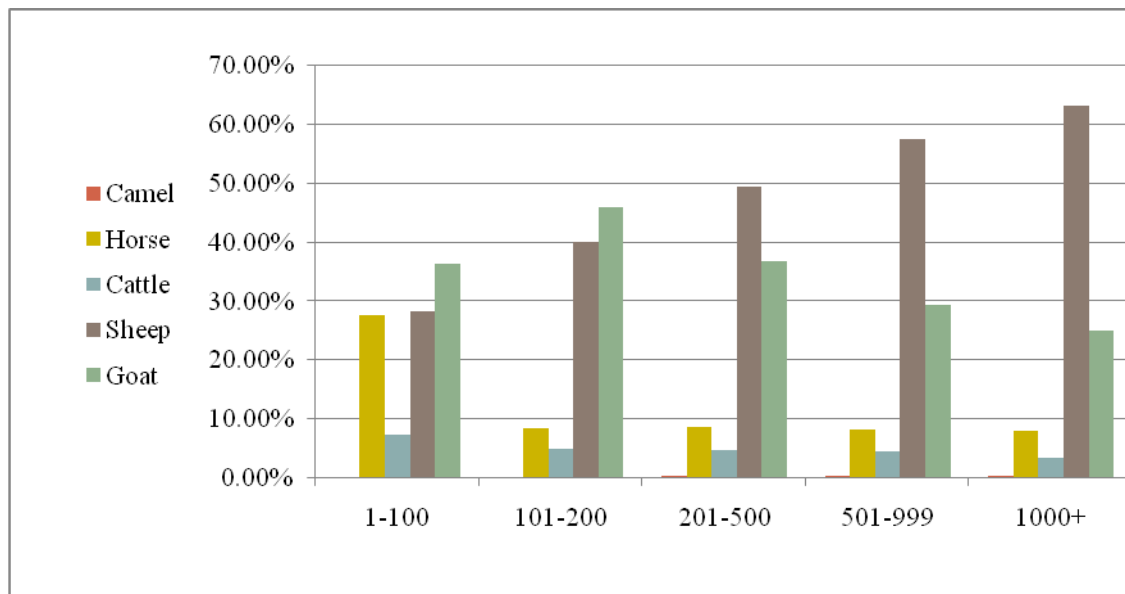


Figure 3.6. Herd compositions by household category for all Uguumur households,  $n=134$  (data collected from *soum* statistical office).

Yet, the primary difference in herd composition between households of varying wealth is related mostly to risk management strategies and market influences. Each species of livestock is differentially exposed to sources of environmental risk. Cattle are largely susceptible to extreme cold temperature whereas small-stock are more susceptible to lack of forage. Horses and camels also have varying degrees of vulnerability depending on the particular hazard. Poor households who aim to remain viable herding households must maintain diverse herds in order to mitigate these risks. Wealthy households are less exposed for a variety of reasons such as increased labor, mobility, and general access to important resources. But even in the case of using herd composition as a risk mitigation strategy, wealthy households simply require a minimum diversity of herds to manage this risk.

In contrast, the disproportionate number of sheep in wealthier herding households and the decreasing importance of herd diversity are more related to market conditions. Although a specific focus on small-stock rearing has been shown to be related to post-disaster coping, in the Uguumur context, the fast rates of breeding that are important for households after disaster are here important as an opportunistic marketing strategy. In current livestock and livestock product markets as discussed below, small stock are significantly more marketable. Specifically, sheep are highly marketable without the potential for unsustainable resource use practices, a cost that wealthy herders try to avoid by restricting the growth of their goat herds.

Consequently, we see that for the poor diverse herds are an important strategy in contemporary Uguumur whereas the wealthy, who only have to maintain a minimum level of herd diversity, are able to specialize in their surplus herds. In the next section I look at the importance of markets and marketing more deeply as this has important implications not only for increasing gains from breeding and shifting herd composition but also on how households dispose of their herds and manage loss.

### **The *Biznes* of Herds: Pastoral Production and Making a Living in Uguumur**

Herders in Uguumur produce a range of different livestock-based products for either household consumption or for the market. Yet, most herders, as they expressed themselves, were not engaged in the *biznes* (business) of animal husbandry in order to provide solely for household consumption. Contrary to other portrayals, herding is not an enterprise of last resort for the poorest of the poor. The herding economy, rather, is seen as a means to increase one's *orlogo* or income. When I asked households why they pursued a herding livelihood, the near universal response, particularly from the young, is that herding is *ashigtai* or profitable. Although most herders would be described as unskilled, herding is largely perceived to be a difficult enterprise

not to be entered into lightly and one must be a *jinxen biznesmen* (a real businessman) to be successful.<sup>69</sup>

If one does not see herd growth as the single all-important goal, but rather simply maintaining a ‘livable’ herd, that herder, unless they make significant technological investments, will find themselves a fast exit back to the *ger* districts of the provincial center.<sup>70</sup> Gaining a livelihood from herding requires a thoughtful engagement in the market while providing for household consumption. In this section I look at the various products herders provide to the market, the marketing chains for livestock products, and data gathered on livestock product sales, household consumption patterns, and herder incomes.

If you raise stock well, you take newborns well. Herders must increase herds themselves. Livestock are themselves like money with interest. Herders must increase livestock and newborns like money in the bank which has an interest rate and will rise. You cannot just willy-nilly sell livestock. This means that if you sell right, keep losses low, and increase your newborn stock the interest will rise. A person must actively work to correctly spend livestock. There is no other choice.

The importance of market-engagement for the cycles of herd growth and loss cannot be underestimated. Poor calculation and control over intentional herd losses through culling, slaughtering, and sales as well as gifting and payments can disproportionately affect the growth potential of one’s herd to a greater extent than any disaster. It is not surprising that many of the wealthiest herders also have experience in accounting, census-taking, veterinary, and other technical and financial work. The management of these losses is discussed in detail in the next section.

### **Herders and the Market**

The integration of herding livelihoods into regional, national, and international markets for livestock products has had an important impact on cycles of growth and loss. Consequently, livestock markets and livestock prices are critically important to herder livelihoods. In the years since 2000 livestock product prices have increased dramatically. In particular, according to traders interviewed and NSO statistics, the prices for meat have tripled in the years between 2000 and 2008. Cashmere prices, although highly volatile, have also risen greatly. As stated previously,

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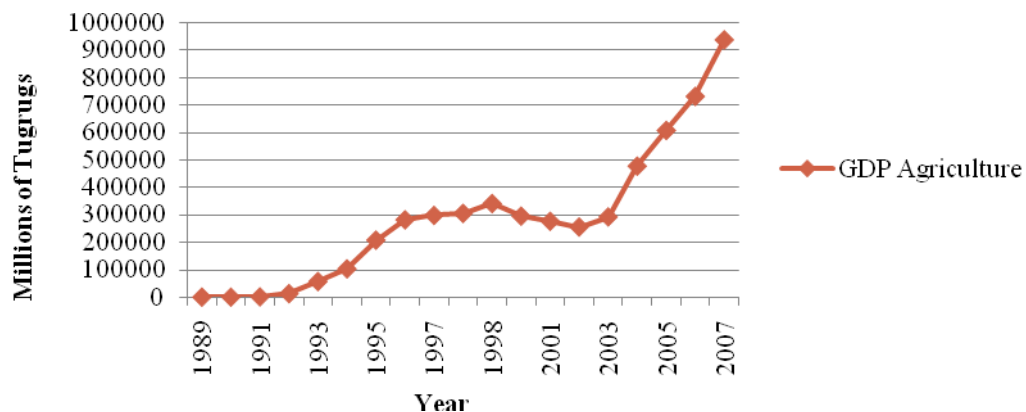
<sup>69</sup> See the quotes at the beginning of the chapter.

<sup>70</sup> There are a number of households that do intentionally maintain small herds for largely subsistence purposes. These households however are typically elderly or retired and have made significant investments social and otherwise over a lifetime that allow them to focus on a small herd. For example, one household has totally enclosed their campsite with metal fencing and have dug a well on their campsite. Moreover, many of these households have a greater number of goats in their herds compared to other households, as goats provide a yearly income without the loss of the animal.

last year the average price for first combings (*deej*) amongst Uguumur herders was 42,000 MNT (35US\$) a kilo.<sup>71</sup> At the same time the CPI has only doubled, meaning that the value of livestock products in terms of trade has risen to the benefit of herding households. This does not mean that households are any less vulnerable to the vagaries of the marketplace and the effects of market integration on the broader political economy. Clearly, a variety of pressures beyond price including competition resulting from the rising value of goods produced on the ‘commons’ and the unequal distribution of that benefit via market access has impacted herders engagement with the marketplace and in turn their livelihoods. I discuss this below.

### ***Mongolian Pastoral Economy***

The importance of herding for the national economy also cannot be underestimated (see Figure 3.7). In 1996 the agriculture sector, dominated by products from mobile livestock-keeping (80-90 % depending on the year), accounted for 43.6 per cent of Mongolia’s GDP. Although this halved to 20.6 by 2007, primarily because of the expansion of mineral extraction and growing value of mining resources, the value of agriculture has grown significantly since 2000. In Figure 3.7 below, the value of the agricultural sector, overwhelming dominated by animal husbandry and associated industries, has grown immensely since 2002 to nearly a billion dollars a year even though inflation has remained relatively steady during that time.



*Figure 3.7. Value of Agricultural GDP (NSO 2008).*

Moreover, the markets for livestock and livestock products have expanded greatly. New markets in China, Russia, and elsewhere have only increased the outlet for the raw materials produced by herders. In the sections below I look at the various livestock products herders provide to the market, the marketing chains, and marketing practices of herder households before

<sup>71</sup> 1 US\$ = 1,200 MNT.

I consider the impact such dynamics have on household incomes and rates of herd growth and loss.

***Livestock products***

Mongolian herding households provide a range of products both for consumption and sale on the market. Table 3.4 demonstrates the range of products herders procure from their animals.

*Table 3.4. Livestock Products in Uguumur and marketability (Compiled by author).*

Species	Market Products (in order of importance)	Species Marketability	Consumption Products
Sheep	Meat, skin, wool, bone	High	Meat, skin, wool, dung
Goat	Cashmere, skin, meat, horn, bone	Very High	Meat, skin, milk, dung
Horse	Racing, meat, skin, hair, tails, hooves, bone	Medium	Meat, hair, tails, milk, dung
Cattle	Meat, skin, bone, horn	Medium	Milk, meat, dung
Camel	Transport, meat, wool, skin, bone	Low	None

*Table 3.5. Annual production cycle.*

Season	Activity	Month
Spring	Birthing	March-April
	Cashmere Combing	Late March
	Horse Hair trim	Mid-April
	Second Combing	Late April
	Milking	Entire Year
	Camel Wool	April-May
Summer	Wool Shearing	June
	Airag (Fermented mare's milk)	June-September
	Live animal sales	August
	Late slaughter	August-September
	Horse training/sales	June-September
Fall	Slaughter	November
Winter	Distress sales	January-February
	Slaughter	January-March

### ***Livestock Products and Marketing***

Each product has a varying degree of importance both to household consumption and in the marketplace. Clearly, cashmere and meat are important but the range of products herders produce is much broader. Skins, hides, bones, wool and hair, hooves, horn, and even organs are utilized for a variety of purposes both at home and in industrial production. Some products such as camel wool are highly profitable but the production per camel is low and the cost of raising large herds is high. Many of the other products are secondary. The majority of the income from a sale of a horse comes from the price of meat; yet, when a herder sells a horse they are also selling the hide, bones, hooves, tails, hair, and other products. These products are individually procured and sold when an animal inadvertently dies. Yet, these secondary products are relatively unimportant to herder incomes and consequently, herd dynamics. In contrast, other primary products such as meat, skins, and cashmere wield a greater amount of pressure on household herd management decisions. Understanding the marketing chains for each of these products, therefore, is important to gaining insights on the source of price-making and consequently, marketing pressures on herder household. In the following sections I look at three most important livestock products in Uguumur: live animals and meat, cashmere, and race horses.



### ***Live Animals and Meat***

The marketing chain for live animals and meat begins in the countryside with herders and ends with urban consumers in Mongolia and to a limited degree other countries such as Russia, Japan, and Korea. There are several possible routes through which live animals and meat transfer from producer to consumers. Additionally, there are clear differences in the rationales behind selling live animals versus selling slaughtered stock as meat. Typically, when a household plans to sell a large number of stock (100-200) they are sold as live animals. The costs of arranging and paying for slaughter are quite high – nearly 1-2,000 MNT per head for small stock. There is also a clear seasonality with live animals being sold in the warm spring and summer months and slaughtered stock being sold in the cold winter. Slaughtered animals freeze quickly in the winter but without drying, smoking, or proper storing will rot quickly in the heat of summer. For example, horses in the summer are sold to *agt* traders who gather horses in large herds out in the steppe before driving them to market or, more typically, to a slaughterhouse. *Agt* traders in some cases work for large meat companies in Ulaanbaatar as purchasing agents. Nevertheless, in some cases herders calculate the costs of selling a live animal versus selling animal products such as skin, hooves, bones, and meat separately.

In the case of live animals, herders sell either directly to traders (*chenj*) or, for the wealthy and very wealthy, transport the stock themselves to UB and sell at the major markets to intermediate wholesalers, meat companies, the national government's meat reserve, and other buyers. The major markets in UB are Bayanzurx, Xar Zax, and Xuchit Shonxor and herders call via cell phone to ascertain the morning's prices at each market. Uguumur is close enough to UB via the new black top highway that herders can make decisions to transport stock to the capital in a matter of hours as opposed to others who have to plan far in advance and estimate what prices will be when they arrive. Consequently, Uguumur herders who have large trucks constantly check prices via cell phone each afternoon. If the prices are predicted to rise the following day (which they estimate on the previous day's volume of sales and prices at their preferred market), herders will prepare stock for transport immediately from the countryside in order to arrive at the market early the next morning. If customs and border officials are operating, which is rare and periodic, or if quarantine has been issued, then herders must obtain documentation from the district governor detailing the stock being sold, the branding, its origination, and veterinary information.

Herders must pay a fee for this service and must pay a series of taxes and charges to animal health services from MoFALI. Herders must take these into consideration before selling stock. Once they arrive at the market in UB or Nalaix, a coal-mining and raw products market district outside of the capital, they contact several buyers and wholesale agents. Because of the

large volume of meat that comes into these markets price elasticity between offers is small. Moreover, time is a more important element as price tends to decrease as the day moves on. Consequently, these herders try to sell as quickly as possible. In most cases I found herders make up for the transaction costs of selling in the capital versus Undurxaan.

Another pathway for live animal sales is through itinerant traders (*naimaachid*) who roam particular territories typically visiting households with whom they have traded in the past. This type of trade (*naimaa*) has historically been the most common being well established prior to the socialist revolution. A more recent innovation by the major meat companies, such as *Max Impex*, is to send out contracted traders and drivers to purchase stock directly from households, driving the stock to a central point and then on to UB or slaughter houses in other aimag capitals, such as Sainshand in Dornogovi aimag to the south. This practice was carried out in the socialist period but disappeared for a time because of the high transport and organization costs (Goldstein and Beall 1997). With the rise in meat prices, this kind of trade has once again become a feasible venture.

Yet, households typically are less inclined to sell to *naimaachid* because of clear information asymmetries concerning meat prices; although, in a few cases herders have developed relations with traders. Households are often too remote from cell phone access or other forms of communication to compare prices. Moreover, most wealthy households would prefer to sell directly themselves and poor households are not targeted by these kinds of traders because of the high transaction costs and low returns of buying few animals from multiple households. It is usually middle income households that must decide whether to sell to itinerants or to sell at market in Undurxaan or UB to the *chenj*. These households must calculate the relative costs of each marketing method so as to maximize returns from their stock. Itinerant traders are not highly trusted unless current prices can be obtained from Undurxaan or UB and, consequently, poor and middle wealth households tend to rely on local wealthy herders who offer to either purchase stock outright or act as a selling agent for the household. Moreover, a number of households sell to the local contracted traders for the national meat reserve which offers a premium price for meat provision. In Uguumur, the NMR (National Meat Reserve) trader is a local wealthy herder. Evidently, some herding households work on the side as animal buyers and typically work in their home districts buying from local households. In other cases, if they are regionally known, as some of the wealthiest herders and horse-trainers are, they may venture beyond their soum into other regions where they have established trading relationships with specific households.

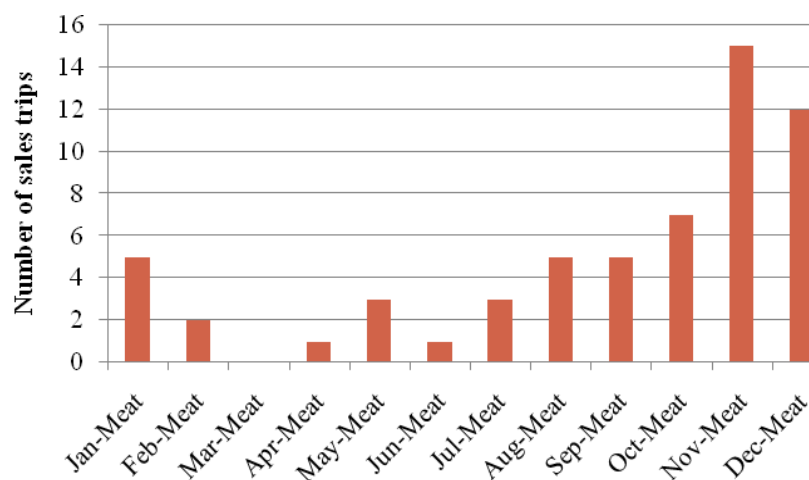


Figure 3.8. Total number of meat sales by month of all households (volume of sales not shown).(Data collected in household survey)

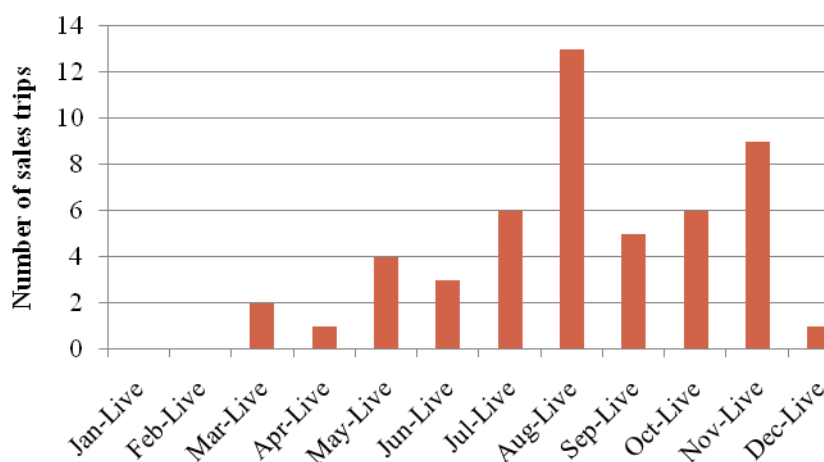


Figure 3.9. Total number of live animal sales by month of all households (volume of sales not shown). (Data collected in household survey)

Households in Uguumur typically sell their livestock as slaughtered meat and not as live animals. In November after the livestock have gone on otor to fatten, the temperature has dropped enough to make slaughter easier, and meat prices have risen due to increased urban demand for winter, Uguumuur households prepare their most substantial sale of the year before moving to their winter campsite. At this time they sell the livestock that is infertile or has aged beyond fertility (*zaaz mal* or cull animals). Even though temperatures are on herders' sides, prices may not be and herders do attempt to slaughter and sell stock as quickly as possible at the best market prices wherever that is found. The slaughter and preparation of animals and skins, however, is labor demanding and time consuming. The animal has to be killed, its hooves, horns, internal

organs, blood, head and tail have to be removed, skinned, and cleaned to be ready for market. Consequently, many households have to hire help to slaughter stock to get it to market on time.

Herders sell their meat in the Undurxaan meat market or at one of the markets in UB. In a few cases herders have connections with grocery store or butcher shop owners and sell their meat directly. Herders who bring their meat to Undurxaan have two options: sell their meat to the buyers at the Buyant-Orgil market who are independent meat sellers in the local grocery stores or to traders who will transport to UB and sell there. On the trips when I accompanied my host families to the market they always sold to the buyers from the local grocery stores. This is partly because they sold less than 20 head of small stock on each trip and a few large stock. But there are a number of context specific factors that dictate this including the effect of market saturation on prices. Located next to the market in Buyant-Orgil is the largest meat market where most local residents in the province capital buy their meat. The market averages 20 stalls of buyer-sellers who butcher and process meat for local consumption. These independent buyer-sellers, all women, buy and sell horse meat, beef, mutton, and goat at prices comparatively lower to those in UB (although local factors and conditions can affect this).<sup>72</sup>

When herders arrive at the weigh house in the back of Buyant-Orgil a number of workers meet them. The meat is unloaded off trucks and onto metal racks by market-workers outside the weigh-house. The meat stays there until the health inspector is ready for the next seller. When the previous meat has been sold, the next herder-seller steps into the weigh-house. On the floor is a massive scale operated by the inspector from the MoFALI who charges a flat 4,000 MNT inspection fee to the herder-seller. All the meat of a particular species is hefted onto the scale and weighed by the inspector. The inspector also assesses the quality of the meat and the possibility for disease or any other kind of health issue. Once the inspector gives their nod that the meat is ready for sale, several of the buyer-sellers who operate in the market begin bidding on the meat. These prices are almost always known before hand and price competition is very weak. Traders very rarely operate in this auction, as they can get lower prices from herders because the inspection fee does not have to be paid (or at least until they get to UB but this can be avoided) and herders do not have to wait around for the process to conclude. Once the price has been agreed a receipt is filled out by the buyer and given to the herder. Most buyers have cash on hand

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<sup>72</sup> Many of the traders in Undurxaan are women. Also, many of the buyers/butchers are also women. Interestingly, every time I visited the market to sell meat I went with the women of the household. At the market, the sales are almost universally a woman's affair, with the health officials typically women and the shoppers are also women. I was told that this was due mostly to the higher levels of education amongst women – they simply are better at counting – and the fact that meat is for cooking, an arena rarely ventured into by men, except for some rare anthropologists (to my host father's horror/amazement).

and render payment at the same time. The inspector takes their fee and the next species is loaded onto the scale. This process continues until the herder-seller is done.

Herders who sell slaughtered meat in UB go through a similar process but, just like with live animal sales, they must incur higher transaction costs because of the fees they must pay to enter the capital region with meat including customs fees, health inspection fees, market-place fees, and the possibility that prices dropped during their journey. Considering the amount of gasoline that has to be purchased for a round-trip, the costs of selling in the capital are significantly higher. However, the prices can at times be nearly double what they are in the provincial capital. In January of 2008, sheep and goat meat prices were double and at one point triple what they were in Undurxaan. My host family sold goat meat at 900 MNT<sup>73</sup> a kilo to the local market in Undurxaan on January 17, when they could have gotten 2,600-2,800 MNT a kilo in UB. Mutton was going for 3,000 MNT in UB, but only 1,300 MNT in Undurxaan. If my host family had sold in UB, they would have totaled their net at over double what they did in Undurxaan and easily covered the costs of selling there. They admitted that this was a mistake and that poor calculation and lack of information seriously hurt them. The effects of these opportunity costs are broader than for just immediate needs. The income they would have gained otherwise would have offset the need to 'eat' their capital and sell fertile, female stock. Effective engagement in the marketplace is not just important for immediate returns from production but also for the overall cycle of asset growth and loss.

### *Cashmere*

Cashmere is the most important livestock product next to meat and live animals in terms of household income. Unlike live animal, meat, and skin sales, cashmere does not require the loss of the animal. Cashmere, the soft, fine undercoat of cashmere goats, can be combed annually from each animal and then sold without any decline in the reproductive capability of the herd. During the negdel period cashmere was not an important product in the pastoral economy because there was little to no access to export markets beyond the soviet pale. In socialist circles, cashmere-based products were not appreciated or valued in the way they were valued in the capitalist west as a luxury good. Moreover, the elite in socialist countries typically consisted of a small core of politically connected families and individuals, not a viably large enough pool of consumers. In Soviet Russia, fur was more highly valued than cashmere and consequently cashmere products never reached a level of great importance in the agricultural profile of Mongolia. During that time period most cashmere in the world market came from Afghanistan

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<sup>73</sup> 1,200 MNT = US\$ 1.

and Pakistan. Since the collapse of socialist rule though, cashmere production in Mongolia and Inner Mongolia in the PRC has skyrocketed outstripping all other sources of cashmere in the world. Mongolian cashmere makes up over 20% of the world export market for fine cashmere. Domestic consumption clearly is limited.

Top quality cashmere is long and fine, a quality enhanced the colder the temperature. Consequently, Mongolian cashmere, produced in the coldest cashmere-producing region in the world is typically of high quality. In particular, the goat breed found in Uguumur, known as the Galshar Red (*galshariin ulaan*), is considered top quality and receives a premium compared to prices elsewhere in the country.<sup>74</sup> The new highway also lowers the transportation costs for buyers and traders, creating better price conditions for herders in the Khentii region<sup>75</sup>.

Cashmere is first combed in late March and a second combing of *borlon* or 2 year old goats is done in late April.<sup>76</sup> Cashmere prices are typically best at the beginning of the season before the market becomes glutted. Among traders there is a perception that the first combing of cashmere called *deej* is of better quality than later combings. Also, *borlon* cashmere is typically not as fine as older goats, they are difficult to handle while combing, having never been combed before, and produce little cashmere. A fully grown male goat can produce between 500 and 750 grams of cashmere annually while a fully grown female goat will produce 200-400. *Borlon* produce only 150-250 grams.<sup>77</sup>

Raw cashmere is combed locally in the countryside at the household's campsite and then is sold to traders or buyers from processing companies. There are a number of cashmere buyers in the provincial center ranging from year-round animal products traders to seasonal itinerant traders. Many households arrange sales in advance, agreeing on a price several days prior to combing with a local buyer. Others who do not must first comb and then bring the cashmere to market. In late March and throughout April a number of processing companies and independent cashmere knit companies set up warehouses where herders can bring in the cashmere and get the daily rate. My host household in March of 2007 sold their 37 kilos of cashmere to Lux Co. a domestic producer of an expensive cashmere clothing line (see photos). From Undurxaan most cashmere that is not purchased directly by a processor or a manufacturer is trucked on to the

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<sup>74</sup> Herders actively pursue new breeds. Many of the herders in the sample have introduced Galshar Red ram goats (*uxna*) into their herds. In some cases, herders have purchased whole herds up to 200 head (mostly females) from as far away as Sukhbaatar aimag to increase their cashmere production.

<sup>75</sup> During my time in the countryside, frequent news reports on cashmere prices were televised. Prices in UX were approximately 42,000 on average whereas the far west regions were getting prices around 25,000.

<sup>76</sup> The researcher combed many goats during the spring for several households. Goat combing is not unlike combing a long-haired dog although somewhat more intensive.

<sup>77</sup> These weights were obtained in the field.

markets at Nalaix or UB (*Tsaiz Zax*). From these markets, particularly the big *Tsaiz* Market, processors and exporters buy the sorted cashmere at auction.<sup>78</sup> Processing plants in UB, such as the large Gobi Cashmere plant are where the raw greasy cashmere will be processed for export or for domestic production into clothing and other goods. The domestic market for cashmere, although growing, is minor compared to the export market for cashmere. The most important export markets for Mongolian both processed and raw cashmere are Italy, the UK, and due to its increasing importance as a producer of fine quality textiles and clothing, China, which produces over twice as much raw cashmere as Mongolia (USAID 2005). Recently, a number of Italian, Dutch, and English firms have set up processing plants and export businesses for cashmere in and around the capital city (UB Post 2008).

Cashmere that does not make it on to UB often ends up en route to China. The illegal cashmere trade has been growing over the last decade despite increased awareness. Chinese merchants hire Mongolian counterparts or even Inner Mongols to purchase cashmere from traders and herders and then sell the raw greasy product to the Chinese cashmere exchange once it has been transported across the border. The Chinese are then able to process the raw cashmere increasing the added value of the export product.

Cashmere prices are highly dependent on the textile, clothing, and fashion industries in the west and consumer demand. Since cashmere-based products are a luxury commodity, prices of raw cashmere are highly volatile and sensitive to slight downturns in the world economy. Consequently, some years are better than others. Increasingly herders are storing cashmere when prices are low and waiting for high prices to sell. A number of wealthy herders have started buying cashmere at relatively low prices from poor households who need liquid cash immediately and then wait until prices rise to sell. This sort of speculative buying and selling is only open to those who have the capital to do so.

### ***Race Horses***

Considering race horses as an important livestock product might seem as a shock to some other researchers, but in Uguumur the possibility of selling race horses for a considerable amount is real and can be an important contribution to a household's income. Although income from horses is not included in herder incomes described below, racings horses are an important, although highly sporadic source of income for households in Uguumur.

Mongolia is synonymous around the world with horses and there is good reason. Mongolians, both men and women, cherish horses with zeal unequal to their average productive

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<sup>78</sup> Cashmere is sorted according to micron width, hair length, color, and origination.

value. Horses are sold as meat, their hair and hooves are both traded and used in the home, and they are the primary means of transportation both in herding tasks and between countryside and settlement. But it is their value as race horses that make them worthwhile to a household's production profile. A special horse that is fleet of hoof and has winning qualities can be a serious boon to a household's income.

Mongolia horses are semi-domesticated and are not actively herded like goats and sheep. They are permitted to roam the open steppe for a good portion of the year, being periodically corralled only for hair collection, health inspection, slaughtering, branding, and gelding. Herders in Uguumur and elsewhere in Mongolia though actively pursue the breeding and training of race horses. Horse racing is a major community activity. The biggest horse races typically accompany the summer naadam festivals around the country and in the capital. Naadam is a celebration of the 'three manly games' (*gurvan eriin naadam*): wrestling, archery, and horse-racing. Contemporary naadams are scheduled to coincide with the anniversary of the socialist revolution on July 11<sup>th</sup>. However, many local naadams are scheduled either prior to or past this date. The national naadam almost always occurs that week. Aimag naadams schedule around the national ceremonies and then soum naadam are scheduled around the aimag ones. This is done so that the best wrestlers and archers can compete in their home counties and provinces and horses can continue on to other races, increasing their value. Other horse races (*murnii uraldaan*) are scheduled throughout the year, even in winter, to celebrate other events such as Tsagaan sar or the anniversary of the founding year of a soum, province, school, police force, or any other number of possibilities. Companies also occasionally will sponsor events to promote new products and services.

Horse races are organized according to the age of the horse. One year-olds – *daaga*, two year-olds – *shudlen*, three year-olds – *xyazaalan*, four year-olds – *soyolon*, five year-olds – *ix nas*, and six year old stallions and up – *azarga*. Although stallion racing is the most exciting race in my opinion and typically the fastest, there is no gambling in legal terms in Mongolia and therefore the greatest monetary return to herders is for younger horses, typically in the *daaga*, *shudlen*, and *xyazaalan* classes because they have many more years of racing left. Culturally, the *soyolon* race is the most important. Horses are considered to be in their prime at the *soyolon* age and in some areas they run the longest races. When the winning *soyolon* horse approaches the finish line, the crowds swarm the horse trying to swipe sweat from its body. People then rub the horse's sweat on their bodies and faces as a kind of good-luck omen (*buyan khishig*). My hosts explained that for those who are able to obtain the sweat of the *soyolon* the next year of their life will be like the horse's race.



The biggest races of the year for herders in the eastern aimags are the provincial races, the Altan-Ovoo naadam in eastern Sukhbaatar, the ancestral home of the Khalkha and Dariganga ethnic groups, and the national naadam outside the capital Ulaanbaatar. For Uguumur trainers (*uyaach*) these are the most important events. A horse placing in the top six can earn a herder well in excess of several million MNT. Top horses in the country sell for 50,000 US or more. For local herders who are not solely specialized in horse training, although some are, selling a horse after local soum or aimag naadams can also bring in significant money. This is not in the form of winnings but of the purchase.

For others, though, the main economic driver of racing patronage is the ubiquitous but also illegal gambling that takes place at such events. Trainers and buyers scout horses at naadam in place of owners and enthusiasts elsewhere. Many corporate executives, members of parliament, and other members of the wealthy elite in Ulaanbaatar and other major cities and towns employ buyers and trainers and keep herds of race horses. These buyers, like blood-stock agents in the US, are authorized to acquire a certain number of horses or are given a monetary cap by their employers. These horses will then be brought to the employer's trainer who specializes in the training of race-horses. Some herder-trainers will not sell at the soum level or aimag level preferring to continue to train and race their horse in other races, increasing their value possibly and their reputations as trainers. One of the households sampled specializes solely in horse-training. They maintain a small herd of goats and sheep, but the primary productive focus is on horse training. The husband tends a herd of several hundred horses both of his own horse stock and that of others. Several local wealthy business owners and some wealthy herders employ him to herd and train their horses. However, the economics of horse-training are quite unpredictable and this household is able to weather downturns in race-horse success by relying on the wife's sisters remittances garnered from her successful singing career in *ardiin duu* or folk music in Ulaanbaatar. For most households, horse racing may be an important activity but its unpredictability and uncertainty make it a secondary livelihood activity. In contrast, for the wealthy, who have time and can weather the ups and downs, horse-racing is an important source of cultural capital.

Nevertheless, horse racing like cashmere is important because it does not affect the most important composition of the herd – the number of productive females. Race-horses are similar to slaughter and live animal sales in that the animal is lost, but these are geldings or stallions not mares. In the case of stallions, the genetic benefits may be lost in a sale but the reproductive success of the herd as a whole is not necessarily affected because of the presence of other stallions in the herd. Another stallion will simply take over the other stallion's harem. The sale of

a horse, or any asset for that matter, also off-sets any threat to the sale of fertile female stock in the rest of the household's herds. If the household is at threat of having to sell female stock, off-setting income elsewhere can be a serious boon to the household's ability to reproduce itself and increase herd growth. By eating into (re)productive capital a household not only affects their annual yields in terms of births, but also the proceeding years' yields. Constraining herd growth in this way has serious implications for households that need to maintain a surplus of herds for self-insurance in the event of disaster.

### **Livestock Product Sales and Pastoral Income**

Evidently, households of different herd sizes will garner varying levels of income from the sale of livestock products (see Figure 3.10). The wealthy earn on average 14 million MNT, with some households earning close to 30 million in a single year. The poor however earn just over 1 million in a year. The differences in total income between the various categories of herd-owners, however, seem to be significantly disproportionate to wealth in livestock. A household with 200 animals garners on average an income of 2 million while a household with 1000 animals obtains just over 14 million a year. While the wealthy household owns 5 times as many animals their income is 7 times greater. As I argue in this section this discrepancy is related to three primary factors: (1) differential abilities to take advantage of price and market conditions, (2) differential composition of livestock product income, and (3) differential rates of surplus livestock and decreased risk exposure. Moreover, household marketing behaviors are shaped to varying degrees by a range of forces, pressures, and tensions both within the household and outside of it that strongly affect income.

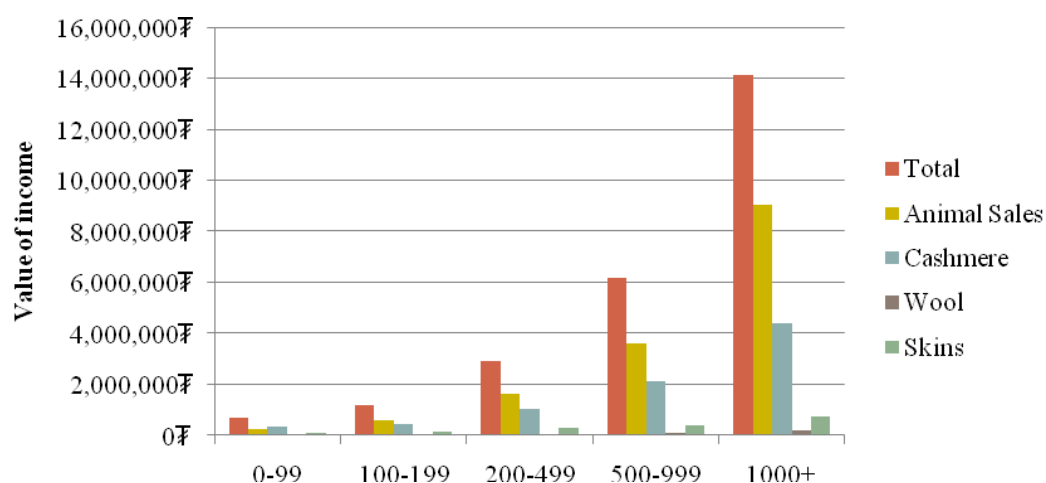


Figure 3.10. Household income composition by wealth category (Compiled from household survey data).

### Price, Marketing, and Income

Wealthy households tend to garner better prices than other households. For example, in live animal and meat sales, this is related not to better prices for higher quality but rather to higher per animal weight than other households. Yet, as we can see in Table 3.6 below livestock product prices fluctuate significantly. Live animal and meat prices typically follow seasonal fluctuations related to winter slaughter, Tsagaan sar and naadam celebrations, and birthing and fattening periods when herders withdraw from markets. Increasingly, these prices, although averaging higher than in years past, are widely vacillating within years. Disasters, in particular, influence live animal and meat prices to a large degree by flooding the market with distress sales during a zud, for example, or decreasing supply after a major storm. The geographic and temporal variability of certain kinds of disaster mean that throughout the year livestock prices, set largely by the UB markets and, secondarily, in the regional centers, fluctuate somewhat unpredictably.

Table 3.6. Range of meat and live animal prices (MNT) in Undurxaan in 2008 (Data collected from interviews with traders and through household surveys).

	Meat (per kilo)				Live animal (per animal)			
PRICE	Mutton	Goat	Beef	Horse	Sheep	Goat	Steer	Gelding
High	2400	2000	2500	2200	60,000	30,000	260,000	250,000
Low	1300	700	1500	1600	25,000	20,000	150,000	120,000

Table 3.7. Range of other product prices (MNT) in Undurxaan in 2008 (Data collected from interviews with traders and through household surveys).

	Cashmere	Wool	Sheepskin	Goatskin	Cow hide	Horse hide
Unit	Kg	Kg	Whole	Whole	Whole	Whole
High	45,000	300	5,000	15,000	32,000	26,000
Low	22,000	150	3,000	3,000	28,000	25,000

Those who can maintain better price information can take advantage of high market prices. The wealthy tend to sell when prices are high.

D: Do you constantly check meat and animal prices?

G: We constantly try to collect information. We will not sell animals poorly.

The poorer a household is, though, the more they must respond to fluctuating needs at home. These consumption pressures often force poor households to accept lower prices. Doubling this problem is that the poor often have to sell when livestock are not in the best condition. Interestingly, although consumption pressures force the poor to face these situations, they are not forced to do so in the event of a disaster through distress sales. In fact the wealthy take advantage of distress sales to a larger degree than the poor who try to keep as many stock alive as possible because of the danger of losing a viable core herd. I found that the only poor households to utilize distress sales are those prepared to quit (*bolix*) herding, by selling off their remaining herd. In essence, distress sales are a luxury.

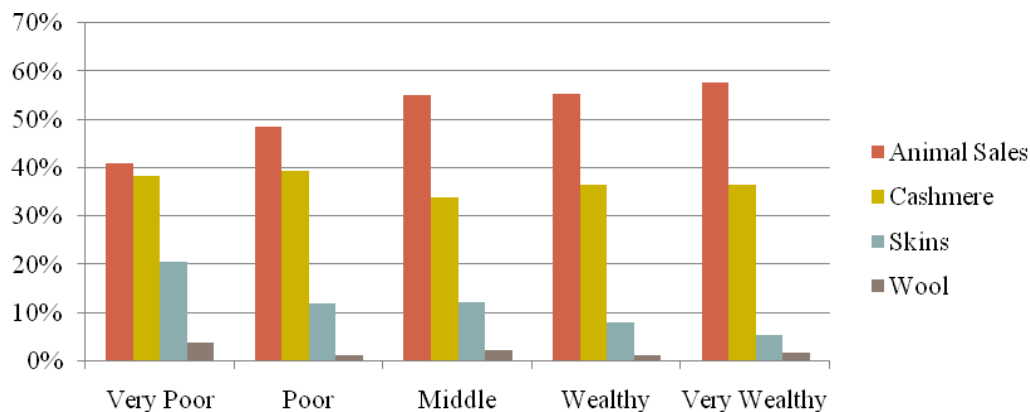
Even cashmere prices are highly variable (see Table 3.7). The first cashmere combing, the *deej*, retains a much higher price than other combings. First combings are valued by buyers because the cashmere high is of the highest quality coming out of winter. The hair is long, straight, and of good overall quality. As goats go through the spring season quality drops significantly and so do prices. Cashmere becomes inundated with dust and sand, damaging the fibers which become coarse and can even be shortened. The rising temperatures also encourage goats to start dropping hairs and often the softest and finest hairs are the first to be shed. Consequently, being able to comb as soon as possible allows households to take advantage of selling a better product and garnering higher prices. Yet, cashmere combing requires significant labor and households that cannot organize this before birthing begins are forced to wait until birthing ends to comb. Evidently, wealthy households are significantly more capable of organizing labor than the poor. This is reflected in the prices they received.

As we can see above other products do not fluctuate in the way the major products do. Hide and skin prices do not fluctuate because there are few timing or seasonal issues with these

products. Hides and skins when cured can be stored. Wool, maintains a low price because the quality is very poor. During the collective period, Soviet technicians attempted to assist Mongolians with breeding higher quality wool sheep with merino and other breeds, but these sheep are highly susceptible to weather fluctuations and in the post-socialist pastoral economy, with few means to protect these vulnerable breeds, herders have cross-bred this stock with Mongolian varieties to ‘toughen’ them while foregoing wool quality. Consequently, wool is not an important part of any household income. Some households even exchange wool for shearing.

### ***Income Composition***

Household incomes differ not only in total but also in their composition. As we can see in Figure 3.11 below households of different wealth categories depend on different proportions of income sources. The wealthy make up a larger portion (58%) of their income from live animal sales. The poor in turn are more greatly dependent on cashmere sales. This difference is rooted in not only price but also in the problem of off-take. Households are constrained by a critical minimum of stock to satisfy consumption, self-insure against loss, and guarantee the reproductive potential of herds. They also must balance these needs with other pressures such as school fees, loans, and other consumption pressures. Just as these pressures force poorer households to sell at inopportune times, they can also affect overall off-take rates.



*Figure 3.11. Proportion of product-specific sales in household incomes by wealth categories (Compiled from data collected in household survey).*

*Table 3.8. Average Sales Off-take for Households by Wealth Category. (Compiled from data collected in household survey)*

Household Wealth	Sheep	%	Goat	%	Horse	%	Cattle	%
Very Poor	2	7%	2	7%	3	43%	3	60%
Poor	16	26%	3	7%	1	9%	1	10%
Middle	20	14%	4	4%	2	7%	1	10%
Wealthy	30	9%	22	13%	2	5%	2	10%
Very Wealthy	174	19%	39	11%	7	7%	2	5%

The poor had the highest off-take rate of sheep; yet, we see that very poor, poor, and middle wealth groups had by wide margins the lowest rate of goat off-take. Goat off-take is even below the yearly natural cull rate of infertile or non-breeding animals. Clearly these households are retaining infertile and non-breeding goat stock for cashmere income.

D: How do you select stock for sale?

E: I select them for many different reasons. Fat, Old. If it is old I will sell (*tsaizalax*). If it is fat I will sell in order to raise the price.

D: For the old, what age do you sell?

E: For a sheep, once it is no longer fertile.

D: What about goats?

E: Ha [laughing]. We do not sell a lot of goats.

Yet, as these households try to increase cashmere income so as to minimize the need to sell other stock they encounter an issue of timing. Cashmere is sold once a year and this income is received once in a lump sum. Households tend to use this income to pay off debts or even to purchase new stock to add to their herds. For many though, this lumpy income gives household a sense of being instantly wealthy. My first host household used their cashmere income to buy sunglasses, a new motorcycle, new furniture, clothes, and other conspicuous items that did not seem necessary relative to their overall wealth (126 head of stock). Just walking around Undurxaan in April and May, I observed many herders in new digs and riding shiny new Chinese-made motorcycles.<sup>79</sup> Beyond this ephemeral brush with luxury, the poor must smooth their income over the rest of the year by periodically selling stock, usually sheep because of the faster breeding rates and higher prices generally compared to other stock. These various pressures

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<sup>79</sup> Two Peace Corps volunteer friends and their Mongolia compatriots also observed this in conversation that spring. I asked my host households if the sudden change in the numbers of new motorcycles and clothing had anything to do with cashmere sales and she confirmed that it did.

result in higher sheep off-take for the poor, although this drops significantly for the middle and wealthy classes. Moreover, cashmere assumes a much more important role in the composition of household income.

In contrast the wealthy generate greater incomes by maintaining off-take rates of nearly 20 per cent both for sheep and 11 per cent for goats. Moreover, this off-take, most of which stems from the sale of *zaaz* (non-fertile or otherwise unproductive) or *suvai* (non-breeding) stock, does not affect the reproductive potential of their herds. In Table 3.8 above we see that the wealthy sell an average of 174 head of sheep. Moreover, the wealthy tend to sell a large number of stock only a few times a year whereas the poorer households sell multiple times during the year and few stock each time.

D: This year you sold 300 sheep? Why?

Herder J: The price got really high so we sold about 300 to the meat reserves. We sold to Mr. Lkhavgadorj, a local man. They were mostly old sheep.

This lumpiness in wealthy sales and scattered pattern in sales by the poor reflect the different kinds of pressures they face. The wealthier a household is in livestock assets the more they are freed from the constraints facing poorer households and, subsequently, can garner additional income. We can see above that there is a massive gulf between the incomes of very wealthy households and those in other categories due largely to the disproportionate levels of surplus beyond a critical minimum. Yet, within these categories there is wide variability. Those who can alleviate the influence of these pressures, the greater their chance for increased herd growth over the long run and greater flexibility they will have in generating income in the present. Nevertheless, it is clear that households of different wealth categories face different pressures.

Moreover, these households use their wealth differently. The higher off-take rates for the wealthy reflect a desire to increase savings and investment in non-pastoral economic activities. The poor maintain a high off-take in order to satisfy basic consumption although non-basic consumption pressures are of course present. In short, the poor sell because they have to and the wealthy because they can. In the next section I discuss these sales as a kind of herd loss. But sales are only one kind of loss, albeit very important ones. To fully understand the importance of sales as a 'source' of asset loss we have to situate it within the broader range of other kinds of loss. In the next section I look at the sources of loss that confront herder households, the differential pressures households face, and the various ways households try to manage these loss pressures.

## Managing Loss

Managing herd ‘loss’ is more critical in many ways than managing herd growth. Losses incurred beyond a minimum percent of natural herd culling can vary much more greatly than birthing rates. Here I consider a loss any reduction in herd numbers; consequently, sales, gifts, and disaster deaths all count as ‘losses’. I define loss in this way primarily because herd growth can be affected by losses of any kind. At a basic level, a reproductive ewe sold means the same for the reproductive dynamics of a herd as a reproductive ewe that is stolen.<sup>80</sup> In Table 3.9 below we see the various rates of loss for different sources of loss. Some of these sources play critical roles in herd cycles such as zud, disaster, consumption, and sales, many of which tend to be highest amongst the very poor and the poor. Other sources like theft, gifting, wages, various fees and bribes play a much smaller role; although, any loss past a threshold of a minimum reproductive herd can be threatening to a household’s pastoral livelihood. Evidently, those with larger initial herds will confront different degrees of pressure from loss sources. For example, as I will demonstrate, consumption is a significantly more important source of loss for the poor than it is for the wealthy. Lastly, in the final part of this section I also look at the ways factors beyond socio-economic differentiation and comparative asset-holdings affect herders’ capacities to manage ‘loss’.

*Table 3.9. Loss percentages according to source and wealth category (Compiled from data collected in household survey).*

Household Category	Theft	Zud	Non-zud Disaster <sup>81</sup>	Consumption	Sales	Gifts, wages, etc.	Total
Very Poor	10%	2%	4%	10%	7%	2%	35%
Poor	3%	8%	3%	10%	10%	1%	35%
Middle	1%	7%	3%	5%	7%	3%	26%
Wealthy	1%	6%	7%	5%	7%	1%	27%
Very Wealthy	1%	1%	9%	2%	10%	3%	26%

<sup>80</sup> Although the sale income can be used to defer sale of another animal, thereby affecting growth/loss rates.

<sup>81</sup> Non-zud disaster generally refers to spring storms. Due to outliers in the wealthy and very wealthy categories I have left this category out of the next series of tables. Only two households experienced high losses and it severely skews these averages.



## Sources of Loss

### Observations

Table 3.9 above includes the actual loss rates for each source of loss; whereas Figure 3.12 below shows the relative proportion of a loss within what I call a household's loss 'portfolio'. If we look at both the Table 3.9 and Figure 3.12 we see wide variation in loss rates by wealth category. Moreover, these two illustrations demonstrate important herd cycle dynamics and the pressures that households with different levels of assets (i.e. livestock) face. As mentioned above and seen in Figure 3.12 below, zud, disaster, consumption, and sales loss make up the largest proportions in households loss portfolios. In this section I will look at each of these sources of loss and the factors that influence loss pressure.

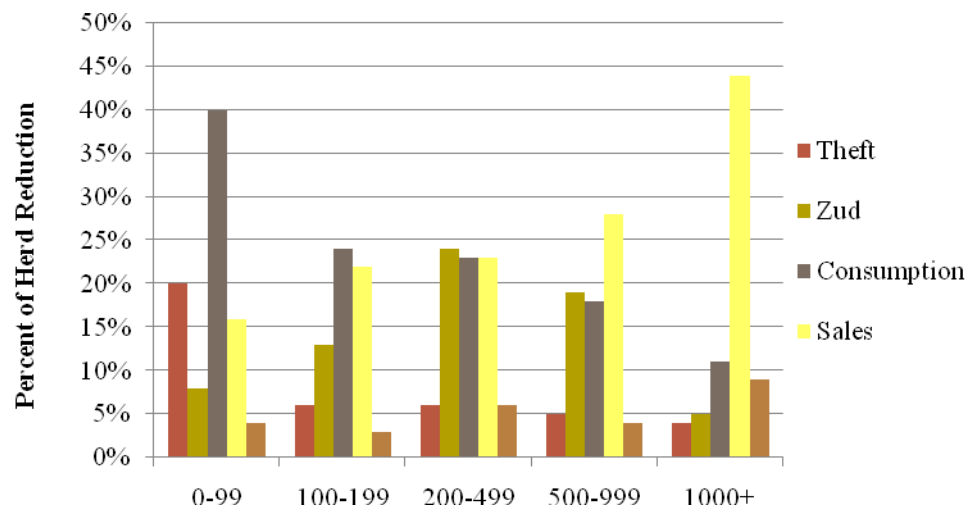


Figure 3.12. Loss category percent of total loss for household groupings (compiled from data collected in household survey).

### Consumption

Households with fewer head of livestock have similar if not greater consumption requirements from their herds. Clearly, the pressure that consumption exerts on herd losses depends highly on the terms-of-trade for consumption items, diet preferences, and nutritional needs. Herder diets are relatively uniform with regard to the desired amount of meat for consumption even though actual consumption may be in fact different. The poor household I resided with apologized profusely in late February and March when there was no more meat left from the winter *idesh* reserves. Consequently, we ate primarily flour based products until mid-March. Wealthy households do not face these kinds of pressures. From the survey data it is clear

that poor households slaughter fewer animals than wealthy households; but the proportion of that consumption has the greater effect on the herds of the poor. The current terms-of-trade for nutritionally equivalent food items still favor the slaughtering of stock rather than sales for purchase, but the importance of flour, rice, bread, and other non-household produced goods is growing (FAO 2007).

### ***Sales***

As can be seen in Table 3.9, there is a minor *u*-shaped distribution of sales rates between categories (excluding the very poor who rely extensively on others for meat). Poor households sell roughly the same percentage of the herds as the very wealthy. However, as discussed above the pressures that households face, reflected in the timing of sales, and the differential income returns from sales are not the same. Households across the board have similar expenditure requirements such as for schooling, additional consumption items, equipment for animal husbandry, health costs, and other basic *zardal* or expenditures. In interviews, surveys, and observation it was clear that poor households sporadically sell livestock intermittently to pay for these needs as they arise. The wealthier a household is the more likely they are to lump their sales at the most profitable time and save their excess earnings in bank accounts. Moreover, the sales rates reflect the willingness of both poor and wealthy to dip into reserve herd growth. The two middle categories however, maintain a lower rate of sale, around 7%. This sales rate reflects the lack of sales pressure beyond the normal cull rate of the herd. Current herd excess is sufficient to match consumption and sales without dipping into fertile female stock although other adverse conditions can change that. The poor however, often have to eat into their herds to make up for the lack of surplus. In interviews, wealthy herders recognized the effect sales can have on building herds:

D: What is the difference between you and a poor herder with few animals?

Herder S: They have not increased their stock because they sell all the time. This year they sell 50 and the next year 10 and by going in this way, they will become poor.

Among the wealthy there is an assumption that the poor simply should restrict consumption. Although this may be the case for some, at a certain level poor households cannot avoid this kind of divestment in assets.

### ***Non-zud disaster***

The category of non-zud disaster refers to what herders called '*baigaliin gamshig*' or natural disaster. In late May of 2008 a massive storm swept through central Khentii killing large numbers of livestock including households from Uguumur who were conducting *otor* in these areas north of their *nutag*. The rates shown here, though, are highly skewed. The high percentages

in the top two wealth categories are deceiving. Only two households were in fact affected in any great way by these storms. Those two households however lost 1,000 and 500 head of stock respectively. The household that lost 500 head was almost the entirety of their herd. Removing these two outliers would lower the non-zud disaster rates to parity with the other categories. However, it is important to note that going on *otor*, even if the poor are disproportionately lacking in the capacity to do so, is still wrought with risk and danger. It is these kinds of events, fast-onset catastrophes, which can level a household's entire asset wealth.

### ***Zud***

Zud, however, is different. Zud, as I will describe in detail later, is a slow-onset phenomenon to which households are differentially vulnerable. It is clear from the data above that the poorer a household is the more likely they will suffer from *zud* loss. Because these losses do not occur every year, this kind of loss is critical to asset cycles and the reproduction of poverty. Zud loss, in addition to other sources of loss, can force a household into a downward spiral. However, even if we subtract the *zud* loss rates from the lowest two wealth categories we see that those household groups would still be in the negative range for average annual herd growth. This finding points to the importance of other sources of losses in rendering households differentially vulnerable to the possibility of sinking below the minimum asset threshold where disinvestment is an effective norm.

### **Loss and Herd Dynamics**

Different kinds of loss affect herd dynamics in different ways. The age and sex ratios not only of herds as a whole but also more specifically of the loss composition is critical. Households typically sell and consume older non-fertile stock and consequently, the loss of these animals has little effect on future herd growth. However, *zud* and non-*zud* disaster losses are indiscriminate and young, fertile stock are as likely to die as older, non-fertile stock. However, animals of different ages and sex are differentially vulnerable to certain kinds of disaster. Clearly, as I have discussed, species are differentially exposed to certain kinds of risk. But young newborn stock, less exposed to the risk of hunger resulting from lack of forage, are more exposed to mortality in contexts such as extreme cold and storms. Older, weightier stock such as breeding males and females, are, conversely, more exposed to mortality in conditions lacking forage. Breeding males however, are especially cared for in contrast to other stock and hence are not likely to die in these contexts either. Clearly, though, the age and sex ratios within losses have critical implications for future herd growth.

D: You now have many animals? How did you increase your herds?

Herder S: I have had many female stock. I increase female stock. Since 1990, for over ten years I increase my herds in a way so that I only use things that satisfy my basic needs. In that way I increased my stock. Now I am a myangat herder.

Nowhere is this clearer than with the pressure to sell or consume fertile young stock. In extreme situations when households have no other options, they can be forced to ‘eat’ (idex) into their female stock. For example, a household that has recently sold the majority of their *zaaz* or cull stock such as most do in November, are limited to mostly young, fertile female stock in their herd during winter until the birthing season. Selling or consuming from this pool of female stock can seriously affect future herd size. Households are often pressured into such a situation after a major sale (the income of which they use to cover moving expenses) to make up for a large expenditure, such as health or education.<sup>82</sup> Others may face the need to sell distress stock following a big November sale. The majority of households that confront this situation are the poor or middle wealth. Additionally, recall that the cyclical dynamics of herd growth have critical implications for household herds; similarly, the dynamic, cyclical nature of herds also has implications for loss as unfavorable sequencing of loss events can exacerbate a downward spiral of de-accumulation. As we will see below the unfortunate sequencing of events led one of my host households to nearly leave the pastoral economy.

### **Strategies and Tactics for Managing Loss**

All households lose livestock. However, the way in which they lose them is critical to future herd growth. Clearly, households must manage the loss of fertile breeding stock as much as possible. If they cannot closely manage these losses, the resulting cycle of de-accumulation can be disastrous. The primary way to avert such possibilities is through asset-smoothing strategies (i.e. not selling livestock), thereby mitigating loss pressures. Clearly, households sell stock in order to convert animal capital into money capital because of the convertibility and liquidity of cash versus livestock. Additionally, they consume stock in order to meet dietary and ritual needs. However, if households can find other pathways to liquid cash or less problematic nutritional sources they can satisfy these needs without losing assets. These alternatives are not without cost. In order to understand how households do this we have to view their livestock capital within the broader financial portfolio and financial practices households engage in. Here I look at 2 ways in which households attempt to manage asset loss: (1) offsetting income and (2) withdrawal.

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<sup>82</sup> My host household had to sell stock in February to cover part of their daughter’s college tuition. She was attending a small private college, majoring in mathematics, in Ulaanbaatar. The rest of the tuition was made up from the rent I paid my host households for floor space and food.

### *Offsetting Income*

One way to prevent a downward spiral of disinvestment is to smooth income through a various array of income sources including livelihood diversification, remittance, loans, insurance (self-insurance and formal insurance), and theft.

Households in Uguumur diversify in a range of different livelihood activities including both formal and informal work. Wives in a number of households are engaged in formal public and private sector work as teachers, nurses, business owners, and traders. In some cases, households split time between the countryside and settled areas. As I discuss in the chapter on labor, two households in the sample cooperate with other households by combining herds and alternating between the countryside and Undurxaan. One of the households works during his off-time as a construction worker and the other as a taxi driver. Several of the herders, particularly those in the wealthy category also engage in livestock and livestock product trading. A number of herders do informal work as well, particularly for other herders. A number of poor and a few middle wealth households engaged in sheep shearing, cashmere combing, and other pastoral activities for other households for a wage. The mother in my host household did informal sewing work for kin and non-kin alike. For Tsagaan Sar in 2008 she sewed 12 del for other households and one for me.

Another way in which households diversify is through investment. A number of wealthy herd-owners have invested in a range of businesses in Undurxaan, Ulaanbaatar, and Bayankhutag soum center. Many in the very wealthy category have a number of non-pastoral investments including owning hotels, bars, automotive and motorcycle repair shops, car-washes, grocery stores, and at one point a leather, textile, and glove factory. Several of these very wealthy herders have also invested in apartments in Undurxaan and Ulaanbaatar, some of whom rent these apartments out to non-kin. Income from these activities supplements household income and mitigate sale pressures.

There are major differences in these two diversification strategies. In the case of wealthy herd owners, they are only required to invest capital whereas the poor must invest their labor diverting their attention away from herding practice. Consequently, if a massive herd loss due to disaster occurs, the poor confront pressure to leave the pastoral economy altogether, whilst the wealthy can simply redirect their investment strategies. In contrast to these two groups, it is the middle wealth category that is the most fully engage in herding.

Households also receive remittances from urban kin. I did not collect enough data on remittances to speak confidently about them. However, as I observed over the course of the

fieldwork, many households, usually the poor, depend at critical moments on remittances from children, some remittances coming from as far away as the Czech Republic. My host household, after losing a large percentage of their herd, utilized remittances from their son and daughter in Ulaanbaatar to restock. They were able to purchase 30 sheep and goats from local households. Although this did not recoup their entire loss, it has allowed them to keep one foot in the herding economy.

Another way in which herders off-set consumption and sales pressures is through loans. This is becoming increasingly important in rural Mongolia. Herders in Uguumur are highly leveraged with nearly 72 % of households in the sample taking out loans (average of nearly 2 million MNT per loan with a 2.7% interest rate) within the survey period 07-08. Many of these households take out multiple loans in a year and do so year after year. In all cases the loans were from formal sector banks such as Xaan Bank or Shuudan Bank; although, some households do take out very small loans from local grocers, shop-owners, relatives, or willing anthropologists. Collateral for formal bank loans is typically livestock but herders are increasingly putting up non-livestock collateral such as their gers, cars, houses, *saravch*, and other capital assets. Nearly 52% of loans are used for *xuviin xeregtseetei* or personal needs – essentially school fees, food and other basic consumption needs. Herders also took out loans for Tsagaan sar, purchasing saddles, cars, feed and hay, houses, extra ger, medical treatment, paying herder salaries, and paying off personal debts. Only in a few cases did I find herders taking out loans for investment purposes and in one case I found a herder who had taken out a loan to pay off a betting debt of 10 million MNT. A few households also took out loans to buy livestock. Using credit to smooth income, particularly over the winter as most households do, can pose a number of problems that can in bad years exacerbate de-accumulation problems. One household purchased 60 animals in the summer of 2007. In the winter, they lost nearly 23 percent of their herd; yet, they still have to pay back the loan. If repayment through cashmere sales does not leave the household with enough surplus to maintain household consumption, then they may be pressed into selling more animals. When I asked him if this was a wise strategy, he angrily replied that it was useless.

Households also insure against loss. All households try to maintain a surplus of herds as a kind of self-insurance. However, it is the wealthy who are more capable of successfully self-insuring. Another way in which the wealthy do this is through savings or emergency credit. Half of the sampled households have savings accounts; however, this is highly concentrated amongst the wealthy. Recently, however, a few sampled households in Uguumur have taken advantage of

the World Bank's Index-Based Livestock Insurance.<sup>83</sup> 19 households claimed they had purchased insurance, 14 of which are either wealthy or very wealthy. However, the timing of indemnity payments was somewhat delayed that summer and consequently, I was unable to collect data concerning the effectiveness or ways in which herders used indemnity payments post-disaster. The second wealthiest herder in the soum, Batnasan, who did not lose any animals in 2008, purchased a policy for the value of 26 cattle the previous year from Tushig Daatgal. He paid 79,691 MNT and received 1,080,000 MNT as an indemnity payment the following August. If the poor and middle wealthy had a greater capacity for or knowledge of IBLI, then such programs might have important implications for altering the very problems exemplified here.

Although no households admitted to doing so, theft is an important method for smoothing one's own assets by off-setting income and sales pressure if the stolen animals are sold or consumption pressures. A number of the wealthiest households are rumored to have built their great wealth by stealing livestock from other households rather than selling their own. Clearly, this is limited in its effectiveness for future herd growth because stolen animals are not incorporated into the thief's herd but are immediately slaughtered and sold to market. The income from thefts, however, can be used to satisfy pressures that otherwise would force a household to potentially sell fertile stock.

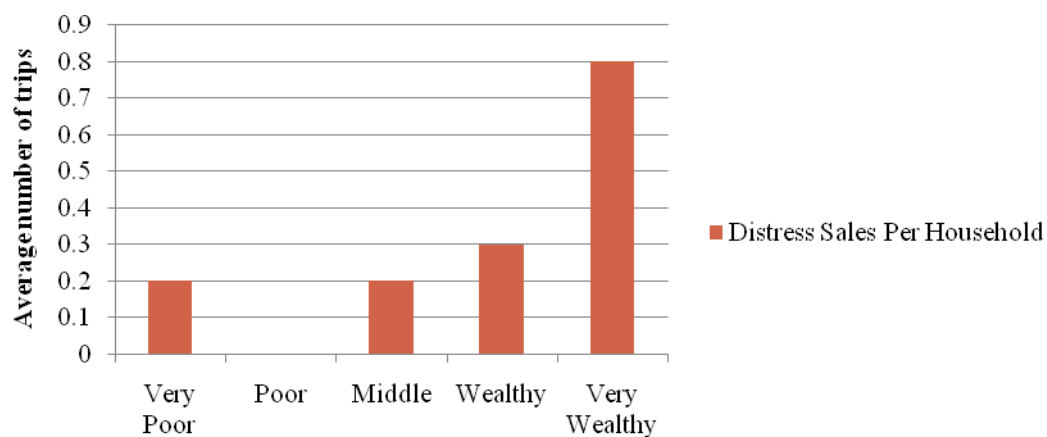
### ***Withdrawal***

In order to smooth assets households also withdraw from markets and alter consumption practices. Several poor households with whom I was acquainted discussed consuming a higher percentage of by-products such as milk or yogurt rather than meat and eating larger quantities of nutritionally poor flour-based food products. My first host-household resorted to this practice during the winter while I resided with them. They profusely apologized nearly every day for not having meat in the meals. Admittedly it was rather frustrating eating Mongolian fare without meat, an ingredient around which the entire cuisine is focused. For almost a month we had fried *bortsog* in the morning with *shar tos* and rice with sugar for lunch. On a trip into town prior Tsagaan Sar I purchased a much broader range of food to share with my hosts. Other households, mostly wealthy, stated that by buying fewer unnecessary products they can prevent the need to sell livestock but this was rarely the case. In fact this is reflected in distress sales. Poor households withdraw from the market in the winter months and refrain from selling livestock in

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<sup>83</sup> In Mongolian, *Maliin Indeksjuulsen Daatgal* or MID. The index is set by soum level mortality rates rather than individual household losses. When these rates exceed a certain percentage in any given year, here 6 %, indemnity payments are triggered for those who purchased policies. Herders buy policies on the value of cattle or any other species, rather than on individual animals. There are also options at 10 %.

the context of zud. The wealthy, however, are more likely to sell livestock, which would gradually weaken and represent a total loss. Instead they chose to smooth their consumption and maintain traditional dietary habits. In Figure 3.13 below we see the average number of times households in each category sold stock in the months of January-March during the zud. Though on average, winter sales are not common, it is clear that the very wealthy tend to sell close to once during the winter months. As I stated before, the wealthy tend to sell over the course of the year in sporadic lumps depending on price. In the winter, prior to Tsagaan Sar, meat prices are usually higher than average. However, if the National Meat Reserve is opened, then this can decrease meat prices. Rather, I found that the wealthy are more likely to sell distress animals, weak animals that have either thrown fetuses or are non-breeding males. Households in other categories clearly are more reluctant to do so. The poor, for example, do not sell at all in the winter months. This reflects a reluctance to depart with stock during times of stress and reflects a strategy of asset-smoothing.



*Figure 3.13. Average number of sales trips in January and February 2008 (Compiled from data collected in household survey).*

In recent years herders have been able to withdraw from the marketplace to a greater degree. Herders can ‘get by’ selling fewer stock for meat, partly because of high cashmere prices, and partly because meat prices have dramatically risen. The income from these sources has offset their need to sell. However, consumption pressures remain and the recent frequency of zud have counter-acted any benefit from rising prices in the marketplace.

### ***Managing Disaster Risk***

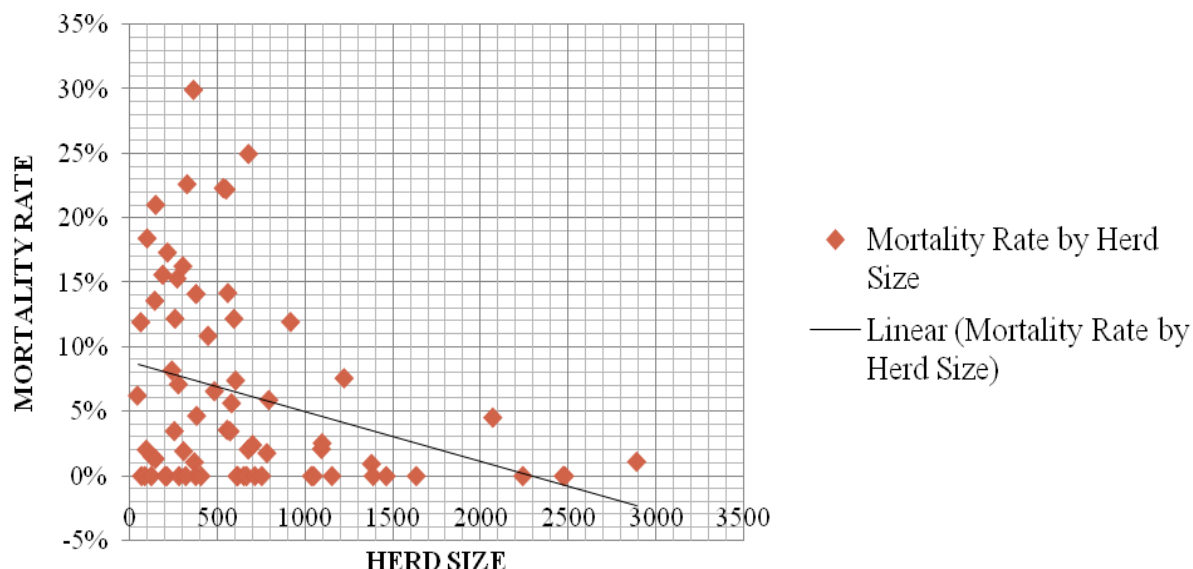
Sales and consumption pressures, as I have already mentioned, year in and year out confront Uguumur households. However, the uncertain occurrence of disaster poses an even more critical threat to herd growth and livelihood security. Herding households must be able to manage



not only the calculation of herd growth minus herd sales and consumption but also the environmental risks which threaten their herds. Moreover, because of the dynamic nature of livestock capital, the poor management of herd growth and loss can not only affect households in the short term but can also set them up for serious losses in the contexts of a range of hazards that frequently arise in Uguumur. In order to ensure future herd growth and maintain household levels of production and consumption, herders must manage these risks effectively. Depending on the risk faced, herders must take measures to mitigate the effect of particular events on herd loss and, when events do occur, to effectively cope with the problems at hands. To do so depends on the ability of households to access resources.

Household herds in Uguumur face a number of environmental threats. Threats from predation to wolves, foxes, birds of prey, and wild dogs, from diseases, and from a variety of climatic forces such as drought, extreme heat, extreme cold, lack of snowfall, excessive snowfall, early frosts, floods, sandstorms, windstorms, freezing rainstorms, and a number of other possibilities constantly confound herders attempts to make animal husbandry a profitable livelihood. Despite popular impressions to the contrary, herders do not passively accept these risks as fate. Conversely, herders attempt to manage and reduce these risks in a whole host of ways. Even in the occurrence of such an event herders attempt to mitigate the effects of these hazards by actively pursuing means to cope and improve their situation. Mobility, fodder, vaccination, vitamins, different kinds of feed, fattening, salt, moving to areas with particular kinds of forage, herd growth as self-insurance, formal and informal savings, formal IBLI insurance, bank loans, and various other methods of risk mitigation and coping demonstrate the seriousness and persistence of herder livelihoods.

The primary threat that herders face is from a spectrum of hazards collectively called *zud*. In chapters 7 and 9 I explain in great detail how households reduce, manage, and mitigate the risk of livestock mortality in the context of *zud*, focusing on the most important strategy: mobility. Here however I want to stress the critical effect that *zud* has on household herds and rates of growth. Moreover, as can be seen in Figure 3.14 below, the distribution of *zud* effects is not even across the population but is rather highly concentrated amongst the poor and middle wealth. The central point of this dissertation argues that this is largely due to the unequal distribution of entitlements and access to resources.



*Figure 3.14. Distribution of mortality rates by herd size (Compiled from 2007 soum census data and data collected in the household survey).*

In the literature scholars have argued that large herds in themselves buffer households against loss (Lybbert et al 2004; McPeak and Barrett 2003). In other words, wealthier households withdraw from the market and maintain surpluses of stock as a self-insurance mechanism against the risk of herd loss in the face of environmental shocks such as drought and conditions akin to zud. Clearly, herd size is important. If two households, one with a 1,000 animals and another with 100 lose 50% of their herd, the wealthy household is clearly in a better position with a viable core herd with which to revive his herds. The poor household, in contrast, may be pressured into crossing an important threshold demarcating a sustainable herd size. In Figure 3.14 above, though, there is a clear trend of significantly *lower* loss rates towards wealthier holdings. Herds in themselves cannot account for such wide discrepancies in loss rates. The primary difference I argue is not that the wealthy avoid disinvestment simply because of their large herds, but because they are capable of managing the risk of herd loss better than poorer households. In fact, what this dissertations shows is that households who maintain high mobility in times of stress fare significantly better than those who cannot. Fernandez-Gimenez (1997) argues that wealthier herders can overcome the transaction costs of increased mobility to a greater extent than poor households because they own trucks and transport stock. Others argue that they can afford to supplement their herds with hay and other forages. This research shows that this is largely the case. But I also argue that mobility is more complex than it has otherwise been treated in the

literature. I argue that the ability to call on labor, secure rights to other campsites, effective use of social power, and political economic dynamics of governance deeply shape mobile outcomes.

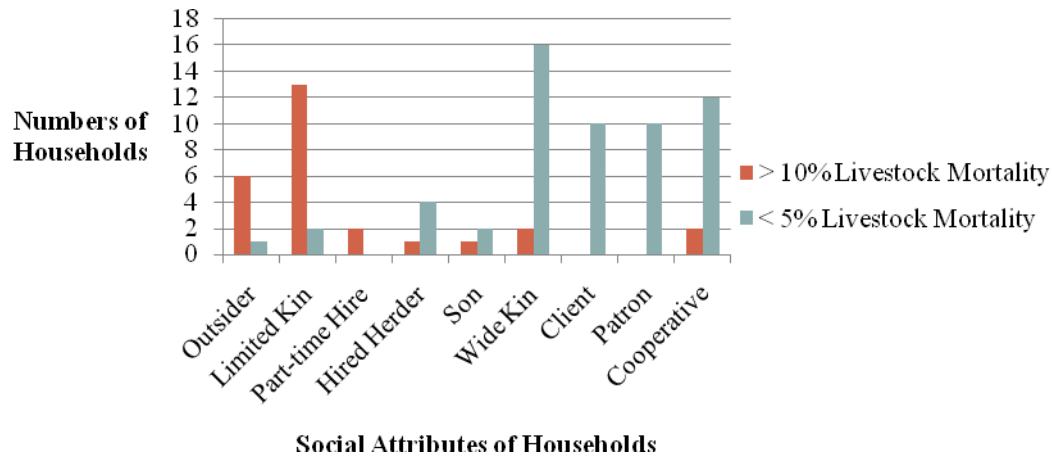


Figure 3.15. Households with loss rates above 10% and below 5% by social categories (Data compiled from household surveys, interviews, and fieldnotes).

Simple class analysis does not suffice. In fact, many poor households, including hired herders, client households, and junior kin, did not experience high mortality rates in the context of zud. As the loss data in Figure 3.14 shows, there is not a simple correlation between ex ante herd size and ex post herd size. In fact there is a wider variation of loss the poorer the households become. This is largely due to the fact that some poor households are capable of accessing resources critical to the reduction, management, and mitigation of zud risk in ways that other households, including some middle wealth ones, are not. In Figure 3.15 above it is clear that social connections play an important role and explain a great deal of this variation. Consequently, socio-economic differentiation can only explain so much in this case. Yet, one might argue that this is simply an extension of the economic capacity of wealthy households. As the rest of the dissertation demonstrates, wealthy households in Uguumur were not only more capable of overcoming the costs of risk management, they were also significantly more capable of deploying political weight to suit their own ends.

This calls into questions assumptions about asset dynamics themselves. Assets in themselves as this dissertation argues do not sui generis shield households from risk. More critically, the underlying structure of entitlements and social relations that mediate resource access are the prime source of differential rates of livestock mortality. This takes the issue of herd loss beyond simple asset dynamics and into the realm of politics.

## **Conclusion: The Meaning of Difference - Being *Bayan*, Being *Yaduu***

This chapter has tracked, at least partially, asset dynamics amongst herding households in Uguumur in order to demonstrate that productive assets like livestock are critical elements in understanding the production and reproduction of vulnerability to various hazardous conditions and poverty itself. Because households must maintain a certain level of consumption and sales in order to reproduce the household itself, poor households are ever more exposed to disastrous consequences of de-accumulation when threats such as *zud* loom. Yet, as I have argued, understanding the various social relationships, structures of entitlement and access, and the distribution of power across society may even tell us more.

Part of this is comprehending what wealth means locally and how local people understand wealth creation and poverty. In Uguumur, the primary social distinction amongst households, is not ethnic or racial, but rather kinship and class. Moreover, ideas about class have important implications in the rural political economy. Being wealthy in livestock, to be *myangat* or *bayan*, carries additional symbolic power beyond the economic value of the herd. It is more than being *ix maltai* (having many stock). Moreover, being poor or *yaduu*, is more degrading than the lack of livestock or being *tsuuxun* or *baga maltai*. For example, the wealthy are able to engage in and manipulate the gift economies, forms of patronage and friendship that are increasing critical to herding economies across Mongolian and in Uguumur. The poor are excluded from these wider social exchanges.

Following Bourdieu (1977) and others, I argue that inequality is also imbued with meaning beyond real, actual ‘facts’. In the course of social action or practice, these meanings not only explain difference, they create and sustain structures of difference. Being *bayan* and being *yaduu* also situates rural pastoral politics within a broader political economy of the nation. It also attends to new ideas about personhood, citizenship, and legitimate sources of power. In the socialist period, large private herds were not legitimate sources of power, but now big herds explain not only economic power, they also serve as remainders of personal force or *chadal*. Additionally, wealth has become increasingly associated with personal responsibility and rational calculability. It is not surprising that many of the wealthiest herders are former financial officers and accountants. Such skills have served them well in the age of the market. Temporally, the shift from *negdel* management to individual management of herds has become a marker not only of the privatization of livestock, but also the emergence of these new personhoods, citizenship regimes, and political legitimacy.

D: In that time period [privatization], suddenly there was no *negdel* and then the livestock were privatized. What did you all think at that time?

Herder T: In that period, well, we thought that it was good we would get our own livestock and property. We thought things would get better. We thought that it was a good thing every citizen could get livestock, increase their herds, and raise their livelihood.

D: In that period though the government, everything was changing. Were you afraid?

Herder T: O, yes of course! If you herded your stock well you would go up, if you worked poorly you would go down. So I thought I must work very hard.

D: Were you confident though?

Herder T: Yes, I was confident.

D: In that period there was no one without livestock? If one could raise their stock very well they would become poor, what did you think?

Herder T: Yes, I thought, however, that if I increase my herd, I will become a *myangat*. So, in the period each person needed to properly regulate their needs and their herds. That is what I thought.

D: In your opinion must a herder have a lot of expertise/experience (*turshlagatai*)?

Herder T: They must have an active initiative. "Now I will increase and multiply my herds": if he do not go with this thinking, or just carelessly go about things he will not increase his herds. They must have the drive to fatten their stock and must count very closely. "I will sell only 60 livestock from this herd": in this way they must take account.

It is not surprising then that during my time in Uguumur, wealthy herders presented their life-stories as Horatio Alger 'rags to riches' tales. They speak of hard-work, dedication, rational calculation, deferring of momentary pleasures and proper management as being central to their emergence as *myangat*. Their numerous awards and material wealth visually and symbolically attend to this narrative.

D: Some *negdel* herders were left without animals but you have animals.

Herder J: The lazy people have been separated out. I have been given property and I increased it so now I am like this [a 2 x *myangat*]. From my side and my wife's side the two of us have received and combined a small number of animals. We increased them. Because our management is good, the livestock increased.

D: What do you mean by management?

Herder J: You must regulate and coordinate the eating, selling, and use of fertile livestock! We always plan how many newborns we will have and from that we know how many we can eat or sell.

D: So what is the difference between a good herder and a bad herder?

Herder J: They are lazy people! They do not move and settle well. They eat and sell their animals. We two are getting old but we move and settled well but young people, for example, are lazy. They do not move and settle well. Some people regretfully no longer have livestock. They have finished them and moved to the *soum* or provincial center. They buy cars and trucks, clothes, and unnecessary things and soon become stockless.

The poor in turn are seen as lazy, dependent, and incapable of delaying personal pleasures. I found that the poor by and large take stock in this tale. The hope of many hired and young herders is to become *myangat*.

As this chapter has attempted to show, such portrayals of the poor and the dynamics of wealth and poverty do not do justice to the social realities of herding in Uguumur. The following

is an excerpt from an interview with a young and very diligent herder who lost a high percentage of stock in the zud. They now live in Undurxaan.

D: Last spring you sold 5 sheep and 10 goats and then another 5 sheep. This was a short period. Why did you sell? How did you know which ones to sell?

B: We have many needs. We needed to buy new school clothes for the children and then we needed things to eat like flour, rice, sugar, etc. We also had to pay the electricity bill here. Every which way we go there are just so many expenses, usually we must sell because of these needs ...

D: You also sold cashmere?

B: Yes but we paid a loan and there was not enough money.

D: Did you sell any other stock outside these 20 livestock?

B: Yes 4 or 5 horses. Together that was approximately 1 million MNT, one race horse was 400,000. The rest were for meat but I sold them alive. That was in fall. November. We do not have many animals left. We live here now [In Undurxaan].

## Chapter 4 From Kin to Contract: Labor in Uguumur

*One day, when many little children of the Golden Lineage had gathered, Chinggis Khan told them the tale of the snake with 1000 tails, but only one head. “Once upon a time, there was a snake with only one head, but 1000 tails. When the winter’s cold came, this snake’s one head went first into its hole, and the 1000 tails each went into their corresponding dwelling places, and the winter’s cold passed without heed. Contrary to this, there was also a snake with 1000 heads, and only one tail. When they very cold winter came, this snake also wanted to go into its hole to hibernate. But when one of the 1000 heads tried to enter first, the other 999 opposed it, and because of this, none of them were able to enter the den and they froze to death on the open steppe.*

*Oyunxuu and Shagdar 1993: 3 quoted in Kaplonski 1999*

*Brothers who work separately, like a single arrow shaft, can be easily broken, but brothers who stand together against the world, like a bundle of arrows, cannot be broken.*

*The Secret History of the Mongols*

### Introduction

In this chapter I look at the shifting labor economy in rural Uguumur. As the data demonstrate, wage-based and share-based contract labor relations are becoming increasingly common. Conversely, cooperative dynamics, long considered the fundamental basis of inter-household labor provision in rural Mongolia, are waning in social and economic importance in Uguumur. There are a number of critical factors affecting this shift including increased socio-economic differentiation, administrative and institutional reconfigurations, and broader social factors affecting individual households like out-migration. Moreover, the political implications of cooperation have become increasingly tense while the conditions of social inequality supporting the emergence of wage labor have become increasingly entrenched.

The two quotes above represent long-held but also contrasting views of political and economic cooperation in Mongolian history. The first quote comes from a folktale text for young elementary school students. Based on an oral tradition, it was written in the years immediately preceding the collapse of the socialist government; but represents a long held perception of ‘natural’ Mongolian political hierarchy. The second quote comes from the 13<sup>th</sup> century Secret History of the Mongols. It is attributed to a saying of Alangoa, the mother of the Mongol nation,

who sought to unite her sons for the benefit of the nation. These two modalities, one of inherently unequal, vertical, hierarchy and one of egalitarian cooperation, are important cultural frames for understanding inter-household interaction.

As a number of works (Bloc 1978; Cohen 1999; Donham 1999; and Wilk 1996) have shown cooperation does not inherently mean political egalitarianism nor does it infer equal distribution or use of resources. Moreover, as a number of new institutionalist scholars have argued, cooperation is costly. In Uguumur, cooperation has become for some excessively costly both in terms of investment and coordination as I will explain below. Where households can, they depend on kin-based cooperation. Most, I found, see full-time inter-household cooperation as an expensive (socially as well as economically) and politically difficult venture. As I show, for juniors or poor households, cooperation can often mean assuming a subservient position or at minimum a position of deference to a senior or wealthy patron. Many poor or junior households have few other options. For the wealthy, cooperation has become too costly in contrast to the prospects of wage and share contract labor. These new forms of contract labor are significantly easier to control and dominate. Moreover, the purging of poor households from the rural economy following the aftermath of disasters has created a vast pool of willing, destitute households from which the wealthy can easily draw.

Yet, cooperation and contractual labor are not always oppositional. All households I found cooperate in various ways with other households. Even the wealthiest herders who mostly hire labor argue that cooperation is important and such traditional values are held in high regards. The role of cooperation in local social life is valued in different ways depending on the purposes it serves, many of which are beyond simple labor provision.

Understanding the shift from kin-based cooperative labor exchange to more non-cooperative labor exchange relationships is critical as it has important implications for household mobility, resource use, and vulnerability to serious risks. The ability to acquire flexible labor and the ability to mobilize cooperatively at critical times have important implications. Here I aim to establish a deeper understanding of contemporary labor exchange practices in Uguumur by describing everyday work, cooperative relations, and the various contractual relationships that have recently emerged. Additionally I look at both the implications such shifts in labor have for resource use practices and what these new forms of labor imply for the meaning of work.



## Labor in Uguumur

### Division of Labor

Labor in the pastoral economy of Uguumur is divided very generally along age and gender lines within households. When households cooperate many of the same principles for labor division also apply. However, how individual households adapt and organize their available labor to the problems of daily tasks is specific to each household's labor capacity (*xunii xuch* or 'man power'). For instance, a household that has few children and is unable to cooperate effectively with neighboring *saaxalt ail* or with relatives would have to be significantly more lenient in the strictness that they apply gender and age principles to labor tasks. Households with broader access to labor resources and a more diverse mix of age ranges and equitable share of both male and females within the labor profile will be able to apply these principles more strictly.

Even though the Mongolian pastoral economy exhibits household divisions similar to other pastoral societies around the world, they are also known for being significantly more flexible in these arrangements (Humphrey and Sneath 1999). Men, women, and children all contribute at different times to the reproductive and productive tasks of their respective household. During my time in the countryside I observed men assisting their wives in food preparation (but not cooking) while in other households I knew men who would not. In the same vein, I observed and even herded with an elder woman on horseback out at pasture. Female-headed households also turn such facile divisions on their head. These behaviors all lie within a spectrum of gendered and aged possibilities along which it is understood households must adapt their available labor.

The impact of the socialist collectives on these social divisions is not to be underestimated. Following socialist ideals of gender equality and the centrality of labor, *geriin ajil* (housework) was treated on par with other productive tasks.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, women were accorded productive tasks critical to the operation of the *negdel*, including, in some cases, the herding of livestock. Some women even attained the titles of *Ulsiin Sain Malchin* (National Best Herder) and *Xudulmuuriin Baatar* (Hero of Labor). In addition, customary arenas of women's productive work such as milking (all five species) or birthing were given a prominent place in the

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<sup>84</sup> This was supported by a number of 'traditions' of gender equality that Mongolians utilize in everyday speech. For instance, the two poles (*uni*) that hold up the circular roof ring (*toono*) represents the husband and wife of the household, both equally supporting the ger. Consequently, only household members are allowed to touch the supporting columns. Moreover, traditional notions of space divide the ger equally into men's and women's space. As Sneath (1999) argues, rather than being a strict spatial ideology, it is a reflection of the practicalities of daily work and the round shape of the ger itself. The cooking materials are located on the east side and herding implements such as saddles, etc are located on the west.

collective production profile. Beyond herding, women in some cases were able to attain leadership positions in the collective, the party, or the soum administration. Although in the years since the democratic revolution the social position of women in rural society has clearly suffered (Bulag 1996; Humphrey and Sneath 1999; Janes and Chuluundorj 2004), the socialist legacy of gender flexibility in the assignment of work tasks has remained to a degree. Only in a few tasks are the gender divisions of labor ‘hard’. For example, women never kill livestock although they assist in the processing and men do not milk livestock even though they may help round up the milch stock.

Below is a conceptual schematic for the separation for *geriin ajil* and *malchnii ajil*. Although these work divisions typically have gendered associations, in no way do I intend to represent these areas as hardened social divisions. In addition, I have included other kinds of labor such as cultural work to the tasks carried out by households; many of these tasks are often underestimated both in the time they consume and the importance to household operation.

In households with a single head or in two home households the division of labor typically is more flexible, weakening in some cases this conceptual distinction. In my sample I recorded only 2 female-headed households who often cooperate with male kin or older male children and the few single male households were elderly men cared for by daughters-in-law. In a more complex and increasingly common situation, most employer households and many wealthy households maintain two homes: one in the countryside and one in the aimag or soum center. In some cases, wives work in other jobs such as teachers or accountants that require they be free from responsibilities in the countryside. In these cases members of employee households will carry out these tasks. Even in employer households fully engaged in the pastoral economy, employee households may in fact do much of the work listed below even if their employers (husband and wife) make the majority of decisions.

### ***Geriin Ajil: Housework***

The primary focus of *geriin ajil* or house work are reproductive tasks such as food preparation, making and repairing clothes, washing, childcare, cleaning, making tea, and stoking the fire. Some of the activities also require work outside. Water collection from snow or ice blocks during the winter, looking after small or young stock close to the ger, milking, gathering dung, preparing feeds, and chopping firewood or collecting *xurzun*. In most non-employer households, this work is typically accomplished by the primary woman, usually the *ezen*’s wife. Even in cases where the husband (*ezen*) may help, his wife takes a lead role in making decisions regarding these tasks. Only in a few cases, did I observe men over-ruling or directing their wives in these activities; these men, however, were considered *aimaar chang* or ‘frighteningly strict’ by

other households. In all seasons, children who are not in school will assist their mothers in these tasks. However, since children above the age of 7 are required by law to go to school<sup>85</sup>, only older children who have left school (but have not yet married) are available as labor. In addition, elder women, elder men who cannot herd, or unmarried siblings at times assist in accomplishing these tasks. In employer households, many of these tasks are carried out by a hired herder's wife.

Both men and women contribute to the necessary work that reproduces the camp when the household moves. Making and repairing rope, loading gers and carts, repairing the ger and carts, disassembling and reassembling the ger are tasks in which every household member participates. Interestingly, this work is rarely cooperative, as all households within a kin collective must move at the same time. This time restriction means that households must often do this kind of work alone. Accompanying such work are a number of rituals that both men and women are responsible for carrying out.

### ***Malchnii Ajil: Herders' Work***

Labor tasks associated with the masculine sphere of productive labor are generally labeled as *malchnii ajil* or herders' work. This kind of work entails a broad range of tasks, separated seasonally, including the herding of animals, watering stock, making leather, finding lost animals, slaughter and skinning, castration, harnessing, saddle making and repair, setting harnesses, corralling, lassoing, breaking horses, cutting and transporting hay, making and repairing animal shelters, transporting animals to market, decision-making regarding moves, pasture scouting, collecting information on pastures, moving dead animals, burning dead animals, penning of livestock, sheep shearing, cashmere combing, veterinary labor tasks, processing livestock products, breeding stock, birthing, herd separation, *saaxlax* or *saax zoruulex* (weaning period that requires stock exchange with *saaxalt ail* or neighbor), herd counting, and a number of other activities.

Men take lead roles in this work, even though women and children help to a great degree. For example, in many of the households I knew most intimately, men discuss in great detail with their wives decisions regarding pasture use, movement, slaughter, sales, and the timing of certain tasks such as breeding or weaning (*saaxlax*). Final decisions are made by men but in many cases women's arguments often prove most persuasive. Only when men go on *otor* are these tasks the sole domain of men. On *otor*, men must often do both *geriin ajil* and *malchnii ajil*. Women, who maintain the base camp, are concerned typically only with milch cows and *geriin ajil* while men

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<sup>85</sup> Some children do not attend school on time. Many are kept in the household until 8-10 years old. Additionally, although most children graduate high school, young men are more likely to drop out of school and work for their fathers or even as hired herders.

leave on *otor*. In the summer, children do most of the actual herding work, taking animals out to pasture (*belcheerlex*), watering the stock (*uslax*), and returning (*xotluulax*) the stock in the late evening. Only in the poorest households where labor is highly constrained do children do this in other seasons.<sup>86</sup>

### ***Other kinds of work***

Housework and herding work are not the only kind of tasks that pastoral households must accomplish to meet their livelihood needs and goals. A broad range of cultural tasks such as weddings, kin-based and community religious rituals, celebrations, parties, disciplining children, gifting, financial tasks such as banking, collecting welfare and other entitlements, health work such as visiting the doctor, political work such as voting, attending bag and soum herder meetings, running cooperatives, social work such as visiting other households in the kin collective to maintain rapport and position, and bureaucratic tasks such as registering for and enrolling in development projects, submitting paperwork for wells and campsite contracts, and counting livestock for census. Some work has important implications for mobility practices such as organizing collective migration, strategic gifting, official visits, and *xuux* or expulsion which requires visiting other households or even stealing livestock. In my time in the countryside, it was more than clear that everyday life is full of necessary tasks.

### **Meanings of Work**

The kinds of labor that households engage in are not just material tasks aimed at carrying out material production and reproduction of the household; rather, labor or rather work is also imbued with cultural meaning. For example, *geriin ajil* is generally looked down upon compared with *malchnii ajil*. It is understood that the maintenance of the household is critical to the productive capacity of the household as a whole. However, men are reluctant to do such work because of its association with women whose social position has fallen greatly in the years since decollectivization, partly due to the fact that such work is unpaid and unrecognized. Yet, even though housework is held in low regard by men, it is not stigmatized like some kinds of pastoral labor. This is the case, most evidently, with *xar ajil* (black work) or hard work. *Xar* (black) refers to the fact this work is *xeriin ajil* or basic work that anyone can do; in other words, tasks that

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<sup>86</sup> In May 2008, a severe storm struck central Khentii aimag and killed 52 people, many of whom were children. It is often children who die out at pasture in the winter and spring when short ut powerful storms are frequent. My host family found reports of child deaths repulsive, since in their view children should be herding during these seasons but rather should be at school. When I mentioned that these household were probably poor and needed extra labor they understood.

require little skill.<sup>87</sup> Many of the manual tasks such as slaughtering and skinning, corralling, branding, horse-breaking, and cutting hay are considered *xar ajil*. Such work is delegated to younger males or to hired herders. Such meanings have significant importance in hired herding.

### **The Problem of Pastoral Labor**

Wilk (1999) states that “every task has a labor restriction as well a point at which adding more workers will no longer improve efficiency” (181). In other words, “the marginal returns to labor will approach zero” as labor reaches optimal efficiency (181). Moreover, certain tasks in the annual production calendar have time-specific and/or sequencing requirements. Consequently, given a specific environmental and technological base, task-specific labor limitations and saturation points, constrained seasonal timing, and restrictive task-sequencing, there will be considerable bottlenecks in some production systems (Netting 1993; Stone et al 1990). Moreover, some tasks are elastic in timing and/or sequencing while others are inelastic. The elasticity of tasks and the constraints of timing and sequence, present in all systems, vary to certain degrees and those who are able to effectively mobilize labor to match tasks, timing, and sequences will clearly benefit. Lastly, as Netting (1993) makes clear, without technological improvements, increased production can only occur through greater resource access and effective management of increased labor supplies.

In my research in Uguumur it was clear there are significant labor requirements and bottle necks in the herding economy. The periods in which certain kinds of labor are in need are dictated by the requirements of animal husbandry whose cycles of production are largely seasonal.<sup>88</sup> The seasonality of Mongolia’s herding economy has a broad impact on how households organize their labor supplies. For those who cannot modify the quantitative availability of labor (*xun* versus *xunii xuch* or ‘men’ versus ‘man power’), they must either ‘squeeze’ more effort out of the labor they have or modify the activities they engage in, as is evident in the practice of *otor* and *saaxlax*. Moreover, labor needs are dependent for most activities on the size of household herds, herd composition, and the presence of environmental stress such as *zud*. Shearing 1,000 sheep takes a significantly longer time and laborer investment

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<sup>87</sup> The description of such work as ‘*xar*’ or black comes from color associations with class in feudal Mongolia where ‘common’ men who were not obligated to provide corvee were called ‘*xar xun*’ or black man. *Xar* is also the root of words like *xaryat* or subject. Other classes were referred to, for example, as ‘*xux*’ or blue such as *xux taij* or blue nobles. Nobility were also said to be of the *tsagaan yastan* or white lineage. Yellow (*shar*) is reserved for lamas.

<sup>88</sup> Camels, however, gestate for almost two years. Consequently, breeding cycles, milking, and other activities subject to this cycle are, depending on the numbers of pregnant camel cows (*inge*), not necessarily annual tasks.

than shearing 200. Those who can manage to increase the labor force, either through *xun* or *xunii xuch*, and have a greater capacity to dictate the speed and quality of work, economies of scale can be achieved.

In Table 4.1 below the most important pastoral tasks are listed. Each of these tasks have timing, sequencing, and labor volume requirements. For example, migration typically requires a large pool of labor because of the different speeds at which species are driven to new campsites and the need to arrive before certain seasonal events like the beginning of winter snowfall, spring dust storms, or summer rains. In the summer, the sudden availability of increased forage can greatly benefit a household and households must be prepared to conduct important otor migrations and successfully wean their stock before they can arrange such opportunistic grazing.

### ***Monthly Labor Schedule***

In table 4.1, black spaces represent time periods in which activities typically take place. In some cases, such as dung collection (*argal xuurax*), the activity takes place during the entire period. On other cases, such as camel wool or mane cutting, the activity takes place one at some point within that time period. Many of these activities like castration take place according to the *zurxai* or astrological charts. Some herders consult lamas and others consult their small astrology calendars which are near ubiquitous in the countryside. Red represents an activity that requires the separation of the camp from the herd and usually requires either an additional household or the splitting of the household. The listed activities are only the major ones. In each season there are numerous additional duties that occupy a households time.

Table 4.1. Annual Labor Schedule (Compiled from fieldnotes, interviews, and surveys).

Labor Task	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV
Customary Move**												
Lambing/Kidding*												
Calving*												
Foaling*												
Sheep/Goat Breeding												
Cashmere Comb*												
Wool Shear*												
Horse Mane Cut*												
Camel Wool												
Castration												
Weaning (saaxlax)**												
Hay Preparation*												
Dung Collection												
Branding												
Customary Slaughter												
Horse Training												
Recovery Otor**												
Fattening Otor**												
Vaccinations												

### Seasonal Labor Descriptions

#### Winter

Winter has the fewest task specific labor requirements of any season but because of the extreme nature of the weather, tasks such as herding can be quite difficult. Watching over livestock at pasture in -40 F can sap the energy of an adult man very quickly. Moreover, active herding of all species becomes increasingly important as the temperature drops and winter sets in. Even camels must be returned at least once a week to ensure that they properly maintain weight. During a zud or when inclement weather persists, additional work such as tending to weakened livestock, transporting hay, slaughtering distressed stock, and preparing fodder supplements such as *xiveg* become central to the daily tasks. Most households benefit from a *saaxalt ail* during the winter. In a typical year however, most households settle at a distance from one another so as to minimize grazing pressure and take advantage of distant ungrazed territories. Without access to more labor during a difficult winter, labor poor households can find themselves highly constrained if problems arise.

#### Spring

Spring presents the most significant bottleneck than any other time during the year. Households move to their spring campsite prior to birthing. Cashmere combing begins for most households in mid-to-late March and then birthing begins. The birthing of animals requires the separation of herds into non-breeding stock, pregnant stock, and lambs and ewes. Maintaining 3

separates herds is the ideal practice for proper herd management and to ensure the survival of young stock and the health of birthing ewes. As spring moves on collecting horse hair, camel wool, dung, and branding add to the daily routine of herding work. Towards the end of spring around the beginning of May, households start to wean their lambs and kids. To properly wean the stock households must cooperate with others or divide their household so they can separate the herds. This practice is referred to as *saax zoruulex* (to cause to reject milking) or *saaxlax*.

In Western Mongolia households typically exchange lambs for ewes with one household herding all the lambs and another herding all the milking stock. In the east, however, the traditional practice has been to exchange lambs only which does not alleviate the problem of additional labor needs. The second practice, which is typical of Uguumur, even among the Uriankhai and Durvud, relaxes pressure on grazing and minimizes respective herd sizes, but with the split herds at each household, different grazing requirements of lambs and breeding stock, this practice requires additional labor. In this case most household exchange stock with a neighbor household, 'saaxalt ail', split a cooperative khot ail into two campsites, or exchange stock with client or herding households who are often left responsible for breeding stock. In the latter scenario, herd-owners typically manage the lambs or in cases where labor is plenty will have sons or a trusted herder tend to the lambs with another household tending to the breeding stock.

### ***Summer***

Although there is a great deal of work in the summer, the warm winds and sunny days make for a much easier context in which to labor. The primary activity in summer is conducting recovery *otor* or at least maximizing the potential of summer pasture. For households that can access additional labor, households will take breeding stock on *otor* for recovery and fattening. Other activities carried out during the summer include wool shearing in June, castration in late May and throughout June, and hay cutting in August or even September. Wool shearing requires a significant amount of labor as timing is critical. As the summer heat rises, sheep can quickly overheat which can lead to wasting and disease. However, wool shearing must be timed after the late spring and early summer rains have ended. These rains are typically cold and can cause animals to shiver which burns additionally energy. Wool, in contrast, sheds the water and keeps the animals warm. In a good day, an individual can shear upwards of 30 sheep. For herds of a 1,000 or more sheep, a mass of labor is needed to accomplish this task as quickly as possible without delaying grazing time. Households that cannot call on kin labor will hire additional labor. For households with small herds, these tasks can usually be carried out by the members including children home from school.



The presence of children in general relaxes the pressures for acquiring additional labor. During the summer months children are expected to take on the mundane daily herding tasks while male heads of household busy themselves with horse training. Horse training, for households that have the herds and the time to devote, is a socially important hobby activity that can in fact, as described in chapter 3, bring great rewards.

By July and August additional *otor* migrations are often necessary so that stock will continue to fatten. In August households that have the tools, the labor, and the know-how will organize hay cutting. A few households continue this practice in Uguumur. Almost all are wealthy. One cooperative *buleg* has benefitted with a tractor from IFAD's Rural Poverty Reduction Project and cut reserve pastures in late summer with the new equipment. Other households use handheld scythes and cut hay, typically in the unused areas near the river.

### ***Fall***

The primary activity that occupies households in the fall is *otor* and grazing. Ensuring that household herds efficiently and effectively graze is an important concern in the fall. During the summer, households are less concerned with optimizing grazing paths for livestock. In the fall, however, minimizing herd energy expenditures and maximizing appropriate forage intake is critical. Consequently, herd-owners themselves, rather than children or hired herders, will take over daily pasturing decisions. In October, breeding also begins. There are two intervals in which households have an opportunity to set rams on the breeding ewes, usually separated by a 2-3 week interval depending on the estrus cycle of the individual ewes. Rams must be collected from 'ram' herders (*xuts uxna xariuulax malchin*) and conditioned before setting them on the ewes. This activity requires little in the way of additional labor. After the breeding periods have passed, households that practice *saax zoruulex* join the weaned stock with the rest of the herd. Ewes are not ready to breed until they are 18 months. By November, households begin selecting animals for slaughter. As described in chapter 3 November is the customary period of slaughter for livestock sales as the temperatures are cold enough to freeze meat, animals are at their fattest, households can distinguish weak stock (*zaaz mal*) and non-breeding stock (*suvai mal*). Slaughtering typically needs to happen fast so that households can take advantage of fluctuations in price so households time their slaughter. Especially for large herds, additional labor is needed for slaughtering and processing meat and skins for the market. Households that can, will acquire labor from kin but typically kin households are also hard at work optimizing for market prices. Consequently, households that need extra labor will often hire for such work.

### ***Herd size and herd composition***

Different species of stock and different sizes of herds have different laboring requirements. All animals have to be driven to new campsites, pastured at different time intervals, corralled for different purposes, and rounded up for productive tasks. The growing size of an individual herd in turn increases the need for labor. However, this is largely dependent on the species of stock. Large animal herds typically never reach a size where they become unmanageable at pasture with one herder. However, small stock herds must be separated when they reach a thousand head. An individual herder cannot manage such massive herds at pasture. Herding at pasture though is only one task amongst many when managing herds.

Horses and camels are largely left unattended for long periods of time sometimes upwards of a week or more. However, driving a household's entire herd takes several drovers. Horses and camels do not move at the same pace and neither move at the speed of sheep, goats, or camels. Moreover, each of these species moves differently. Although all of these livestock are gregarious herding species, horses, camels, and cows are much more independent minded than sheep and goats. A herd of horses can disappear with minutes and cows tend to disperse and are easily attracted by forage. Sheep and goats are easy to drive in large herds but they are slow and maintaining the unity of the herd takes effort. Typically, households prefer to move these herds separately, although most do not have the necessary labor to do this.

Horses and camels are pastured only rarely and are left largely to their own devices. Consequently, they can graze up to 10-20 kilometers away from the campsite. Both are branded to prevent theft, but this largely only prevents other locals from stealing stock. Most though are reluctant to steal a camel, as most camels are unruly and steppe herders are uncomfortable in their presence. Each however have to be returned to the *xot* every once in awhile so as to reinforce the sense of 'home'. *Xotluulax* or returning animals to their camp (*xot*) is similar in this way to *nutagluulax* or returning animals to their home territories (*nutag*) after returning from a long distance migration. Most horses and camels know their customary campsites and will return at times on their own. Cattle, sheep, and goats however have to be pastured and corralled every day. Cattle can simply be driven out to a spot and they will actively search for the best grazing on their own and are not as affected by local conditions such as wind and temperature. If there is good forage they will try to access it. Depending where the forage is cattle can graze up to 5 kilometers distance. Sheep and goats on the other hand are more complicated and must be pastured, tended, and corralled with active care and kept within a few kilometers of the campsite. Although sheep herds tend to stay together as one unit, goats will stray especially at pasture. More importantly, the herd can easily split, particularly if there is competition amongst breeding males and lead

females. Sheep and goats have to be led to good pasture as well, as they tend to wonder and poor leadership at the front of the herd can waste a whole day. Herders therefore have to actively find the right pasture and put the herd in it. Lastly, sheep and goats are much more susceptible to everyday risks and dangers than other species. Consequently, they require near constant attention.

When herders need to acquire products from their livestock they typically have to have additional labor to do so. Not only do they have to round up and corral the stock for cashmere combing, shearing, hair cutting, and other productive tasks, they must have off-setting labor to tend to the rest of the herd. Huge herds must be split when these tasks are done. For example, a herd of 1,000 sheep will be split. The herd-owner may only take 100 sheep a day and leave the rest of the herd out at pasture. In these circumstances a herder must tend to the main herd while others shear the small herd of one hundred.

With large herds many of these tasks require additional labor. Although one herder can tend to a 1,000 sheep at pasture without much difficulty, one herder could not supply all the necessary labor to maintain that single herd. Labor to livestock ratios are often debated in the literature, but in Mongolia most herders agree that one herder can tend to a herd of 1,000 sheep and goats at pasture. Yet, this is somewhat deceptive. Although one herder can tend a thousand head at pasture relatively easy, pasturing and tending livestock is not the most difficult, time-consuming, or labor intensive task a household has to complete. One herd-owner told me that a single household with children can tend to a thousand sheep and goats only if there are no other livestock, i.e. horses, cattle, and camels. Even then he pointed out the household would require a lot of help to carry out any productive tasks. In his case, he only allows one household to tend a thousand stock under contract. He hires other households for the other species and for the excess herds. Herd size in this case has important implications for the elasticity of labor demand.<sup>89</sup>

### ***Insufficient Labor***

Individual households without the aid of children or additional members beyond the heads are largely incapable of carrying out many of the tasks that make a pastoral livelihood profitable (*ashigtai*). Solving the problem of labor deficiencies is critical in the 'age of the market' where increased resource access, necessary both for increase herd growth and mitigating

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<sup>89</sup> Additional labor does not always translate into improved labor capacity. In other words, more *xun* (men) does not equal more *xunii xuch* (manpower). Moreover, a la Chayanov, additional labor puts additional stress on herds as consumption needs potentially outstrip herd reproduction. However, in the critical instance where herds might grow, the ability to call on or recruit additional labor is vital, without it, households risk losing potential herd growth.

risk, is intimately connected to labor availability. In the remainder of this chapter I will examine the ways herding households attempt to solve this problem.

## **Historical Patterns of Labor Exchange in Mongolia**

The micro-economics of household level labor exchange are critical in our analyses of contemporary labor practices. However, understanding the *longue duree* of Mongolian history demonstrates other factors we must consider in understanding why households favor some kinds of labor exchange over others. In the following section I aim to demonstrate the labor exchange practices emerge from more than timing and sequencing problems at the household level. Labor exchange, whether ‘cooperative’ in nature or not, has long been intimately woven into the socio-political tapestry of Mongolian society. Administrative structures during imperial, feudal, and socialist periods have deeply affected the ways in which households solve the labor problem. As we will see in the following sections, shifts in the broader political economy of Mongolia society have altered the various social forms that labor exchange practices exhibit. Moreover, as we witness these shifts, it becomes clear how intimately labor, land, and livestock are woven in the complex politics of livelihood and territoriality.

### **Pre-socialism 1206-1921**

Little is known about pre-Chinggisid labor exchange practices in ancient Mongolia. What we do know comes primarily from Chinese texts (Bold 1999) and the Secret History of the Mongols (Rachewiltz 2003). Historical references are rarely made specifically to labor but we do know that social organization was founded primarily at the clan level and exhibited a social form called the *xuree*. The *xuree* was a kind of coalition whereby large numbers of households or ail would move en masse to new campgrounds and pastures.<sup>90</sup> Group membership numbered anywhere from 20 in the smallest to hundreds at the largest. This type of social organization, however, was often founded on a kind of patron-client relationship within the clan system. A leader, sometimes a senior male within the clan or a particularly well-qualified up-start, such as the young Temujin, organized and directed such conglomerations. Such men gathered followings of households and moved across the landscape in search of pasture. Client households were known to change allegiances and, conversely, leaders at times would subordinate or ally with other groups. Grazing and resource competition for the best pasturage was fierce and territorial control was founded largely on military might and political force. Client households within the *xuree* were consequently, subject only in so far as they found themselves secure. Patrons would

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<sup>90</sup> Hunting was an important secondary livelihood activity during this time period; much more so than in later centuries.

take on client households in so far as they swore loyalty and subordinated to his rule. At the bottom rung of society were slaves (*bool*), captured in battle and conflict. It was slaves and lowly clients who conducted the day to day pastoral tasks for the leaders and their immediate kin. In an ordinary ger, household labor undertook most domestic duties.

After the founding of the Mongol empire in 1206 with the unification of the various tribes under Chinggis Khan, territorial authorities were delegated out to various military leaders who had provided exemplary service to the khan. Leaders were often referred to as *axlagch* or *darga* and various other terms of seniority and privilege. As I described earlier the introduction of the decimal system of socio-political organization instituted a new regime of authority and control on the steppe. Moreover, with increasing socio-political complexity, the *xuree* system of movement and social organization disappeared; although, for a time, households moved in conglomerations called *xoroo*. As the imperial administrative system emerged, the inherent patron-client nature of these social forms became intimately entangled with the feudal nobility and the hierarchy of rule that it implied.

As Mongol society became increasingly divided between nobles and commoners with the emergence of the Borgijin lineage as the ruling class, various kinds of exchange relationships became highly institutionalized. By 1691 when the ruling nobility ceded territorial authority to the Manchu Qing empire, individuals within Mongol society each “occupied a fixed position within society with a defined range of feudal responsibilities.” As I discussed earlier, *khamjilga*, retainers of the nobility, provided taxes to the state and corvee to their overlords and *albat* provided taxes and corvee to the state by serving in the military and post system. Other classes had various responsibilities, save freemen or *darxan*. The noble class, in turn, also had obligations and duties to which they were responsible. If their *khamjilga* incurred debt or could not pay taxes, then nobles were obligated to pay. Moreover, *taij* were customarily responsible for ensuring the security of their dependents. There are numerous references in historical texts to the provision of animals to households who were rendered stockless by disaster. In most cases, these provisions were of cattle and other milch stock so that households would not starve. Rarely, *taij* would also *maljuulax* or restock dependent client households. More often though, when households became poor or lost livestock to disaster, “In such cases it was quite usual for a poor man to attach himself to a richer one and get taken along ‘under his wing’ in the Mongolian expression; in exchange for work” (Bawden 1968). Despite the appearance of mutual co-dependency, the relationship was very much stacked in the nobles favor. For example, *khamjilga* were not “legally entitled to move about and dispose of their labor as they wished since this deprived their feudal

overlord part of his subsistence” and although nobles were responsible for their debts, they “would often discipline them or even punish” their *khamjilga* (Bawden 1968).

Most *khamjilga* also served as herders for their respective nobles. Bold (1996) states that *khamjilga* were given an average of 75 head of stock. Yet, Sneath (1999) reports that one herder in Alashaa (now in Inner Mongolia) was entrusted with 1,000 camels by his *taij*. Often rich *taij* would divide their herds by species and place them with *khamjilga* households. There were two primary ways in which nobles employed their dependents: 1) in a practice called *sureg tavix* or herd placement<sup>91</sup> and 2) *xorog xiiix* where a herder would become an assistant in residence<sup>92</sup> (Bold 1999). In *sureg tavix*, *khamjilga* would herd stock independently, retaining certain products for their own consumption and providing other products to their *taij* at set rates. In *xorog xiiix*, herders, and their families, would live with their lords and conduct daily pastoral tasks in service to their *taij*. These households were also referred to as *zarts* or *zartsiin ail*, servants.

I used to be a *khamjilga* of Naidan *taiji* ... We used to do unpaid work like herding the *taiji*'s horses, collecting dung for fuel, shifting pastures, breaking horses, and so on. We were a poor family with ten-odd sheep and goats and two horses and with no other beasts or property. (Reminiscences of Soldiers of the Mongol Peoples' Volunteers 1961: 594 cited in Bawden 1968)

In some cases, nobles recruited wealthy *khamjilga* who were renowned as good herders. Although there is disagreement about which kind of service was most beneficial and which required better herding skill, one could assume that in either case, better skilled herders were desired over those lacking in them. It is clear from the historical record that both wealthy and poor households served in such positions; yet, what is equally clear is that relatively all of these relationships involved deep social and economic inequality. Consequently, these relationships were rife with tension and conflict.

In 1797 for instance, a man of a banner of Tushetu Khan aimag stabbed his *zasag* to death, for which he was executed. He was in desperation at the ruin of his life through years of forced labor, including the task of breaking in wild horses for which he had been willfully denied the use of saddle and bridle. (Bawden 1968: 175)

Yet, *khamjilga* serving in such capacity, could in the most egregious circumstances, sue his lord and ‘employer’. A number of legal documents from the period demonstrate the possibility for such redress, including a document from Tsetsen Khan *xoshuu* where present day Uguumur is located (Rasidondug 1975). Yet, as Bawden (1968) continues:

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<sup>91</sup> The contemporary term in Uguumur is *mal tavix* or ‘to place or put livestock’. Those who do *xorog xiiix* are now called *tuslax malchin* or herd assistants.

<sup>92</sup> I described these relationships in much greater detail in sections below.

There was no intention to usurp authority, or to replace the feudal system of the time by some other, as yet, unimagined, social order. The most that might be aimed at, or achieved, was the redress of grievances by the repayment of illegal extractions. (176)

In other words, wronged dependents sought to reinstitute the moral economy between *noyon* and *khamjilga* rather than overturn the system.

During the Manchu period, nobles and other wealthy herders also engaged in other kinds of labor exchange, even hiring. As Bawden 1968 states, “From very early on we find richer families turning the situation to account by engaging vagrants to work for them, instead of returning them to the banner they belonged to as regulations required.” Good labor, at times, was hard to come by and *taij* and *noyod* were reluctant to forego quality herders. A number of court cases demonstrate importance of the return of *khamjilga* to their rightful lord (Rasidondug 1975). Defendants often contested these suits arguing that the labor was indispensable and compensation could be provided in other ways. In other cases, *taij* would openly trade with *khamjilga*, recruit other herders to escape to their territory, or arrange to purchase them from their respective *taij*. In 1789, however, such practices became illegal.

Outside of herding employment, a number of other kinds of labor existed, particularly in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Frequent disasters would leave a number of household completely stockless. If they could not find employment with their *taij* or obtain stock, they would wind up destitute living near settled areas such as around the aimag center. They would hire themselves out as day laborers, farm labor, and women found employment often as prostitutes, a common occupation in the vicinity of monasteries. In several cases, large scale disasters led to migrations to growing urban areas like Urga where small factories and other small-scale industries were increasingly common with investments coming from Russian, Chinese, Japanese, and even American sources of capital.

The relationships between *taij* and *khamjilga* served not only to increase available labor supplies; rather, the relationship served to increase labor so that greater range of resources could be utilized thereby creating the conditions to increase herd size. In many cases, additional labor was taken on in order to counter-act low ratios of labor to livestock. Yet, under the feudal territorial regime, labor also equated to greater access to land and other natural resources. As Natsagdorj (1967) points out, ‘The emphasis was not so much on accumulating and retaining ownership of valuable land as on the availability of human labor and working animals to exploit new territory.’ Although *noyod* controlled *khoshuu* territories, they could not rightfully claim access to various sites without a presence of livestock. Consequently, the employment of herders in these various relationships served to stake claims to critical resources, at the expense of others.

In 1717 the Tushet-Khan Tsetsendorj of Khalkha wrote: ‘a large territory is the means of life’, and ‘for the increase of the herds it is necessary to expand the territory for ample migration and grazing the stock.’ (Natsagdorj 1967: 266)

because of the *saun* ‘client’ relationship, in which herds were given out by the wealthy to poorer herdsmen in return for use of the milk and wool, the lords could have access to scattered pastures used by many individual households. The feudal lords could direct the migration routes of such herdsmen. The pressures which they used to induce people to take on their flocks were non-economic, but the result was that the feudal herds could increase enormously. (Humphrey 1978:20 in Vainshtein 1979)

Moreover, as Humphrey makes clear, “the distribution of property in herds amongst several scattered client households had the effect of minimizing risk, and wealthy owners were able to increase their herds to enormous proportions” (Humphrey 1978:16 in Vainshtein 1979). Such dynamics also led to dispute. Bawden (1968):

A lawsuit arose between a banner-prince in Tsetsen Khan aimag and a rich man of his banner, one Wangchig. The terms in which the prince complained to the League Chief show the conflict between the real situation and the ideal ‘feudal’ relationship, “The subject Wangchig farms out his cattle to others to herd for him as a duty, and lets them pasture on the broad, luscious pastures just like the prince’s herds. He monopolizes the winter quarters for the beast belonging to me myself, the banner taij, and the commoners and causes them loss.’ (90)

Although *sureg tavix* and *xorog xiix* relationship were a primary form of labor exchange, it was also during this period that a latent form of inter-household cooperation emerged called the *xot ail*. As opposed to the *xuree* or the *xoroo*, the *xot ail* is relatively small. Some researchers argue that *xot ail* can include anywhere from 2-7 households or even up to 12. In speaking with the research participants, they argued that although they understand what these researchers mean, the term *xot ail* does not specifically refer to an institutionalized form of cooperation between two households. The *xot* simply refers to the area in which the livestock reside on the campsite, and the *ail* is the household itself. Despite this, because it is used so ubiquitously in the literature, I will retain the meaning applied to it by researchers for the immediate discussion, because the kind of inter-household cooperation they are referring to became most prominent during the Manchu period when the institutionalization of a complex administrative system relaxed the various social and political threats that warrant the increased security of collective migration on a grand scale.

During the Manchu period, herd-owners could obtain labor from various sources such as children, sons, sons-in-law, adoption, hiring of labor, or cooperation with various other households. When two or more households cooperatively settled together on a campsite, these organizational forms are considered *xot ail*. A number of researchers have argued that the foundational basis of the *xot ail* is kinship and the stem family. Various combinations of related



kin, it is presumed, would settle on a single campsite and cooperate in various pastoral tasks. In many cases, newly married sons, for example, would continue to reside with their fathers from whom they would inherit herds and campsites. Synkiewicz (1983) argues that this kind of inter-household cooperation was a function of a moral economy of mutual aid and obligation inherent in kin modalities. Yet, numerous sources point out that, in other cases, *xot ail* could consist of a *taij* and his *khamjilga* or simply a wealthy herder and his unrelated poor client. As Simukov (1993) argues, the fundamental basis of most *xot ail* relationship was socio-economic inequality, regardless of kin relation. Within any *xot ail* then, a senior household, usually wealthy, acted as the group *ax* or *axlagch*. The Khalkha Jirum for instance, even refers to the position of the *xotiin ax*. Although some argue that such inequality was largely a function of the domestic cycle of the household, evidence suggest that these ‘cooperative’ forms, whether based on kin or not, necessitated social and economic inequality between the households. Here Humphrey (1978) cites from the work of the soviet ethnographer Potapov concerning Buryat Mongols:

The members of the aal do in fact pasture their animals in turn. However, the poor man with no herds of his own, or almost none, also goes herding in turn, ie he really pastures other people’s herds. During this he drank *khoitpak* and also receives some milk which he takes home. In fact the poor man of the aal had to pasture all the herds all the time, because the rich owner never went out to work but ordered him to do it instead, Nor did the middling rich owner do any herding. Old men told me that they sent the poor man or his children instead. If there were no children he and his wife had to do it all. The idea of turns was kept up simply so that it should be known when it was the rich, and when the middling, owners’ turn to feed the poor herdsmen. In summer the poor mans family was fed by the different owners and the children were sent each to a different yurt to receive *khoitpak* the basic food of the poor. At the home they had only teas. In winter the poor family was given the liver, lights, stomach, feet, head, and udder of animals killed by the richer families. Thus in this case it was in fact the poor family which pastured the herds all the time, obtaining only a miserable payment in natural products, the whole operation being masked by the idea of a communal custom. (27-28)

In Khalkha regions, it is these poor households that were referred to as *zarts* or servant. Today, in Uguumur, they have a gentler term, *tuslax malchin* or herder assistant. In the Manchu period there were few outlets for the poor and the wealthy, especially those who lacked noble title, who did not have a means to divest out of the herding economy. Consequently, this kind of inequality is inherent in the production cycle of Mongolian pastoralism. Moreover, even in cases where kinship underlie such cooperative forms, Humphrey (1978: 28) is right in citing Bloch who argues that the ‘amity of kin can promote a tolerance of long-lasting imbalances’ and even exploitation. As Humphrey (1978) continues:

In groups with a hierarchical kinship ideology, fathers and sons, or older brothers and younger brothers might contribute very different amounts of labor to communal tasks such as herding, felt-making, or harvesting. Ethnographic accounts of both Western and Eastern Buryats and Khalkha

Mongols describe older or senior men as rarely participating in such activities, unless forced to by poverty ... (29)

### **Socialism: 1921-1991**

Following the victory of the Red Army and the Mongolian socialists in 1921 change was slow to come to rural society. The Bogd Khan remained the titular head of state until 1924 and although the feudal *khamjilga-noyod* system was abolished in 1923 the monastic estates remained largely intact. Lamaseries were forced to formally hire *shavi* as herders and establish written contracts with payment in wages and in-kind (Bawden 1968). Additionally, all private claims to land were abolished and monastic and noble claims to land were no longer legitimate. All land, in effect, became state-owned. Regardless of the feudal abolition and monastic reform, most herders continued to work for wealthier herders, including for their former feudal lords, even though they enjoyed greater freedom of movement and the freedom to dispose of their labor in various ways and exit without punishment. Not all however were able to continue their former relationships. With the loss of the security, many were incapable of continuing to herd and large rural to urban migration ensued.

After the 7<sup>th</sup> party congress in 1928, the period in Mongol history known as the leftist deviation started (Bawden 1968). The party plan called for the establishment of associations and cooperatives and the incorporation within five years of at least seventy percent of the poorest households and fifty percent of the middle wealth category of herders. Yet, rather than associations or cooperatives, however, local party leaders were encouraging the formation of communes. The imprecise language and lack of understanding of the differences between cooperative, communes, and collectives combined with party privilege founded on strict adherence to dogma led to the overzealous implementation of strict commune regimes. Yet, local party organizers found increasingly stiff resistance from local populations. Local herders, both poor and wealthy alike, rejected the communes and local party use of coercion and force. Even those that joined simply refused to work for the commune. Many killed off their stock rather join. Between 1929-1932 between 6 and 7 million head of livestock were either slaughtered or died due to neglect. Some simply fled.

Thousands of beasts were driven off into China as people emigrated to escape the commandeering of their property ... The emigrations were massive. ... it is know that in one month in 1933 over 2,000 households returned to the Khovdo district alone and another 195 to the Altai district. (Bawden 1968: 312)

Eventually armed uprisings broke out leading to an effective civil war. In 1932 the Comintern and the Communist Party of the USSR repealed the orders of collectivization arguing that 'hastily formed collectives should be disbanded with private property reallocated'. In order to put down

the armed uprising the Soviet and Mongol armies were sent to bring local areas back under state party control.

Between the 1930s and the late 1950s few cooperatives evolved. Those that did consisted of mostly poor or middle wealth herders. Richer herd-owners were often rejected from cooperatives anyway.

“One example of the way things worked is furnished by the story of a friend of mine. His family had been prosperous enough to hire herdsmen, and so had held back from joining the local cooperative. As the cooperatives prospered, poor people to joining them rather than work for a private employer. Crippled by lack of labor, the family asked to join the cooperative, but was turned away because ‘you would bring us too many livestock, but not enough working hands, of which we are short’.” (Cited in Bawden 1968: 123)

Consequently, most wealthy households continued herding independently, at times working with clients or non-cooperative poor households. The state however, monopolized the purchase of livestock products. This became concretized during WWII when the state worked furiously to provide livestock and livestock products for Russian troops on the western and eastern fronts.

By the mid-1950s, the party was once again determined to collectivize the rural pastoral economy albeit via a different pathway than before (Bawden 1968). By 1955 the party had issued a new five year plan which included collectivization. Much of the plan aimed to encourage wealthy households to join through incentives that would, over time, eventually compel them to do so. The state gradually increased taxes on private livestock holdings and also purchased products at a premium from collectives rather from herders. Collectives also provide a number of benefits exclusive to independent herders such as haymaking, transport, and veterinary services. Moreover, as poor households increasingly joined collectives, the wealthy found it increasingly difficult to obtain labor. The process, however, was slow and these collectives or *negdel* did not appear over night taking over nearly a decade from 1955 until 1965. Moreover, different *soums* initiated the program in different years – so the *negdel* in one *soum* began in 1956 while a neighboring *soum* did not begin until 1957 or 1958. In *soums* where the *negdel* had monopoly control over services and purchasing rights, some wealthy herders left for other *soums*. By the early 1960s every *soum* had been collectivized and nearly all herders were effective employers of the *negdel*.

The *negdel* or collective is largely synonymous with the *soum* or county (Lattimore 1968). *Soums* carried out civil functions such as taxation, legal procedures, education and medical services. *Negdel* oversight was in theory limited to production and economic activity. In practice the *soum* and *negdel* administrative framework were highly integrated, some officials even serving positions in both (Humphrey 1978). For example, members of the *negdel* committee

often also served on the soum councils, and all of course were party members. In some cases the chairman of the negdel was also president of the soum. Negdels were divided into *brigad*, *xeseg*, and *suur*.<sup>93</sup> Brigad are largely synonymous with the term bag or district. Brigad operated as productive units, which in the case of Uguumur, were tasked with herding particular species of livestock. Uguumur herders, for example, tended mostly sheep. Auxiliary brigad would be formed during the year for seasonal tasks such as sheep-shearing or non-herding work such transport. The *xeseg* or section consisted of a collection of *suur* and were typically united by a common task such as herding breeding ewes or lambs. *Suur*, the smallest unit beside the household, consisted of one to several households and in some case in the Khangai regions of the country more than ten (Rosenberg 1981). Suur operated as individual cooperative units sharing labor and united in specific tasks much like the *xot ail*. Each level of production came under the oversight and direction of a leader or *darga*. Darga were responsible for ensuring that households and suur fulfilled the plan. These leaders were appointed as well as in some cases elected by their respective groups.

Moreover, brigades and negdels were territorial administrative units with central settlements (Humphrey 1978). In the negdel center one found administrative buildings, general store and shops, medical center with doctors, schools and kindergarten, boarding house, accounting office, milk factories or mills, transport garage, trade center for livestock and livestock product procurement, veterinarians office, machine repair shops, cultural center with a dance hall, cinema, and library, and even hairdressers and public baths. Brigade centers consisted of administrative buildings, medical staff including a *baga emch* or little doctor and midwife, political education ger with library, movies, and radio, ger schools, veterinarians, and brigade accountants, financial officers, and animal technicians.

Most negdel employees knew each other and many, particularly within xeseg and suur were related. A number of researchers found that kin dynamics were important to understanding the day to day cooperation of the negdel (Delaplace 2002; Rosenberg 1981; Humphrey 1979; Bawden 1968). In many cases the suur and xeseg hierarchy supported the position of older men such as in Uguumur. In other cases, though, leadership positions were a means to temper pre-socialist inequalities. Whether this operated only at the level of rhetoric is not well understood.

Herders were quite literally official employees of the negdel (Rosenberg 1981). According to the 'labor day system', herders earned wages based on a per day basis depending on

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<sup>93</sup> *Brigad* means brigade, *xeseg* means section, and *suur* literally refers to the campsite or 'where one sits'. Those that occupied a campsite were referred to as a *suur*. In Uguumur this was often only one or two households. In the *khangai* and other areas this could be several households.

the type of work. They worked as permanent members of *suur*, *xeseg*, and brigades and could only volunteer for a change in work assignment. Otherwise they were tied to these production groups. As employees of the *negdel* individual herders were tasked with fulfilling specific goals set by the *negdel* and brigade administrations; although particularly ‘driven’ herders could volunteer to do additional work. Decision-making rested primarily with brigade administrators and leaders. Daily decisions such as pasture selection were made by herdsmen themselves; but large-scale decisions such as migrations and the timing and organization of seasonal labor tasks were made by others or at least in consultation with the brigad. Many of the decisions were made at *xeseg* and brigade meetings where herders and leaders would discuss pasture allocation, cooperation, exchange of livestock, and timing of moves like *otor*. Non-fulfillment of the plan was meant with punishment and harsh criticism at brigade meetings. Over-filling one’s plan meant a series of possible material and non-material rewards. One way in which the *negdels* sought to improve production was through ‘socialist competition’ or ‘socialist emulation’ where *suur*, *xeseg*, brigade, and even *negdel* would compete against each other in contests for highest live-weight of stock, most liters of milk, and most tonnage of wool or horse hair. Success would be met with various medals, certificates, and monetary bonuses. I discuss this system in detail below.

By the 1980s it was clear that the labor day system of socialist remuneration was not increasing production in the livestock sector (Goldstein and Beall 1994). Consequently, in 1987 the central government introduced the *geree* or contract herding system. Herders were still *negdel* employees but on a contractual basis. As I discuss below they continued to earn a base salary in addition to various bonus payments. This system was found to be unproductive and, consequently, in 1989 they introduced the *turees* or lease-herding contract. Here herders, in effect, became independent contractors. They signed contracts with the *negdel* to herd a specific number of animals and breed a specific number of newborns. Although they paid a leasing fee, they were also given exorbitant bonuses, exceeding the ‘perceived’ value of the labor being provided.

By 1991, only two years later, the collective period had ended. In the process of privatization, collective herders were given an opportunity to continue the collective system as companies or to fully privatized livestock and become independent herders. In Uguumur, herders choose the latter. In the follow sections I describe how this path has wrought changes in inter and intra-household labor organization in Uguumur focusing on cooperation and various configurations of non-cooperative, even contractual, employment.

## Contemporary Labor Exchange Practices in Uguumur

### Introduction

Herders in contemporary Uguumur attempt to solve the labor problem by acquiring needed labor in a variety of ways. These methods generally can be categorized according to whether labor was acquired through cooperative principles of labor exchange where equality is presumed or through exclusively dyadic, non-cooperative labor exchange relations. This division is to some degree misleading as inequality is pervasive in both and strategic exploitation is thus a frequent feature of these relationships. Cooperation, some argue, is often marked by the reciprocal ‘giving’ of labor where there is an assumption of a future ‘return’ overlain by an ethic of social egalitarianism. Non-cooperative labor exchange is often presented as being neither reciprocal nor is labor provision considered to be ‘gift-like’. But this, again, is largely a partial portrait as non-cooperative labor exchange simply operates on a different moral plane and I would argue that even employee-employer relations are part and parcel to evocations of moral and ethical principles. These two descriptive categories, cooperative and non-cooperative labor exchange, therefore represent extremes in a spectrum of possible forms of inter-household labor organization with pure contracts at one end and pure altruistic cooperation at the other. In both circumstances, interaction is engaged in various moral currencies; yet, the obligations, debts, and duties that make up these moral spectra are qualitatively different.

Moreover, in either case, actual exchange takes place in a material world where environmental conditions, political and economic exigencies, and social interaction enable and constrain various kinds of engagement. In the same vein, individual actors each develop and pursue their own conditioned strategies within this world.

But representations of labor exchange are important. Do portrayals of labor exchange as cooperative versus non-cooperative concretize and essentialize what in practice is much more fluid? For example, how do I categorize father-son and patron-client relationships when they both exhibit elements of what one might call cooperation but exist in a clear context of deep inequality? The distinction I have chosen to make here between cooperation and non-cooperation is not meant to represent some reified ethic distinction but rather reflects the moral and material actualities in which I conducted my research.

### Cooperative Labor Exchange

In the literature on contemporary herding in rural Mongolia, researchers have created a portrait of rural cooperation founded on the organizing form of the *xot ail*, a grouping of 2 or more households, typically a stem family, which cooperates throughout the year, even combining herds (Bold 1997; Bruun 2006; Synkiewicz 1982). In Uguumur, full-time ‘cooperation’ between

independent households as *xot ail* is quite rare. Rather, cooperating households typically occupy proximate campsites as *saaxalt ail* or across wider expanses as a collective *buleg*. In these relationships, cooperation, although full-time, is task specific. Whether as full-time *xot ail*, neighboring *saaxalt ail*, or even collective *buleg*, extra-household cooperation almost always occurs with kin rather than non-kin. Among households sampled, 73 per cent cooperate on some labor task with kin. Cooperative labor relationships are, therefore, embedded to a great extent in kin ideologies and dynamics. Consequently, as kin ideologies differentially distribute power with the kin group, kin-based cooperation is not always equal or voluntary as is the case with cooperation between elder males and their younger kin. However, these relationships are not universally viewed in such terms. Interestingly, those in less powerful positions are more adamant about stressing the cooperative ‘*xamtraad*’ (together) nature of such relationship as opposed to their elders who in contrast stress the inherent inequality. This divergence is rooted in the strategic nature of kin interaction. Below I discuss contemporary kinship practices and ideologies in Uguumur and case studies of cooperation.

#### *Kinship*<sup>94</sup>

Customary Mongolian kinship ideologies are based on principles of patrilineal descent. These ideologies are symbolized in bodily discourses of ‘sinew, bones, and brains’ (Vreeland 1957). As Sneath and Humphey argue, “discourses of patrilineality tend to be dominant in Inner Asia in contexts of identity, ethnicity, ritual, and life-cycle events such as birth, marriage, and death” (27). Moreover, as I observed during fieldwork, such discourses are manifest in a range of practices including order of eating, the spatial configuration of the ger, and ritual. In such kin modalities, elder men of ‘higher’ (*deer*) generations are hierarchically imbued with positions of authority and power above those of ‘lower’ (*door*) generations. Senior males are, like patrilineal ancestors or *deedees* (from on high), *xundelen* or respected. These elders are considered ‘experienced’ (*turshlagatai*), skilled (*aviastai*), and ‘knowledgeable’ (*erdemtei*), traits that are deeply respected because they reflect not only material power in the present but also a deep connection to the past and control over the spiritual landscape and forces of nature which surrounds them. The extent to which such vertical hierarchies pervade kin-based social interaction and serve as organizing principles in daily life is to some degree limited. Nevertheless, they carry strong ideological weight when deployed in socially and culturally salient ways.

Mongolians use a range of terms to refer to kin-like relations. *Turul sadan* literally refers to consanguine relations and refers to those of a minimal lineage, usually of three generations. *Xamaatan*, in contrast, refers to all ‘related’ peoples including affines and even fictive kin like

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<sup>94</sup> See Park (2003) and Synkewicz (1982) for other studies of Mongol kinship.

adopted children and close friends. Yet, in day to day interactions, the organizing modes of Mongolian kin life, such as *xamaatan*, are rooted in the principle of *ax-duu* or elder brother (senior)-younger brother (junior) relations. Such kin terms embed ‘kinship’, as a ‘state of being related’, in particular ‘modes’ of interaction marked by sets of obligations, rights, and duties. Although more flexible and therefore malleable, as Sneath (1999) points out, it also roots ‘kin’ in a primarily vertical, interactive hierarchy divisible by age and gender.

### ***Ax Duu***

The principle of *ax-duu*, as Sneath (1999) has argued, has supplanted to a degree Mongolian traditional kin organization and terminology. Although traditional kin terms display Omaha type lineal lexicons,<sup>95</sup> in many cases herders in Uguumur never used this terminology and generally, outside of a few important non-lineal terms such as *xurgen* (son-in-law) or *ber* (daughter-in-law)<sup>96</sup>, referred to non-lineal ‘*xamaatan*’ (kin) in terms of their relative position within the *ax-duu* framework as either *ax* or *duu*. This verticality is manifest in social interaction. Seniors are referred to with the respective ‘*ta*’ (formal you) while youth are referred to as ‘*chi*’ (informal you). Even a year difference in age requires the elder to be referred to as ‘*ta*’ and the younger as ‘*chi*’, except in cases of extreme familiarity such as between husband and wife or in arguments where all sides use the less respectful ‘*chi*’.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, juniors must *avgaalax* or avoid using the name of their elders and simply refer to them as ‘*ax aa*’ (my elder brother) or ‘*egch ee*’ (my elder sister) or with names *jaja* or *nana*.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, patrilineality encodes these *ax-duu* social roles with traits attributed to ‘ideal’ father-son (or lineal) relations where juniors display subordination, obeisance, deference, and respect and, in turn, seniors provide protection, security, and wise council. For example, as I heard many times, juniors must ‘*ugend orox*’ or do as their elders say by literally ‘entering their word’. Juniors who do not are said to *buruu umuurex* (behave wrongly) or *mayagtai baix* (to have an attitude). Much in the way Donham (1990)

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<sup>95</sup> The Omaha naming system is typically associated with patrilineal clan societies where gender and generational distinctions are made for each side of the family. In Mongolian terms, this is true beyond the nuclear family which has its own terminology.

<sup>96</sup> Although people often use the words for brother-in-law or *xurgen* or sisten-in-law or *ber*, I only found that older generations still use the terms like *nagats* or *avga* to describe maternal and paternal relations, respectively.

<sup>97</sup> This is much stronger than the formal and informal you distinction in Latin languages such as French and Spanish. The use of ‘*chi*’ to refer to an elder in Mongolia is very disrespectful. People of standing however are referred to using the ‘*ta*’ generally, such as a governor or foreign experts.

<sup>98</sup> *Egch*, meaning ‘older sister’ or ‘senior woman’, refers to an older female sibling or a general salutary term for older women.



discusses Maale kin interaction, the inherent inequality of patrilineal hierarchy is ideologically expressed in *ax-duu* concepts.

This portrayal of *ax-duu* relations, of course, represents an ideal, but it is the major idiom through which Mongolians understandings of kin and even broader social interaction are expressed. In practice, *ax duu*, obviously, is significantly more complex and mutable. Although the terms of address remain, *ax-duu* roles must be negotiated in practice and depend to a great extent on the political and material weight principle actors are capable of deploying. Fathers or uncles who control inheritance and gifts of livestock, utilize such material inequalities to reinforce their position as *ax*. In fact even younger men can take on the role of ‘*ax*’ to a degree, minus the term of address, by increasing herds and building up his status as a patron. Such ‘movements’ are limited by the lack of age and are to a great degree muted. Regardless, an *ax* must retain respect by presenting himself as worthy of respect. This can be accomplished in less materially direct ways. For example, older herders who are wealthy in stock, have gained titles, and have won awards will foster greater power over their younger counterparts than one who has not by their appearance of having *chadal* or ‘force’. This condition is an inner-force that exudes inherent power. Such individuals can retain strong positions as *ax* without having an immediate material hold over their juniors.

Yet, even in the absence of immediate material or political weight, senior men are advantageously positioned to use such ideological framings to their own strategic ends more readily than juniors. In contrast, juniors must find ways to work inside this discourse in order to more beneficially position themselves. Other salient cultural modalities are limited in their effectiveness. Although claims of lateral relatedness and friendship do mobilize actors into legitimate and appropriate frameworks in the broadest recognized sense, such claims, in the present post-socialist context, do not have the moral or material backing like inherently unequal frameworks such as *ax-duu* and historically, as I have shown, have little to draw on in their support.

The principles of *ax-duu* when overlaying organizational modalities such as *xamaatan* can constitute, in themselves, concrete social forms. In Uguumur, *ax-duu* networks extend out into conglomerations of kin referred to as *uls* (nation) or *buleg* (group or gang). Although not a distinct descriptive term (or proper noun) as some researchers have discussed, these collectivities often to refer themselves or refer to other such groups as *neg nutgiinxan* or people of one *nutag* or territory in Uguumur. As chapters 5 and 6 argues, territory in Uguumur is associated largely with kin and, at particular level of interaction, *buleg* or *uls* can be referred to as *neg nutgiinxan*. Yet,

because *nutag* operates at so many scales, *neg nutgiinxan* can refer to many different kinds of groupings.

Yet, I do not intend to suggest that there are not other kinds of interactive principles at work in rural social life, nor is the modality of *ax-duu* the only pathway for kin interaction. For example, a junior who is significantly wealthier than his senior, a rare case, may in fact take on the social role of *ax* without the form of address, as I have stated above. Moreover, as Sneath (1999) argues, bilateral and fictive relations may in fact prove more important in daily relations. In Uguumur, although full-time labor cooperation based on non-kin interaction was extremely rare this does not mean that herders and herding households do not interact with non-kin in cooperative ways.

### ***Beyond ax-duu***

Moreover, even in kin groups where *ax-duu* principles are deployed, there are other ethical discourses and moral economies through which individuals organize interhousehold cooperation. Amongst laterally related actors such as cousins of similar ages, ethics of egalitarianism and cooperation coordinate interaction. Moral economies of equitable food sharing and aid during times of distress are strongly held kin-based moralities that operate both inside and outside the parameters of *ax-duu*.<sup>99</sup> With siblings there is an inherent tension between lateral frameworks of cooperation and egalitarianism and the hierarchical and unequal principles underlying *ax-duu*. Consequently, siblings often invoke various moral codes when disputes arise such as when my host family's younger sibling continually shirked his duties in assisting his mother and brothers with the herds. As his other siblings could not, they would call on the eldest brother to bring him into line.

I found some of the most evidently equitable cooperative relations between sets of close-aged brothers who have few to no other kin in the pastoral economy, brothers-in-law, and in particular brothers-in-law united by sister-‘exchange’. These kinds of relationships are almost exclusively found amongst younger households who are less invested in *ax-duu* principles because they receive fewer benefits than elders. These relationships work in an equitable sense with egalitarian distribution of decision-making and task allocation largely because they are not beholden to *ax-duu* modalities and socio-economic inequality is largely muted.

At times, however, *ax* can use this alternative moral economy to support inequality; for example, by ‘giving’ in ‘altruistic’ ways such as by giving a ride into town, they are not just being good Samaritans even though that is how they might wish to appear. The situation not only

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<sup>99</sup> Even though they may operate within such relations.

highlights the material inequalities between them and their juniors, but also can work as a kind of debt – one in which a junior will be more compelled to repay than if the recipient had been in fact an ‘ax’. In such contexts, these ‘other’ moral economies are becoming strategically infused into more dominant frames.

Yet, at the same time they can be used as a pathway for resistance or to ‘take advantage’. In interviews, participants would often complain about kin and as I discuss below many are reluctant to employ kin. They argue that kin often take advantage of obligations such as food provision. These sentiments also can provide a secure pathway for resisting domination as well. For instance, sons and other kin juniors can push boundaries in ways that non-kin such as hired herders cannot. Hired herders risk losing secure employment. Kin however will not lose the reciprocal moral obligations inherent in kin relationships if they resist their father or senior’s attempts at domination.

### ***Social Change and Kinship***

Yet, kin interaction is at times very mutable while in other contexts it is not. Moreover, as there are a number of forces strengthening unequal ax-duu relations in some locales and among some groups of actors, in other locales or amongst other groups of actors there are forces actively weakening such groupings and supporting other more laterally egalitarian and cooperative interactions. In some cases, the same force may operate in ways to produce divergent outcomes. For some individuals, the lack of older kin has encouraged them to develop lateral relations with friends, siblings, cousins, or non-kin. For individuals from kin groups with fewer lateral relations but greater generational diversity, ax-duu principles dominate. The pressures exerted on both groups extends from a process of out-migration related several to factors such as the collapse of the rural administrations and social service provision following post-socialist reforms, widespread disaster such as zud, and the increasing importance of the few urban centers in Mongolia, particularly Ulaanbaatar.

Bayankhutag *soum* center was once a vibrant village with shops, a cultural center, hospital, small craft factories, animal product processing plants, and a felt factory. Although some of these are still operating, like the small ten room hospital and two stores, very few herders from the 3<sup>rd</sup> bag actually visit the *soum* center more than just a few times a year. The former bag centers, small villages themselves, are now non-existent with buildings lying in ruin. There are few employment opportunities in the *soum* center, the schools are considered poor and have been rated the worst schools in the province, there are only two small shops, the bag governors, veterinarians and other administrative workers live in the provincial capital reinforcing the demise of the *soum* center. The only operating facility in the *soum* center for most of the year is

the soum administration building. The geographic focus of social relations is now the *aimag* center where 52% of herders have a secondary house and yard. Their children often attend school there as well. With increased mobility due to cars and the legal freedom of movement herders feel the access to better health care, better shops, stores, post-office, banks, internet cafes, movie theaters, museums, restaurants, bars, pool halls, and a range of investment possibilities make life in the provincial center not just more appealing but more feasible.

This shift has impacted kin groupings and kin interaction in two primary ways. First of all, native herding families simply cannot keep their children in the herding economy as the educational and employment opportunities elsewhere prove too much of a draw. Most families in fact would prefer not to keep their children in herding and actively seek to find the best education possible, even though education in contemporary Mongolia is by no means an assurance for success. Even during the socialist period, children from herding families by and large entered non-herding employment, removing the foundation of kin-based labor economies. This has in effect weakened many households who have small kin groups to begin with. As the number of herding kin diminishes their ability to access critical resource such as labor and much needed assistance in the context of disaster and other such problems, these kin groups find themselves increasingly atomized and to an extent alienated. Secondly, non-kin herders now interact with each other less. With households maintaining secondary homes in Undurxaan their relations are increasingly limited to kin and their dependence on neighboring households in the countryside has lessened. This has a strengthening effect on kin groups that still retain a large number of kin in countryside herding.

Clearly, a number of forces are at work in Uguumur. The increased market integration of the rural economy, socio-economic differentiation, and shifts in rural governance and administrative policy variously pressure the contextual salience of certain forms of kin interaction and kin-based social organization. Nevertheless, it is clear that in Uguumur, under certain conditions, kinship and cooperation remain viable pathways for labor exchange.

### **‘Uniting the Hands’: Dynamics of Cooperation**

As mentioned previously, cooperative households camping on a single campsite (commonly referred to in the literature as *khot ail*), even amongst kin, in Uguumur are exceedingly rare. When two or more *gers* are settled on a single *nutag* (campsite) one of the households is, almost invariably, either a hired herder or a son. Yet, kin-related households do cooperate on specific tasks outside of *khot ail* arrangements. Between *xamaatan* exists an economy of favors, sharing, and gifting. Kin related households share materials and other things important to animal husbandry. At times households also cooperate in well building and

operation, horse-training, transport for people, livestock, and other resources like hay, monitoring herds, and tasks such as searching for lost animals, scouting pastures, gathering information, and making pasture-use decisions. A few kin-related households also work in *saaxalt* relationships, although most households practicing *saaxlax* utilize hired herder or client households. While on collective otor (described in chapter 7), limits to cooperation relax and households also tend to each others' herds during the herd-owners absence and may collaborate on important productive tasks such as cashmere combing and wool shearing. Outside of otor, cooperation on these tasks is nearly non-existent. Yet, these kinds of relations are more dominant among the Durvud and Uriankhai ethnic groups rather than among the Khalkha, although this too is changing as I will describe below.

Whether or not households cooperate with kin is dependent on several factors, the most important of which being whether or not other kin are present. Many of the poorest households come from either small kin groups or from kin groups with a small presence in the pastoral economy. A number of the poorest households who suffered most severely in the zud of 2007-08 had few to no kin present with which to cooperate. In chapter 9 I look at individual household migration histories during 2007-2008 and how the lack of cooperative kin households affected migration strategies.

Amongst households with kin present, the likelihood of cooperation is dependent on herd-size and the age and number of laboring children.

The numbers of families in an encampment is inversely proportional to the number of livestock per family. Wealthy families usually remain on their own or in small numbers, therefore they tend to lack working hands, while many families with a small number of livestock stay together in a neighborhood and have a labor force which is superfluous to their needs. (Shombodon 1999: 217)

I found this to be largely the case. The discrepancy in labor-livestock ratios between households of varying livestock wealth, as a number of scholars of pastoralism have long argued, serve as a basis for 'cooperation' between households. Wealthy households are largely prevented from cooperating with each other in any serious, long-term way because of the massive herd sizes that would quickly decimate surrounding pasturage. More importantly, though, cooperating with households having fewer stock is socially easier and, because of unequal power dynamics, pose less potential for serious disagreements. And when cooperation requires combining herds, unequal relationships cause fewer overgrazing problems. Labor-livestock ratios and carrying capacity issues affect non-cooperative relationships as well.

Moreover, households must be able to reap benefits from additional labor. For instance, if two households have surplus labor and equally small herds, they may not immediately see returns from cooperation as they have little altered the primary problem of small herds and increased

consumption. If they both have large herds and labor deficiencies, cooperation would be beneficial as long as cooperation is the least expensive form of labor acquisition. In Uguumur, this is not the case. Hired herding is significantly cheaper, although it may pose other risks and different kinds of costs as I will explain in detail below. If two households have labor deficits and middle size herds, cooperation may be important as these households cannot afford hired labor. Yet, they must find ways to keep the costs of cooperation low.

Either way cooperation can be expensive, especially for those of different wealth categories. The obligations and expectations that surround kin relationships can present a serious number of costs and can prevent certain kinds of disciplinary actions. It is often assumed in the literature that hiring or cooperating amongst kin profits from social capital and built-in levels of trust. I found that for the most part in Uguumur, herd-owners expressed a reluctance to do so because kin are also costly. A number of herd-owners complained that kin eat too much, sleep too much, are lazy, and expect gifts of livestock and no reductions in payment for poor work. Moreover, kin are reluctant to discipline their relatives in the same way they would hired herders and their relatives are more likely to take advantage of kin ideologies by being less attentive of the livestock.

Clearly, cooperation is also dependent on the respective levels of trust between households. Herders stated that their ability to cooperate with another household was based on whether or not they understood their *zan setgel* (character), *setgel sanaa* (psychology), or *zan aash* (demeanor). Each of these terms equates to ‘essential nature’ or one’s core ‘being’. People who were honest, hard-working, and diligent could be trusted. People who were lazy, annoying, or simply angry were *aash muutai* (bad temper) or *zan muutai* (bad character or bad demeanor). These traits are considered the essential, unchanging core of their being. Yet, a person who was hard-working but also ill-tempered, for instance, could also be included in cooperative dynamics. The key is whether or not there is *oilgomj* (understanding) or *undes* (foundation). When there is understanding another person’s behavior is predictable and expected. If it is expected that a cousin is always late, but also works hard, then this is understood and accepted and therefore can serve as a foundation for cooperation. The problem is when one does not know and cannot predict another’s actions. In this instance there is no *oilgomj* and therefore no *undes*. For instance, most people view ‘outside’ groups (even other local kin groups) or people (such as those from other soums) with suspicion because there is no *oilgomj* or *undes*. The lack of understanding of another group’s *zan setgel* is often cited as the cause of disputes and arguments.

However, trust even amongst kin always confronts power. Finding labor either way requires a calculation of cost-benefit in various social, political, and economic currencies.

Frameworks such as *ax-duu* and lateral moral economies found between siblings and friends serve as the ‘grooved channels’ (Geertz 1963) of social life making actions more predictable and in turn providing a measure of trust between herders of various positions and social status. Critical to cooperation is the ability to *gar niilex* or ‘unite the hands’. Other terms also apply here like *setgel niilex* (unite the minds) or *sanaa niilex* (unite the thoughts or ideas). In interviews and in observation, participants stated that what is important in cooperation is to have someone who can *gar niilgex* or ‘make the hands unite’. This infix *-lg-* is causative in the sense that one ‘makes’ something happen; in this instance, cooperation. In most cases, it is *ax* who *gar niilgex*. Yet, these very ‘grooved channels’, such as *ax-duu* principles, may in fact diminish trust in some cases, as actors may resist these ‘channels’ (rather than labor exchange per se), which mystify and hide exploitation and inequality in ‘tradition’ and ‘custom’.

Because most cooperative relationships are overlaid with the politics of *ax-duu* relations, some households, whether poor or wealthy, are net recipients of labor and immediate material benefits, while others may obtain less materially obvious benefits such as security, information, or even status and prestige for the wealthy. Although there is also little accounting of labor debts, individuals are able to sense the balance of exchange in cooperation relative to their sense of status and social position. Households of high social standing who are too frequently being called upon for help, may simply refrain from doing so if there is little benefit to them either in the short or long term. Households of low standing such as juniors are more willing to accommodate the unequal labor flows in cooperation, but will at times resist such measures as we will see below. The provision of labor to a more senior household signifies dependency and households that are not willing to appear so or become beholden to such dynamics, will resist. Freely co-opting another’s labor, particularly household reproductive labor, without compensation is a pre-eminent sign of poverty and humiliation as the individual loses their status as an *ezen* or master of their own household’s labor and resources.

Moreover, in most contexts, I found that wealthy households will rarely refer to these relationships as cooperative work (*xamtraad ajillax*) while junior or low-standing households attempt to position such relationships as cooperation. In both cases, these representations are ways of conserving social standing. Interestingly, in non-cooperative relationships the discursive dynamic is just the opposite. Employers attempt to posit hired herding as ‘benevolent charity’ while the poor or low-standing households criticize their poor treatment.

Because of these dynamics labor cooperation is becoming more uncommon in Uguumur and limited largely to disparate tasks such as migration or sheep shearing which take place intermittently throughout the year. Full-time cooperation on a single campsite is severely limited.

In the few case I have found this, households were often very poor. But where cooperation takes place it is important, particularly in regards to migration. The households I discuss below cooperate in these sorts of tasks. Part of what enables them to do so, however, is the simultaneous interaction and investment in forms of hierarchy and inequality.

In the discussion below I look at examples of kin-based cooperation amongst households in 3 different kin groups.<sup>100</sup> Additionally, I look at dyadic cooperation amongst brothers, brothers-in-law, and friends. Although fathers and senior patrons play important roles here, for example by encouraging cooperation (*gar niilgex*) amongst sons and sons-in-law, I leave discussion of the specific dynamics in father and son dyads out of this discussion because in no sense would a son or father ever claim their relationship was a cooperative one. Fathers have significant power over their sons even married ones. Fathers and sons both recognized that sons held limited decision-making power even over their own herds, except for internal household issues like sales. However, fathers play important positions in encouraging lateral cooperation amongst siblings and other generational equivalents because they have the power to *gar niilgex*.

#### ***Kin Group Profile 1: Xuviin Am***

This kin group consists largely of one extended family whose customary nutag is centered around a region in southeastern Uguumur on the border with Galshar soum and the 2<sup>nd</sup> bag called Xuviin Am or ‘Mouth of the Valley’. Although this family has married into other groups and is connected to other kin groups matrilineally, this group, on major labor tasks, cooperates only amongst each other. This group like group 3 described below, and to whom they are related, are of the Durvud ethnic group which is closely allied with ethnic Uriankhai households. The head of this family, Chuluun, and other Durvud and Uriankhai came to Uguumur in 1975 as herders for the negdel. Since that time, these ‘seed’ families have intermarried and cooperated in various ways. At the time of fieldwork, however, labor cooperation has atomized for the most part in each extended family. Labor connections between Chuluun’s family and others have largely been through outright labor exchanges such as through hired herding and contract herding. Nevertheless, almost all Durvud and Uriankhai settle in this region and consequently, coordinate their actions regarding settlement patterns in the customary region.

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<sup>100</sup> The data discussed in this was gathered primarily through genealogical diagramming amongst sampled households. In the interviews, I coded each kin group member signifying whether they cooperate and on what specific tasks. I also coded gifts, inheritance, and other data not discussed here. This data was supplemented by migration histories interviews that asked sampled households with whom did they cooperate or work with at each settled campsite. Lastly, this data was complemented by observation and informal conversation. All of my host households are in Group 2, the largest single kin group in the bag.



Chuluun's family comes closer than any other grouping in Uguumur to 'traditional' imaginings of the Mongolian herding family and ideas about *khot ail*. Chuluun and his wife organize a vast array of labor activities with their 13 children, most of whom have 'tusdaa garsan' or separated from their father. Nevertheless, Chuluun maintains a significant amount of authority over his children. His eldest daughter has two children and has separated from her husband. After living for a time in Undruxaan she now lives full-time with her parents in the countryside in her own *ger*. She organizes most of the milking activity at her parents' campsite. The eldest brother Naidankhuu has recently taken up herding as he and his wife have been unable to find work in the *soum* and *aiamg* centers. Because he took up herding so late and after his younger brothers, his *xuvi* was significantly small, only 70 animals, and still has only about 80 or so. Narantsetseg, the second eldest daughter, lives in Undurxaan but her two older children, 22 and 18, live permanently with Chuluun in the countryside helping in the work of herding. Naranbaatar lives in Ulaanbaatar with the youngest brother Nasankhuu who is a student at university, although both of their animals are still in Uguumur herded by their siblings. Bilgee, himself a *myangat*, has a family and lives with his sister Ganbileg, who has 3 children but never married. Although he accedes to his father's authority in some areas of social and economic activity, he represents a kind of second node of cooperation and is for the most independent of his parents. Bolor-Erdene, the fourth daughter, is married to Erdene a poor herder from Ulaanbaatar. They live and herd in Uguumur, working side by side with Chuluun for most of the year. Chuluun's son Munkhsaikhan is mentally challenged and lives with his parents full-time. Four of the youngest sons, Otgonjargal, Munkh-khishig, Bayraa, and Munkhbileg are independent herders. All four have reasonable size herds of 300 or more.

Within his 'buleg', Chuluun coordinates a range of activities including: for example, in the late summer they cut hay as a group, conduct *otor* in Tsaidam in the fall, cooperate with each other through *saaxlax* in the spring, comb goats and shear sheep, and train horses amongst each other with their father leading the way. They also collectively migrated north to Murun and Kherlen *soums* during the difficult winter. The family is so close knit, despite occupying separate campsites, that when I interviewed several of the households they continually gave stock numbers for the whole group (*dundiin mal* or 'common livestock') rather than their own personal stock (*xuviin mal* or 'private livestock'). Although this was a problem I encountered with households that occupied the same campsite year round like many fathers and sons, I only encountered this with independent households in this case. After explaining the meaning of my question, these households understood what I meant and the data was collected. Referring to herds as *dundiin*

*mal* is both a pre-socialist practice when herds were associated with the eldest male in a kin group and became a socialist practice associated with the *negdel* when herds were collectivized.<sup>101</sup>

Chuluun's children do not only work with him, but also with each other, independent of their father's oversight. When the households go on *otor* or leave their traditional home *nutag*, they often cooperate amongst each other, even in the absence of their father. Moreover, they cooperate so frequently outside their father's purview that they have to a degree formed their own section or *xeseg* within their father's informal *buleg*. In fact in 2007 two of them refused to obey their father and comb goats collectively and they all did not '*ugend orox*' or 'enter their father's words' when he organized an *otor* to move to Tsaidam by the salt lake, the old *otor* pastures during socialism. They even organized their own cashmere combing outside of their father and elder siblings. This refusal was a serious contradiction of their father's authority. One of their older brothers expressed a sense of outrage at this insolence, particularly concerning the combing because the activity requires so much labor. There are a number of reasons why these younger sons refuse at times to '*ugend orox*'. Primary among them is that their father has already dispensed to each of them their *xuvi* and so since their father no longer controls livestock he has a lessened capacity to control their labor. Secondly, their mutual cooperation enables them to do so collectively, a better position than striking out alone. A third reason is that they have all worked for other *myangat* in the past.

Two of them have worked in the past as a hired herder and contract-herder for other households. Bayraa helped his former employer, Ochirbat, this past year by herding full-time when he and his son were in a car accident in Undurxaan. Ochirbat suffered few minor injuries but his son is still in a hospital in Ulaanbaatar recovering from life-threatening injuries. Bayraa helped him by overseeing his core herd during the winter and spring. Since then Ochirbat has found hired herders to take Bayraa's place. Otgonjargal has been herding the local coal mine's livestock for several years as his father had done before him. The relatively small open-pit mine is located down the valley on the border with Galshar soum. Others have worked at times, informally, in the coal mine as secondary income sources.

Additionally, the younger brothers have initiated with their older brothers a cooperative group via IFAD's herder cooperative project. In contrast, their father has resisted such developments and refuses to join the group; although, they list him as a member. Moreover, the

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<sup>101</sup> For example, in an interview concerning the pre-socialist history of Uguumur an elder talked about a herder named Samdanpuntsag with 10,000 animals. Surprised at such large herds, I asked how this was possible for one man to own so many animals. The elder explained that these were all the animals owned by his kin, but since he was *xamgiin tom ax*, the 'biggest' senior, 'we say the animals are his'.

second oldest son who has accumulated a considerable herd is now the group's official *axlagch*. In our interview their father said that he does not approve of the project because work and well operation should be organized as a family not as a separate entity (ie NGO). I explore this conflict in chapter 6.

Interestingly, the emergence of this formal cooperation independent of the father is a result first of the father's authority in the first place, and, secondly and ironically, as an action against that very authority. As this kind of cooperation has strengthened it has weakened other kinds of cooperation based on the hierarchical dynamics of *ax-duu* within the family. This has a number of implications, not just for labor dynamics in Uguumur but also for territorial practices seen elsewhere in the bag as I describe in chapter 6. In short, because Chuluun limited his access to labor solely to that of his children and not hired herders or other clients, he has also limited his control over territory. In turn, his children have emerged to fill the vacuum left by his diminishing power but the extent that they can contest the territorial strategies of other households is yet to be seen.

#### ***Kin Group Profile 2: Xaya***

The second kin group consists of descendants of a herder named Sodnomdarjaa and their affinal kin. This kin group exhibits similarities to Chuluun's in that there is a central dominant senior male. However, this senior, Batdalai, does not coordinate cooperation amongst his kin via the authority of a father; rather, he occupies a position of eldest 'ax' within the kin group. This position, because it is relative to his *tursun duu nar* or younger siblings, typically would put him in a weaker position to accumulate significant levels of authority and power over his junior kin than a father. Yet, he has demonstrated his capacity for *chadal* to a greater extent than any herder in Uguumur or even the province for that matter. In 1991 he was awarded the title of Hero of Labor the most prestigious title a citizen of Mongolia can receive.

Yet, other than his son, Batdalai does not work with his juniors in any kind of permanent way, preferring hired herders and former hired herders as clients. Rather, over the course of the year he calls on his junior kin to assist him in various activities particularly for migration. When the group conducts a collective *otor* migration he assumes a lead role in coordinating the timing and location of the move. He has assumed this role through a variety of practices. First, like some of his younger siblings, he has taken on several of his siblings' sons as apprentices. For a period of a summer or two, his younger siblings would send their children to assist and learn from Batdalai. Additionally, he has overseen the distribution of his siblings' shares and he has continued to provide gifts especially for the weddings of his siblings and siblings' children. Because of his dominant position and his ability to produce consent (Burawoy 1979), it is difficult to call such a

relationship cooperative. The overwhelming sense of inequality and sense of duty that he manipulates complicates the degree to which these dynamics are cooperative.

Beyond Batdalai, other households within the kin group cooperate amongst each other. The second oldest male sibling, Sodnompil, occupies a kind of secondary nodal position within the kin network. Whereas, Batdalai maintains campsites in a different local from his kin, Sodnompil is the oldest kin within the group's traditional nutag. Consequently, he coordinates many of the activities that take place there, including most importantly the building and operation of a private well that he shares with his younger siblings Chinbaatar and Battsolmon. The well repairs and operation were, however, 'overseen' or 'supervised' by Sodnompil. Although they share the use of the well, Sodnompil largely dictates the timing of that use. Moreover, he often coordinates where they settled in their region in the far west along the river.

The two sisters amongst the siblings also cooperate with these other households. Yet, their two households cooperate mostly amongst each other rather than with their brother's household. Part of the reason for this is that when they married they moved out of their circle of lineal kin and seniority within that line. Their own husbands' independence of their wives' elders and subjection to their lineal seniors stood in contrast to that of their brothers. This created more social distance between them. Now, though, both of their husband's have passed on, leaving them largely dependent, again, to a lesser extent, on their brothers, and to a greater extent their sons.

For example, Tuya, although treated in some ways as the head of the household and occupying the day-to-day role as decision-maker in her family, is highly dependent on her sons to provide labor. Unlike other kin groups or large families, she and several of her sons collectively tend their animals in a combined herd. Customarily in Mongolia, the youngest son takes over as head when the father dies as long as their older brothers have all married. Ganzorig, her youngest son, is officially the head of household and provides the bulk of non-hired labor. Yet, Ganzorig only lives part-time in the countryside. His two older brothers, Saikhanbileg and Enkhsaikhan, also provide labor themselves and through their sons, as their animals are combined with Tuya and Ganzorig's. For example, Enkhsaikhan's children help drive stock in the various seasons, excluding winter. Amarkhuu, however, has separated (*tusdaa garax*) and started herding on his own. Each of these sons, besides Amarkhuu, has a large herd although they are listed officially as the animals of Ganzorig (as a means to avoid taxation). Her son-in-law, Enkhjargal, works for her as a hired herder although the relationship appears on the surface to operate largely in a cooperative way. During the winter he conducted most of the daily herding activities and took a lead role, along with Tuya, in decision-making. Because this group has a large pool of labor, albeit infrequent and at times not dependable, they cooperate relatively rarely in many tasks with

other households except for otor migration. Tuya's younger sister Punsalmaa is in a similar position. Her son Batzorig herds their livestock collectively. He cooperates at times with other households in the group particularly with Tuya and her sons who are all in similar social positions without fathers. He is considered more dependable than Tuya's sons because he is solely devoted to animal husbandry and limits the degree to which settled life distracts his pastoral activities.

Other dyadic cooperation is practiced amongst individual households in this group. Enkhbayar and Shinebayar, brothers whose father has passed, both frequently cooperate on tasks such as migration and sheep shearing. They also assist each other in transport and random tasks like driving to town for supplies. Yet, this cooperation is muted by the fact that they are both myangat and cannot devote significant time to cooperative affairs. Sons with fathers presently live under different circumstances. Batdalai and Sodnompil's sons, in contrast, cannot cooperate beyond their father's say-so. This is largely due to the fact that they are the only sons (older than 16, as in Sodnompil's case) and hence have over time received a greater degree of their fathers' time and energy and hence control. Although a great deal of cooperation exists between households within this group, the most important activity that they partake in cooperatively is through territorial practices and collective migration under the aegis of Batdalai. This cooperation involves little in the way of 'labor', narrowly conceived, and is better seen as a kind of political cooperation. I discuss this in detail in chapter 6.

### ***Kin Group Profile 3: Tarvagat and Arslan***

This third group is more typical of most large kin groups in Uguumur. Many of these groups are relatively 'dormant' in the degree that they cooperate for most of the year. During times of stress, however, these groups mobilize. Moreover, as with the groups above, whether such large groups cooperate broadly does not signify the intensity of cooperation or exchange between individual dyadic sets within each group. Much like the group above, this group has two nodal positions, that of Ochirbat and Bilgee. This group is made up of almost all sisters. Consequently, because of household configurations of authority and control, their husbands take more prominent roles in the public life of the group. However, these men have married into this group from much smaller kin groups and because they have no 'blood' or 'bone' connection they have fewer mutual obligations and feel less compelled to cooperate amongst each other. Therefore, the ability of older males in the group to utilize the ax-duu framework to their strategic ends is quite limited, although their connections to other groups and to their little brothers has allowed them to find other pathways.

The two eldest sisters and their husbands herd livestock in Tuv province to the west and do not form part of this very loose confederation. The third oldest sister and her husband live in

the 2<sup>nd</sup> bag but because of its proximity cooperate with Ochirbat. They also only live part time in the countryside and are considered ‘retired’. The fourth oldest sister and her husband live and herd in the eastern part of the soum and rarely cooperate with any other siblings. Amongst the rest of the siblings, networks of cooperation are focused on two points: Ochirbat and Bilgee.

### *Ochirbat in Tarvagat*

Compared to Bilgee, Ochirbat receives a broader range of support through cooperation. Yet, at the same time, Ochirbat straddles life between countryside and Undurxaan where he and his wife own and run a large store, bar, and previously, small hotel. Consequently, Ochirbat is to a larger extent dependent on additional labor. He acquires most of this labor from hired herders and contract herders, even as kin. Previously, two of his wife’s younger sisters’ husbands have worked for him in such a capacity. Lkhavgajav and Batbold previously worked for him as full-time contract herders. Yet, both of these households prematurely left these relationships to herd independently. Although they occasionally will assist Ochirbat in tasks such as hay cutting or otor, now they cooperate largely with each other, even settling on the same campsite during summer. They both have small herds and can accommodate their stock in this way. However, the rest of the year they split up and herd independently. They left these relationships because they felt that Ochirbat was overbearing and too demanding, treating them like his ‘sons’. Moreover, they felt that the exchange was largely not fair, benefitting Ochirbat to a greater than the terms they believed they had agreed on. Lastly, they felt that the work distracted them from tending to the welfare of their own herds.

Ochirbat is also connected to other wealthy herders through his sisters but these relationships are limited, as with most wealthy herders, to occupying and defending territories. Ochirbat expressed in interviews that he does not hire relatives according to a preference related to job performance. He said that this largely did not matter, but that, for him, helping family was important. Lkhavgajav still herds some of his birthing stock in spring as a lease herder, but they are compensated for this. They denied working in this capacity but Ochirbat allowed me to look at his account books and he had listed them as currently holding some of his ‘*taviul mal*’ with their signatures. This highlights the conflicting discourses concerning cooperation and labor.

Ochirbat has benefitted periodically from assistance provided by his previous hired herders. One of the younger sons in the first group discussed here worked for Ochirbat and after leaving the contract, settled independently. In the last year when Ochirbat was involved in car accident he helped Ochirbat by herding his core herd of breeding stock. He has occasionally also left stock with Chuluun and his children in lease herding arrangements. Other members of his group at times depend on his assistance, such as gifts, loans at the store, and during moves. The

interesting thing is that Ochirbat is not related to anyone in this group except through marriage. When I asked him how he attained herds originally he stated that he received animals during privatization. Although not a herder, he worked in the negdel as the *brigad* accountant and dealt mostly with the various contracts, leases, livestock census, and other financial matters. When he received his animals and a small *xuvi* he only herded for a short time before distributing his stock out in lease arrangements with other herders including his little brother, Otgonbat who is now a *myangat* as well. One former herder in the sample worked for Ochirbat as early as 1993 just after privatization. Unlike other seniors he has become an *ax* not through kin but through his own ability to generate wealth and the strategic use of available ‘people’ resources. In some ways it is difficult to consider these relationships cooperative as they exhibit aspects of patron-clientalism.

### ***Bilgee in Arslan***

Ochirbat is not the only node within the kin group that facilitates cooperation amongst households. His brother-in-law, Bilgee, occupies a similar, albeit somewhat less overtly dominating senior position. Bilgee has a close relationship with his brother-in-law Uugankhuu, the only brother still alive amongst the group of sisters. Bilgee, like Ochirbat, is a *myangat*. Uugankhuu is, in essence, his hired herder. He receives remuneration for his work which includes herding, together with Bilgee, their livestock. At times however the two households split and Bilgee will take one section of the herd and Uugankhuu will take another. However, Uugankhuu does not work alone. Bilgee has also hired others from the kin group and even some of the same employees as Ochirbat. For example, Batbold who is now herding independently previously worked for both of them. Batbold and Uugankhuu who are also brothers-in-law frequently cooperate with each other even on everyday tasks such as shearing and combing. Unlike Ochirbat, Bilgee has other kin connections within the *soum*. His sister is married to Chuluun, the head of the first kin group described above. As stated there, Bilgee, like Ochirbat, has hired from Chuluun’s children in the past and continues to cooperate with some of them in infrequent and ephemeral tasks. Bilgee, like Ochirbat with Otgonbat, has depended largely on cooperation with his youngest brother, Purev. Purev is very close in age to Bilgee and nearly a *myangat* himself. Consequently, they cooperate together in an essentially egalitarian manner.

### ***Other kinds of Cooperation***

Cooperation between households is not limited to members of large kin groups and do not necessarily have to occur under strongly hierarchical *ax-duu* dynamics. A number of households cooperate in dyadic pairs including what I call ‘straddling’ households as well as sets of brothers and brothers-in-law and amongst friends. These kinds of relationships can be found

both inside and outside large kin groups. These sorts of relationships tend to be the most egalitarian and match ‘traditional’ understandings of ‘cooperation’ both in the theoretical sense and in a local Mongolian imaginary. Within these pairs typically there is little wealth or power differentials. For example, brothers who cooperate in such ways tend to be closer in age and young. They also serve as an outlet for those who cannot access ax-duu relationships and for those whom ax-duu relationship might confer few immediate, material benefits. Here I described several examples of these cooperative dyads.

‘Straddling’ households are not fully invested in the herding economy and depend on relatives who reside and herd in the countryside full time. Or as in some cases, they arrange for a part-time relationship with another straddling household. When one household is in the aimag center, the other is in the countryside and vice versa. This relationship requires a high degree of flexibility and coordination; consequently, I found it limited to brothers of similar age.

Cooperation amongst brothers is often the most tense and capable of slipping into ‘customary’ ax-duu relationships. Brothers close in age and wealth, particularly if they are young and subject to another ‘ax’ like a father or uncle, are positioned in such way that the power differentials are minimal. Two of the sampled households, Khosjargal and Buyanjargal, work in such cooperative fashion. Although Khosjargal is older, neither have any other relative in the soum and are juniors to no one. They depend solely on each other. They are also close in age and have similar levels of material wealth. Moreover, they both straddle by keeping a small farm near the *aimag* center and tending herds in the countryside. Only during the summer and winter months do they both settle in the countryside. These relationships, over time, have potential to become unequal over time, particularly if the benefits start to accrue differentially. For example, Lkhavgadorj, a local *myangat*, and his younger brother, occupy extremely different positions. Todbayar, in effect, works as Lkhavgadorj’s hired herder. He is significantly poorer than his older brother and, to a great extent, is subject to his authority. As I describe below, his behavior was commensurate in many ways with a son.

Similar to brother dyads but with less potential for unequal power distribution are those between brothers-in-law. Moreover, in several cases, I found brothers-in-law united by what has been called in the anthropological literature as ‘sister exchange’. Although I am not wont to call these relationships ‘sister exchange’, these pairs tend to cooperate all year long and in very intense ways.

Another cooperative dyad found increasingly amongst younger herders are those based on friendship. I found several examples of young friends cooperating with each other such as between Ganchuluun who has very few kin and Amarkhuu who only has a only a little brother



but no other kin. These two households have been neighbors for a number of years and have consequently developed a relationship. Another household, Batbold, has left the countryside part time and now works as a construction worker on building projects in Undurxaan. He and a friend have arranged to hire a herder who will tend to their animals. They will alternate between monitoring trips to the countryside. Another household, Munxbayar has done the same. All of these households are young.

### ***Changes in Cooperation***

These different forms of cooperation are increasing in Uguumur according to older herders and on numerous occasions I heard seniors complaining about such dynamics. These dynamics present an alternative to the ax-duu system. Moreover, the flexible nature of such cooperation signifies to elders a sense of lack of commitment and hence laziness if not contempt for tradition. Because such relationships represent an alternative to ax-duu they are seen as contradicting ideas about family, obligation, and kinship. Morally, although they draw on other traditional sources, are seen as excessively flexible and opportunistic.

There are also a range of other forces altering the dynamics of cooperation including the formalization of ‘cooperation’ by NGOs and multi-laterals. In Uguumur we see this with the rural poverty reduction project in being implemented across Khentii and since 2006 in Bayankhutag. I discuss this in detail in chapter 6. In short the IFAD project has supported local ax-duu dynamics at the expense of other alternative forms of cooperation. This has had a number of other implications for resource access and use. However, the primary source of change has been the emergence of non-cooperative forms of labor exchange including hired herding and lease herding.

### **Non-Cooperative Labor Exchange**

As I outlined in the section on historical forms of labor exchange in Mongolian pastoralism, it is clear that such dynamics have long involved non-cooperative exchanges along with cooperative ones. Yet, as stated above, the differences between cooperative and non-cooperative labor exchanges form a continuum along which both material inequality and perceptions of inequality vary. Cooperative relations, as discussed above, depend greatly on socio-cultural frameworks that disproportionately allocate power and authority to senior males which in turn create a space for cooperation by sustaining the ‘grooved channels’ of social life amongst dependent juniors. However, here I turn my eye more directly to those vertical relationships that exemplify and reinforce the hierarchical principles of ax-duu. These frameworks are found in their most ‘pure’ form in father and son relationships where the clear

division of authority renders such practices most visibly non-cooperative. Just as father-son relationships and the patronage model serve as a backbone to horizontal cooperative frames, they also infuse other non-cooperative relationships with salient logics of inequality, most particularly in hired herding. At the same time, there are fundamental differences between father and son and employee-employer relations. In this section I look at these various non-cooperative labor exchange relationships more closely.

### ***Fathers and Sons***

Father and son relationships are marked, potentially to a greater degree than any other kin relationship, by extreme inequalities in power and authority. Even wives and daughters, by my observation, have a greater degree of latitude than herding sons.<sup>102</sup> During interviews with young herders I was surprised to find that when in the presence of their fathers they would refrain from answering questions, deferring instead to their father. In fact, this dynamic made interviewing so difficult that I had to schedule interviews with young herders at times when their fathers were not present, such as at restaurants, in the streets, or out at pasture. When their fathers were absent, I was surprised to find previously reticent participants become quite gregarious and more than willing to voice their opinions on the pastoral economy.

Yet, not all sons are equally subject to such regimes. Birth order and the number of herder-sons have a significant effect on the degree to which sons are subject to their father's authority. Older sons who separate from their fathers early are afforded a greater degree of social maneuverability than young sons, particularly the youngest, who occupies a subservient position within the family, that is, until their father dies and they assume control of the 'house'. With more sons and the broader distribution of duties, sons in larger families with a large number of active herders, will be less overtly subject to their fathers management than a single son. Moreover, if a son chooses to engage in non-pastoral activities the degree of fatherly dominance is largely rendered moot. Lastly, whether or not a son is unmarried and the wealth of the father can also have important effects on paternal dominance. Married sons, although subject to their father's authority outside the ger, are 'masters' of their own domain within the ger. Unmarried sons, evidently, are not. And a father who is wealthy versus one who is not retains a greater ability to coax his son(s) through material reward.

On average, though, because fathers can maintain a greater degree of control over their sons, they attempt to recruit and maintain one or more of their sons as herders. Because of the degree of deference accorded to them, fathers can discipline and control sons labor at relatively

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<sup>102</sup> Sons, though, have a greater potential in the long run to escape their father's grip and become powerful patrons themselves.

lower costs than with other kinds of laborers without being subjected to moral economies of ‘fairness’ or the time-consuming task of producing consent through incentives and other contractual techniques. Moreover, they are assured a greater level of labor quality because sons are socially and emotionally invested in the well-being of their father’s standing and the ‘family’s’ herd.

This is not all a loss to the son who has a great incentive in working for their fathers, as they will, in most cases, inherit a large portion of their father’s herd. As is still practiced in Mongolia, children do not separate from their parents’ *ger* until they are married. During this time sons, and daughters, live and work with their parents. Once a child marries they must have their own *ger*, as ‘there cannot be two masters in one *ger*’ as the Mongolian saying goes. Once sons marry, they will receive a wedding gift, usually livestock, which is really a portion of their ‘*xuvi*’ or share in the family’s herd. His wife’s family might also provide stock as well. As the data show, the comparative size of inherited herds is large and getting larger. This materially strengthens a father’s power vis a vis his sons.

Yet, even after marriage, and after receiving their *xuvi*, sons are compelled to live next to their father on a single campsite. Their fathers control of resources beyond livestock including campsites, wells, fences, shelters, and additional labor from other juniors including other sons and hired herders compel married sons to remain under their father’s authority. In such contexts, married sons continue to do the difficult work of *otor* and *saaxlax*. Yet, married sons will, over time, consider separating from their father and establishing their own campsite if their own herd becomes too big. Just like hired herders or other clients, the time and energy they devote to their senior’s herds can often distract from the care of their own. Expressing a desire to branch out, beyond the control of paternal dominance, is a tense topic. As is frequently the case though, it is fathers who may even, as one young herder explained, compel their sons to settle on a new campsite. As their sons herds become too big, the costs of maintaining both herds on a single ‘*nutag*’ becomes damaging to sustainable use. Even in this situation, although to a somewhat lesser degree, a son remains under his father’s authority in certain decisions.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, sons must consent to this exchange and there are cases in which they have resisted and refused.

The father and son relationship, supported by patrilineal ideologies and *ax-duu* dynamics in the broader society, serves as an important model for interaction in employment relations as a whole. This model of paternal dominance and authority is often referred to as patronage. In the following section I will discuss contract labor and the implications of paternalistic modes for patrons and their clients.

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<sup>103</sup> This is quite apparent in chapter 9 where I profile household migration histories.

### ***Contractual Relations***

One of the most apparent developments in the herding economy of Uguumuur is the use of hired labor. Out of the sample, 67 per cent of households hire labor based either on verbal contract-like salary based wages (hired herders), daily or piecemeal wage rates (see Tables 4.2 and 4.3 below). Even between relatives, who customarily would have provided cooperative labor, many herder-owners instead prefer waged labor relationships. As will be discussed below, kin obligations put a costly amount of expectation on both employer and laborer. These workers may be hired to complete a range of different tasks including herding, cashmere combing, wool shearing, construction such as wells, shelters, and fences, stock driving on migrations, conducting *otor* migrations, and generally any sort of task seen as work (*ajil*). The time period may be simply a couple of hours to full-time employment lasting in one case up to seven years. Compensation for such work takes a variety of contractual forms and material outcomes for employee and employer alike. Currently, the pay rates, listed below, for most activities other than full-time hired herding are consistent throughout the sample (1,200 MNT = US\$1).

### *Types of Labor Relations*

*Table 4.2. Remuneration rates for various occupations and tasks. (Compiled from surveys, interviews, and fieldnotes based on observations)*

<b>TASK</b>	<b>Unit</b>	<b>Per Unit Rate</b>	<b>Stock Payment</b>	<b>Stock</b>	<b>Food, clothing, etc.</b>	<b>Bonus</b>	<b>Season</b>	<b>Stock</b>
Share /Lease Herding	Livestock leased	10-20 %	Yes	Lambs and kids	No	No		
Hired Herding	Cash (Daily)	3-4,000	No		Daily meals	No		
	Cash (Monthly)	30-108,000	Yes	Sheep	Negotiated	Yes	Spring	Negotiate
Milkmaid	Cash (Monthly)	40,000	No		Yes	Yes	Spring	Calves, kids
Sheep shearing	Sheep	100-300	No		Daily meals	No		
Cashmere combing	Goat	1,000-2,000	No		Daily meals	No		
Slaughtering	Sheep/Goat	1-4,000	No		Daily meals	No		
	Cattle/Horse	5,000	No		Daily meals	No		
Odd jobs	Negotiate	2-5,000	No		Daily meals	Not usually		

Each of the above tasks has a different unit of payment and rate of payment per unit in Uguumur. Many of these rates have little flexibility. For example, slaughtering rates are set by the weigh-house in Undurxaan where for-hire butchers and skinners gather. For many of the other activities such as hired herding and milk-maid work, the rates are set by the value of sheep. Lastly, other tasks such as sheep shearing, cashmere combing, and odd jobs are piece-rates set largely by negotiation although the margins are so small that bargaining makes little difference. Below I discuss these different tasks and forms of compensation in greater detail.

Table 4.3. Percent of sample who hire according to tasks. (Compiled from household survey data).

Task	Percent of Households in Sample
<b>Share/Hired Herding</b>	35% who hire or have hired 21 % who are currently working or have worked
<b>Shearing</b>	18 %
<b>Combing</b>	34 %
<b>Slaughter</b>	28 %

#### ***Share or Lease Herding***

Several herd-owners who live in the countryside with their herds employ ‘share’ or ‘lease’ herders. These contracts range from seasonal (spring) to multi-year in length. In this relationship the herd-owner provides the herder household with a set number of female stock (*taviul mal* or put stock), usually 100-200. The herd-owner will then collect all of the adult stock and approximately 80 per cent of the newborns, leaving the remaining 20 per cent of newborns for the herder as a ‘share’. This is referred to by terms such as *xuvi* (share), *turees* (rent), or *xuls* (wage, also sweat). Typically however, herd-owners will subtract any deaths from the 20 per cent share, rather than from their own thereby ensuring that the contracted herder will afford attention to all the stock. Interestingly, herd-owners began using these contracts immediately following privatization, as they are based on the ‘lease-herding’ (*tureeshuulex*) contract system initiated by the *negdel* in 1989 and continued until the collapse of the cooperative companies in 1993.

#### ***Hired Herding***

With hired herding there is a greater range of variation in contract structure than with share herding depending on the herd-owner’s needs including: (1) daily wage rates ranging from 3,000 to 4,000 MNT, (2) short term monthly or seasonal contracts, and (3) longer term 3-4 year contracts. The long-term contracts typically evolve from daily or short term ones as the herder becomes a trusted employee. For long-term contracts, past the initial trial phase, herders receive salaries of anywhere from 30-108,000 MNT per month or the equivalent in livestock. The most common rates are roughly equivalent to the market price of a single breeding ewe. In most contracts, a hired herder receives the equivalence to 2 breeding ewes or roughly 80,000 MNT. In some contracts, herd-owners also give *uramshuulal* livestock, or a bonus, of lambs and kids in the spring. In a few cases herd-owners paid in bulk at the end of given period, either one year or three years, when they give all accumulated livestock to the herder.

The contracts offered differ for a wide range of reasons; for example, depending on whether the herder is a relative, whether they have experience herding, the extent that the herd-owner can supervise their work, the price of livestock, the current minimum legal wage, and a host of other reasons discussed in greater detail below.

### ***Milk-maid***

One of my host families hired a local woman as a *saachin* or ‘milk worker’. She is 33 years of age, unmarried, and comes from a very poor family living near the soum center. Such work is not unheard of but it was the only current case in Uguumur during my stay. Her work consisted largely of tending the milch cows and calves. While living with the host family I was charged with assisting her in her duties. These ranged well beyond simply milking the cows. She tended the young lambs and kids, collected dung, removed wool from fencing, raked the sheds, cooked, cleaned clothes, and generally maintained the ger. The employer lived mostly alone in the countryside for 9 months out of the year and only during summer would his wife join him in the countryside. She was disabled and could not perform the daily household duties. The *saachin*, consequently, was charged with the *geriin ajil* or housework and therefore rarely left the countryside. In addition to her normal salaried duties she also combed goats and sheered sheep for the normal fee.

Her salary was similar to that of a hired herder. She received one cow/calf a year and one kid per month in addition to food and clothing. Because she rarely left the countryside she received nearly all her salary as animals. When she wanted to sell her stock or livestock products such as cashmere, she did so along with her employer.

### ***Sheep shearing***

Sheep shearing is long, difficult work that rewards very little as described in chapter 3. As temperatures rise in the summer the sheep become hot and more reluctant to eat which can adversely affect their fattening and winter condition. Moreover, increased exposure to heat can create the conditions for a range of diseases including worms. Consequently, the importance of shearing the sheep lies mostly in animal health rather than as an important livestock product for the household.<sup>104</sup> Sheep-shearing rates therefore match the return employer households see in the marketplace. Shearing a single sheep takes only a few minutes and some can shear up to a

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<sup>104</sup> Current prices for wool and the extremely poor quality of Mongolia sheep wool mean that this is simply not a worthwhile product. The shift in breeds is related primarily to the need for meat animals and the greater risk in maintaining fine wool breeds. These breeds simply cannot survive in the Mongolian climate under current social and technological arrangements. Without protection from the cold and other adverse conditions weaker fine-wool breeds would easily perish.

hundred in a day. Employers, however, only pay 150-300 MNT for each sheep, nearly the same price they receive for the wool. In one case an employer paid his shearer in wool rather than in cash. In another case, an employer paid a daily rate of 15,000 plus food. 18% of households hire for shearing.

### ***Cashmere Combing***

In contrast cashmere combing commands higher rates. The work of combing takes more time and attention than shearing. Fully combing the cashmere from a goat can take up to 30 minutes or even an hour (for breeding males). Moreover, because the combs can be very sharp combers must pay close attention to what they are doing. When I was combing goats with my host family their son got a little carried away with the comb and sliced open the goat's belly. Needless to say we had goat that evening for dinner. His parents were also extremely angry.

Cashmere is extremely important to herder incomes and so the work must supervised when employees are doing the work. Moreover, the rate for cashmere is generally quite high most years and this is reflected in the wage rates. Each goat combed equals 1,000 to 2,000 MNT; although, I know of one case where the rate was 3,000. In a single day a comber might be able to comb 30 goats if they work the entire day. For the poor such a take can be important income. This depends though on the sex and age of the animal. First combing in mid to late March involves older animals and the larger males. These animals typically produce more and are quite calm and easy to comb. The later combing of 2 year-old females (*borlon*) produces much less cashmere but the animals are much more difficult to comb as they have never been combed before. Although the first combing is more profitable from the stock-owner's perspective, the second combing is also critical because the work is more difficult and it prepares the goat for the next combing season. Consequently, herd-owners typically pay the same rate. 34 per cent of households hire for cashmere combing.

### ***Slaughtering***

Slaughtering is generally done by the herder themselves. However, when a herd-owner is selling a larger number of animals or when they refuse to do the slaughtering work themselves as many older herders are unwilling to do they must hired others to do the slaughter work. Large herd-owners with over a thousand animals may hire a number of people to do this work. In the winter of 2008 when the *zud* was affecting my host households, they decided to sell a large number of livestock. They hired four others to help them complete the task in a single day. Other households did this as well. 28% of households, mostly wealthy, hire people to slaughter animals.



In the aimag center at the meat markets are slaughter-butchers who can also be hired to do the work in town.

The rates depend on the livestock involved and the location of the slaughter, in the countryside small stock slaughter ranged from 1,000 to 2,000 MNT and in the city such slaughter can go up to 5,000 MNT. Large stock like cattle or horses demand a greater rate. When someone is hired to slaughter stock they complete the whole process including skinning, leg removal, organ removal, head removal, etc. The processing of organs, however, is done by women. Organs are generally kept although some may sell the organs along with the whole carcass. Slaughter hires typically come from a pool of hired herders or from odd job workers in the aimag center.

### *Odd jobs*

Herd-owners hire laborers for a range of odd jobs including certain kinds of pastoral work such as driving stock, helping with newborns, counting herds, loading and unloading stock, and other work such as shed repair, driving, or hand-well digging (usually 2-3 meters depending on the region). These jobs are often temporary and one-off transactions that involved little beyond the immediate work performed and remuneration. However, some households develop relationships with handy-men and do-it-all employees. My host households often hired the same two men for nearly every task they needed to accomplish which required additional labor beyond their employees. For example, when they left on otor in the early fall of 2008 they hired an individual to lead the camel train 80 kilometers to their next campsite. The household members are uncomfortable dealing with camels and prefer to hire him. They also hired an employee for assisting during lambing. He and another herder tended the pregnant ewes, and when one gave birth, one herder would tend to the ewes while the other gathered up lambs and brought them back to camp. The wages for such work are determined immediately and are negotiated between employer and employee openly. Typically there are no going rates for such work in the broader Uguumur economy and so depend largely on the relationship's history and negotiation. As the number of wealthy herd-owners increases and the unemployment grows in Undurxaan, there is waiting pool of labor to cover this kind of work.

## **The Life of the Contract: Hired Herding and Share Herding in Uguumur**

In this section I look deeper into the social realities of contract and wage work in Uguumur, particularly hired herding. I explore contractual relations from three different angles: (1) the hiring process which includes labor search and bargaining and negotiation, (2) the dynamics of life under contract focusing particularly on labor discipline and techniques for resistance, and (3) the power struggle between employer and employee over authority and

consent in the labor process. In the latter section I focus primarily on the central cultural modality of paternalistic patronage to demonstrate how authority and domination are reinforced and consented to by clients in some ways similar to and in other ways not similar to other juniors. Exploring contractual life in greater detail is critical because these relations are increasingly becoming more and more common as poor herders become incapable of carving out a livelihood outside of their connections to senior wealthy herders. Moreover, as the herding economy becomes increasingly less centered on kin modalities, contractual relationships are in turn filling the void. Proceeding this discussion I ask why are the wealthy increasingly turning to these relationships rather than other kin-based modes for cooperation. Before I look at contemporary contractual relations in Uguumur, I explore the culture of the contract in Mongolia including historical precedents and the lasting effect of pre-socialist and socialist labor regimes on ‘contracting’.

### **Geree: The Culture of the Contract**

Beyond general statements about the importance of labor alienation and other critical conceptual understandings of labor contracts, which are oft repeated in the contract literature particularly within anthropology, I argue that prior contractual relationships (i.e. history) and the broader social frames of contract structures (i.e. culture) have important implications for understanding what structure contracts take. During interviews concerning labor contracts, many wealthy herders told me that they simply used the contracts established by the negdels to inform their contracts with hired herders. Yet, the structure of these contracts has an even deeper history as Sneath (1999) and others have shown. As I discussed earlier the unequal labor-livestock exchange relationship has a deep past in Mongolia. Many of the contemporary relationships today appear structurally similar to these past social forms. Although the process of bargaining and negotiation, wage and service are negotiated in contemporary market logics, they are done so within historically sustained moral frames and cultural logics; consequently, we see that these forms have retained a wide berth of similarities.

### ***Contracting Cultures in Mongolia***

#### ***Feudal Dynamics***

As Sneath (2008) points out across Central and Inner Asia there are a plethora of examples of institutionalized labor exchange. Among the Turkmen, *emanet*, among the Kazakh and Tuvan, *saun*, and amongst the Mongols, two forms dominate: *sureg tavix* and *xorog xiix*. Additionally, during the pre-socialist, feudal period, monastic economies also operated on the foundation of these practices. In this section I look at the terms of agreement or contracts upon

which these relationships were founded. As I will demonstrate, there are a number of similarities to contemporary social forms.

*Shavi*, literally ‘disciples’, served monastic estates in a variety of roles including as herdsmen. Herding *shavi* were afforded a section of animals from the *san* or monastic herd. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, monastic estates offered a kind of salary to herding *shavi* in addition to which the *shavi* received livestock products and occasionally livestock for the purpose of household consumption. Most *shavi* also had their own livestock, but generally much fewer than the high lamas. In Narovanchin monastery, it was estimated the on average high lamas owned 34.8 head per persons while *shavi* maintained a spare 5.7 head per household (Vreeland 1954). There was, however, great dispersion of wealth amongst the *shavi*. For instance, 2 households had over 2,000 head of stock and a good number had 200 to 300. However, there were still a great many stockless households that depended on either the monastery alone or on other, wealthy *shavi* and the monastic estate.

In some cases the terms of agreement were quite favorable:

To take one example of the type of arrangement entered into, the sheep belonging to the sang, or personal estate of the Dilowa Khutukhtu of Narobanchin monastery, used to be farmed out to families owning three hundred or less sheep of their own. They were allowed to keep all the summer milk, seventy percent of the wool and the lambs. In winter they froze the milk and gave some of it to the Khutukhtu and had to hand over also the skins of any sheep which died. (Bawden 1968: 148).

In addition to the contractual terms *shavi* acquired significant religious merit herding for the high lamas and the *khutagt*. Of course the benefits of the relationship were largely dependent on the estate and not all monasteries offered similar terms.

Khamjilga served under *noyon taij* with similar terms in some cases. *Suregch* or households that worked under a *sureg tavix* agreement “pastured the herds of the nobles as direct subordinates, fulfilling an exacted duty, and had no right to make use of the stock entrusted to them for such purposes as riding, transport, etc. They were also obliged to supply the owners of the *sureg* yearly with fixed quantities of milk, meat, and wool” (Bawden 1968: 274). *Suregch* enjoyed a certain level of freedom as they were not under the direction supervision and orders of their owners. *Xorogch*, however, typically received little in return for their services which were mostly subsumed under their responsibility to provide corvee to their *taij*. A partisan in the revolution recalls his experiences as a young man:

My family was a very poor one ... From sixteen to twenty I was employed by a man called Yondon of the same banner, herding cattle, relay-riding, and collecting dung and firewood ... In 1920, when I was twenty-four, I was to become a dung collector for the new zasag, but I ran away and came to Urga and worked for a butcher, carrying meat or herding the sheep. (Purevadvaga quoted in Bawden 1968: 145)

A partisan named Dendev, as Bawden (1968: 145) demonstrates, “got his living as a boy by herding sheep for the administrator of his banner office and by doing manual labor. In payment for his services he got a lamb and half a brick of tea a month.”

It was the *xorogch* who were referred to as *zarts* or servants. As Vreeland (1954) describes, in some cases, a *zarts* provide more than just labor for pastoral tasks. Rather their ‘services included almost any kind of domestic chore in addition to management of stock.’ In return they receive various amounts of food, clothing, and shelter, Some households received milk while others might receive a sheep for food. In other cases, they were given felt or rope, loan animals or carts.

The actual conditions of *sureg tavix* service, which we know more about, varied from xoshuu to xoshuu and even amongst *taij* within a single locale. Like *xorogch* or *zarts*, they received occasionally additional stock such as sheep for food or a cow which they could milk. But for the stock entrusted to them they were expected to return a set amount of products. Anything above this set quantity, it is generally viewed, herdsman kept for their own use and consumption. But the boon for a *sureg tavix* herder was the share or *xuvi*.

The basic capital stock belonged to the noble, and were replaced, in time, out of the natural increase. The yearly increase was divided, the noble usually getting half or more. (Vreeland 1954: 12)

But like contemporary share contract there was a catch to such agreements:

Replacement to maintain the full numbers of the original stock, fell to the serf, and losses by disease, blizzards, wolves and so on were also charge to the serf. Thus in a good year the noble got most of the profit, and in a bad year the serf was charged with the whole loss. A good herdsman could do well if he worked hard and had children to help him from the age of six; but terrible blizzards were always a hazard everywhere in Mongolia ... A man could be wiped out in a single season. (Vreeland 1954: 12)

Considering the significantly higher levels of risk herders faced in the pre-socialist period and capacity for higher mortality rates, such terms even at 50 percent, a debatable rate, were not wholly beneficial considering the typically annual loss rate and survival rate of newborns

Clearly, this did not, over the longue duree, work to the favor of khamjilga. For example in Tsetsen Khan aimag, in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was estimated that *noyon* (lords) average 231 head of stock per person and *albat* and khamjilga a measely 3.6 and 3.3 per person, lower even than the *shavi*.

Yet, *noyon taij* were not the only wealthy members of society. On occasion some khamjilga or even *albat* could become impressively wealthy. As Natsagdorj (1967) points out,

wealthy khamjilga also employed poor households in very similar ways giving food and free use of transport stock in exchange for labor.

Well-off people among the arat put out their cattle to be grazed by poor people in the same way as the feudal class, and this was a widespread phenomenon. Arat who had too few cattle or none at all got cattle from rich people under various conditions and for different periods of time, such as *shim xereglex* (use of the nutrition) and *xuch edlex* (use of the strength) – that is, with the right to consume the milk, or to use the animals for transport purposes when migrating. (Natsagdorj 1967: 276)

Bawden (1968) also points out that these households were called *maliin ail* or livestock households and in some cases these households were given all milk and dairy products along with half or even two-thirds of the wool. In some cases these households operate in a similar fashion to *suregch*, independently tending to the wealthy households animals on their own. Wealthy households also hired other kinds of labor as well. These laborers were referred to as ‘*xulsanii xun*’ or *gusnii xun*’, literally ‘men of sweat’ or ‘men of wage’. Moreover, similar to a practice I describe in chapters 7 and 9, “in cropping areas, wealthy families who cropped hired watch ails called *ajiliin ail* who stood watch during summer months over the crop.”

Such relationships did not exist in a cultural vacuum. *Taij* did not seek to simply extract surplus from their laboring khamjilga. In the case of the famous, or rather infamous, To Wang, labor served as a means to ideologically discipline the rural population. To Wang is famous for the strict control with which he governed his xoshuu. He sought to develop agriculture, built water mills, handicraft shops, established gold mines, encouraged fishing, hunting and gathering during off-seasons, order that all buildings must be built with local resources, established schools for musicians and actors, set up mandatory primary schooling, translated scriptures into Mongolian so that everyone could read them, and wrote and issued a range of ‘instructions; to the herding populace concerning such topics as “how to select horses, how to fix a saddle, how to pasture, how to build shelters, and stalls, how to protect animals from drought and blizzard, how to look after young, etc” (Bawden 1968: 190).

He also realized that he was pushing for changes that would require herdsmen to be kept under ideological control ... (such as) ... patriarchal authority, deference to elders, the superiority of men over women and the early capitalist virtues of self-reliance and saving money. (Bawden 1968: 181)

Here I take a quote of To Wang from Natsagdorj (1967):

If you just sit about at your ease, and go to sleep when you feel tired, so neglecting your livelihood, and then, as soon as you wake up, drink some more tea, and eat up whatever there is, this will surely mean that in one day you will eat up to three days food and drink, three months requisites will go in one month, and three years will be exhausted in one year, leading to poverty. For that reason, discipline yourselves to get up early ... Your wives ought to work continuously,

educating their children, doing sewing or other work, dealing with the cattle stalls and so on ... For yourselves, be sparing of how much animal products and grain you consume. Collect mushrooms, onions, wild grain and nuts for food ... (180)

Economization, efficiency, self-discipline and responsibility were the fundamental basis of To Wang's philosophy. He argued that if people would work harder they could fully pay their taxes and make legitimate offerings to the Buddha. As Lattimore points out, they could be 'better citizens.' His attempt at running what could be called a 'plantation economy' utterly failed as he was eventually sued by his khamjilga and became embroiled in a violent conflict between he and his serfs.

Many of the relationship as I outlined above faded over time, particularly after the abolition of the khamjilga system in 1923 and the liquidation of the monasteries in the 1930s. However, at the local level the unequal relationships between wealthy and poor households continued to operate. With the arrival of the collectives in the 1950s rural herders would enter a new phase, but in some ways structurally similar, period of contract labor.

### *Collectives and Contracts*

In the late 1950s and early 1960s the Mongolian state apparatus began the second and much longer lasting push to collectivize the rural herding economy. Prior to the socialist collectives or *negdels*, herders privately owned stock and contracted with the state to sell livestock products. In essence the state had a monopsony over all products most of which was destined for the USSR. Because the state *beltsel* paid a flat price for all products without regard to cost herders with greater herds benefitted from this system at the expense of poorer households. Socio-economic inequality, however, was muted to a large degree by World War II which forced much higher off-take rates than herders normally would be willing to proffer and disastrous zuds in the mid 1940s. By the 1950s, the incongruity between state ideology and the growing inequality in the rural countryside led the party to include collectivization in its five year plan. However, this time, as opposed to the disastrous leftist period in the early 1930s, herders would be incentivized to join. Although the wealthy were reluctant, by the late 1960s all rural soums were fully collectivized.

*Negdel* operations were set by an institutional hierarchy. At the national level the Central *Negdel* Association and Ministry of Agriculture set product needs for food, factory production, and export. From these requirements production targets were set which filtered down through the layers of bureaucracy to the individual *negdels*. Each *negdel* assumed a level of production equivalent to its stock holdings, so soums with fewer animals had lower targets. At the *negdel* level, the targets were set by species rather than by *brigad* or household. Once the species targets

were set the *brigad* committees then apportioned the targets to each household. In return the state purchased the products garnered from livestock production. Each *negdel* was apportioned a purchasing order for livestock from the *brigads* and households. The state then purchased the products from the *negdels* going back up the ladder economy. *Negdels* were also apportioned operating budgets proportional to their total production whether they reached their targets or not. However, in cases where they did not meet their production targets, they were accorded loans to cover additional operating costs. Often these loans were never repaid.

Under the *negdel* system all herders and actively working household members were wage employees, an ideologically comfortable class of rural proletariat. As workers in the *negdel*, herders did not privately own stock outside of a minimum of 50 or 75 for private consumption. Rather, the *negdel* accorded each herder stock and production tasks set by the *brigad* committees. Individual wages depended on the animal per day of work not on performance or productivity. All households earned a base salary. The prices herders received from the *negdel* for livestock products were so low there was no incentive to produce more. The primary wage they earned was the set salary according to the ‘Labor Day’ system. Each household herded a single species and in most cases a single sex or even age. For example, shepherds would be accorded a certain number of ewes which would be bred in November, lambs birthed in March, and weaned until August. The lambs would be given to another herder who specialized in young lambs. Other shepherds maintained wethers (castrated male sheep) while others might have only male breeding stock. For those who herded lambs and other young stock they would be given ‘survivorship’ money at 6 months. If production targets were not reached, the *negdel* appropriated stock or products from the household’s private herd or charged the household the price per unit short. They were not penalized for animal losses, however, due to zud or disease.

The targets were often so low that everyone could meet them. For those who fulfilled their target they were paid a 10% bonus or *uramshuulal*. For those who continually performed well they received awards and medals according to the party’s dictates concerning ‘socialist competition’. Many of these awards continue today and are important forms of cultural capital. But the difference between those who won awards and those who did not was not drastic. The average annual household income was 8,500 MNT (or US\$1,700).<sup>105</sup> Employees worked until 60 years of age if they worked 25 years for the *negdel* and 55 if they worked 32. Women received pensions at 55 if they worked 20 and even earlier if they had more children. Employees could opt to continue working and retain both salary and pension.

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<sup>105</sup> Exchange rates for the socialist period should configure to roughly 5 MNT to 1 US\$. However, like in the USSR, the exchange of the tugrug was non-existent during this time.

Table 4.4. Labor Day pay system in tugrug (from Goldstein and Beall 1994). Conversion rate, 5.6 MNT = \$1 US.

Household	Milk (.2 MNT/ltr)	Butter (3 MNT/kg)	Cream (1.5 MNT/Kg)	Aruul (1.5 MNT/Kg)	All Sales	SubTotal with bonus or penalty	Salary	Total
A	234	69	24	117	444	488 (+44 for meeting target)	1975	2463 (only 6% more)
B	211	63	21	105	400	356 (-4 or 10% for missing target)	1975	2331

The goal of the system was to ‘eliminate the profit motive and capitalist competition and exploitation’, while ‘internalizing socialist values and socialist competition’. By the 1980s, though, it was clear the productivity had simply not risen in the country. National stock levels had not risen and total productivity remained stagnant. Many saw the lack of incentive in the ‘Labor Day’ system as the prime culprit. In Table 4.4 above we see that there is little difference between a ‘successful’ herders and an ‘unsuccessful’ one. Although herder A produced a greater quantity of dairy than herder B, they were paid nearly the same rate. Consequently in 1986 the party congress issued new agricultural reforms that allowed for a new voluntary contract or *geree* system. The program began in 1988 but very few herders volunteered for the program and a number of *negdels* did not bother introducing it because there was little herder interest. Uguumur *brigad* in Temtsel *negdel* did not incorporate the contract system.

In the contract system herders agreed to a certain production target. For example, if a household was given 100 ewes they were required to return 93 lambs. A higher rate was set for 98 lambs per 100 ewes. They received a low fee for fulfilling 70 per cent of the target and a higher fee for fulfilling the last 30%. In doing so the *negdels* hoped to encourage entrepreneurial households to strive for higher return rates in exchange for correspondingly high payments compared to other *negdel* employees. Unlike wage employment, however, contract herders would have to make up any losses from their own herds no matter what the cause. Yet, they would also be given bonuses or *uramshuulal*. For every lamb over 100 per cent they received an additional payment of 13.39 MNT, for 1-4 lambs over target they received an additional 1.79 for every lamb



returned, and above 5 additional lambs they received an additional 4.47 MNT for every lamb returned. Table 4.5 below from Goldstein and Beall (1994) demonstrates how this payment system operated.

*Table 4.5. Contract system remuneration rates with new bonuses for various households. (From Goldstein and Beall 1994)*

Hshl d	Targe t	Actua l	70% (3.18 MN T per lamb )	30% (8.93 MN T per lamb )	Lamb s over 100% (13.3 9 per lamb)	Uramshuula l, 101-104, 1.79 per lamb for all lambs	Uramshuula l, 105+, 4.47 MNT per lamb for all lambs	Tota l	Total+Wag e
A	93	93	207	250	0	0	0	457	2757
B	93	79	207	125	0	0	0	332	2632
C	93	96	207	250	40	172	0	669	2969
D	93	102	207	250	121	0	456	103 7	3337

However, the contract system was not successful, largely because the *negdels* still paid base salaries in addition to the contract payments. There was too much risk and too little reward for herders to volunteer to work under this system, and so few did. Consequently, in 1989 a new system, the lease or *turees* system, was introduced.

The lease system sought to drastically increase the rewards associated with independent herding while also reducing losses and increase productivity. *Negdels* eliminated the base salary and required leased herders to pay lease fees for each animal. In return herders received payments for returned stock, births, and livestock products. They were also rewarded for increased weight. Any shortfalls had to be made up out of their own herds. However, all excess animals above leased herd could be kept. Payments were still set by state pricing of products and overall target goals. Herders had to return only 97 per cent of the leased animals and maintain an 87 % birth rate. The risk of losing stock was great but the benefit of garnering excess stock beyond the minimum return rates fostered increased interest. Below Table 4.6 from Goldstein and Beall (1994) we see how one herder benefitted from the system. His salary amounted to 8,117 MNT along with 9 mares and 12 foals from only one year of work.

Table 4.6. Lease system remuneration rates for a horse herd. (From Goldstein and Beall 1994)

Hshld	Lease stock	97% return	87% foal rate (130 MNT for each foal)	26 gallons of milk/mare, 3.08 MNT/gallon	Horse wool	Horse hair	Subtotal	Total
A	433 horses Lease fee = 10,825	Returned 100%, kept 9 for personal herd	95 foals = 10,790 MNT for 83, keeps 12 for herd	7,600 MNT	195	337	18,942 – 10,825 (lease fees) = 8,117	8,117 + 9 mares, 12 foals = 18,500 MNT

There were significant problems with this system, however. The payments did not match the benefit the state garnered from increased productivity, which mostly went to the lease herder. The actual loss to the state is hard to calculate because overhead costs and state prices were already set. Within 2 years, as the democracy movement brought down party control over the state, *negdels* would be slated for decollectivization. Although the *negdel* companies continued the lease system in slightly different forms, by 1993 many soums had privatized all the *negdel* stock.

What is clear from the socialist experience is that living under contract was the central mode of life for herding citizens. Most contemporary herders in Uguumur were born into and grew up in a life under contract; whether the wage system, the contract system, or the lease system, herders' very lives were dictated not just by the plan which was to a extent somewhat remote from their daily lives but rather the contractual relation between themselves and *negdel* and *brigad* committees.

Interestingly, many of the wealthiest herders who now hire herders and lease out their own animals, in fact, administrated the very contracts other herders lived under. It is clear that the current range of contracts mirror, respectively, the *negdel* wage, contract, and lease systems. Herders explicitly stated this to me in interviews and conversation. For example, contemporary lease herding arrangements mirror aspects of the lease system under the *negdels* such as the

*uramshuulal*; although, in contemporary Uguumur such agreements are usually seasonal and concern only birthing stock. Hired herding contracts appear to be more akin to wage and contract agreements with a base salary. In all arrangements, similar to both the *negdel* period and previous patron-client relationships in the pre-socialist period, hired or lease herders are penalized deductions for lost, stolen, diseased, or perished animals. Although none of the current arrangements mirrors exactly the arrangements from previous periods, the elements that make up current contractual terms are clearly, to a certain extent, residual cultural forms. At the same time, current pressures, emanating from the market and state, have also shaped to a large degree the process of contract formation and contractual relations. The culture of the contract must, like all cultural forms, be reproduced and in that reproduction change is born. In the next section I look more closely at contemporary contractual dynamics

### **Hiring: Search, Bargaining and Negotiation**

The contractual process begins with hiring. Employers have labor needs and through the hiring process they attempt to satisfy those needs as completely as possible. When employers need extra labor and decide to contract it outside of kin circles they must conduct a search and once they have chosen a potential employee they must engage in a process of bargaining and negotiation, over which they have significantly more control than the potential employee. Here I look at the search and negotiation process.

#### ***The Searchers***

Individual employers have their own specific labor preferences when they hire. Some employers prefer hiring kin because of a sense of increased trust. Others hire kin because they are able to control their labor to a greater extent. Many feel quite the opposite. Some herd-owners hire non-kin because they feel kin are not trustworthy. For instance, as a number of herd-owners stated, kin may be more inclined to laziness and take advantage of food provisions because the kin bond cannot be broken. Kin may also be more difficult to control, using the mutual obligations demanded by kinship ethics to weaken their employer's ability to discipline and encourage better work. In the same vein employers also demonstrated distinct preferences for married or unmarried workers. With unmarried herders, employers can obtain the full attention and labor of a worker in the management of herds and the performance of other duties. Others prefer married herders with children. The rationale for this is somewhat evident as herders with families bring in additional labor and according to employer logics, by hiring the household *ezen* they have in turn gained control of the household's labor. Only in one case did I find that employers compensated households for this additional labor. Most herd-owners simply assume

that hired herders wives and children will perform duties because of their obligations as wives and children.

There are also a number of other preferences for age, ethnicity, experience level, and future plans. Most herd-owners prefer young herders who have no animals and want to build herds in order to get married. No one expressed an interest in older herders. This is related both to the absence of older herders in the labor market and the problems of controlling the labor of someone older or equivalent in age. In cases where I knew older hired herders, they generally feel humiliated by the work and are often treated in ways incongruous with broader community ideals concerning elders and age. I explore this below. Ethnic minorities are less likely to hire Khalkha. Uriankhai and Durvud herd-owners explained that Khalkha are lazy and violent, two qualities they argue that make for a less than desirable employee. Although one would think a herd-owner would prefer experienced labor, most stated that this was not a requirement and they could care less. Part of the reason why this is the case is because most Mongolians, particularly rural Mongolians, have a basic knowledge of herding and animal behavior. Moreover, by having little experience the herder is dependent on the herd-owner for advice, knowledge, and direction. Lastly, most employers stated that one of the most important attributes they are looking for is someone who wants to herd, who has desire, initiative and motivation. Herders who have intentions to become independent herders themselves are preferred. However, employers stated that they did not want to hire those who saw employment as an easy pathway to an easy herding life; rather, they wanted herders who were young and passionate about becoming good herders.

Another interesting preference a number of employers stated was whether or not the herder was from another soum. Initially this seemed odd. Why would herd-owners want to hire someone from another soum or even aimag? Clearly, it seemed there would be a problem of trust. It is typically assumed that there are higher levels of trust within communities than between members of different communities. However, employers stated that not knowing a herder may in fact be better because they are forced to depend on the employer. Secondly and most importantly, hiring a herder from another region automatically guarantees the employer use of the hired herders' former campsites, particularly if the herder had not ceded his citizenship in that soum or region. It is not surprising then that a number of hired herders actually come from other soums. The majority, though, come from the aimag center. This is largely due to the fact that there is great unemployment in the aimag center and stockless herders are forced to leave the countryside and settle there if they cannot find work. Only in a few cases did employers state a preference for local people from Uguumur or Bayankhutag.

From here employers must attempt to recruit their preferred labor. Initially, they must get the word out that work is available. Employers do this in a number of ways, even in newspaper want-ads (see above) and radio adverts. Most, however, spread the word through their social networks. In some cases employers already have ideas of who might be willing to take on the job. In other cases they ask their friends and relatives about unemployed people looking for work. Once they get the word out, they must collect and process additional information about particular individuals. They not only ask the herder themselves but their acquaintances, friends, and relatives. Some of the primary questions they ask are whether or not the person drinks alcohol, has animals, what kind of work they do, are they responsible, do they have a wife and children, where is their original homeland, and various other queries. Once they have collected enough information most employers will meet with the herder himself and discuss the work, their plans, and other important details. At this point the negotiation begins.

### ***Bargaining and Negotiation***

When employer and the potential employee meet they discuss the terms of the ‘contract’ or *geree*.<sup>106</sup> The herd-owner explains what he wants the herder to do which typically includes all of the *malchnii ajil*. If the employer has other employees already, then the list of work may be narrowed to specific tasks. The herder usually accepts the terms.<sup>107</sup>

Remuneration, however, is different and potential employees do negotiate certain aspects of the employer’s offer. In most contracts the monthly rate is either one or two female sheep. Some hired herders prefer cash or half-cash/ half-stock pay rates. For example, some hired herders ask for flexibility from month to month. One month they may need cash such as for school supplies or Tsagaan sar celebrations. In other months they may prefer stock. Most employers agree. For some employers, however, this request might foretell that the herder is not serious about herding. Others, however, do not care. It is understandable they said that someone might prefer cash at least initially or to prefer half cash and half stock payments because herders would be forced to meet fluctuating consumption needs.

Employers also differed in the way they pay in livestock. Some pay each month so that the herder can tend to their own animals. Others pay in bulk at the end of each year or at the end of the contract. In this case, herders know in advance that they will not receive their animals until the end of service. Each of these methods has advantages and disadvantages, mostly for the hired herder. A herder who received monthly payments can benefit from births, give greater attention to

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<sup>106</sup> Not all employers or employees refer to the agreement as a *geree*. The term has a sense of formality to it. The agreements that they reach are essentially *amiin geree* or verbal contracts.

<sup>107</sup> I did not find any cases in which a herder refused the contract offered.

his own stock versus the employer, sell stock to meet needs, and more easily exit from the relationship without a quarrel about payment. A herder who receives a bulk payment, however, does not have to worry about tending to their own stock or birthing, but they also cannot immediately meet their own needs and must place a great amount of trust in their employer who may or may not pay them the stock they believe they deserve. For the employer, he might feel bulk payments ensure the hired herders will pay greater attention to their own stock and better quality labor by withholding payment. Moreover, it prevents early exit from the work by the employee who may see opportunities elsewhere or want to branch out on their own. In cases where payment is in bulk, employers must provide food and clothing. These arrangements can be quite difficult for the herder though. Yet, employers often offer greater numbers of livestock. I found that employers offered anywhere from 100 to 250 head of small stock in these arrangements, a much larger payment than they would have received in the monthly contract which after three years would have amounted to at most 72 head plus additional births in each of the three years. The bulk payment arrangement is similar to *xuvi* transfers between fathers and sons.

Employers also differed according to whether or not they provide food or clothing. Some employers provide food, particularly if the herder is single. In such cases they also provide clothing, either when their work *del* has worn completely out or for Tsagaan Sar. Others do not provide food or clothes. In the case where an employer perceives that they have hired a family rather than a single herder, they typically do not provide clothing or daily food although they might provide winter *idesh*. *Idesh* is the meat a family requires to last them through the winter. In these cases, employers often provide a cow and a horse for *idesh*. These are often older animals that no longer produce offspring and would generally not bring a high return in the market.

Most employers who are hiring a potentially long-term employee offer a trial period of one to three months. During this time herd-owners only offer a monthly contract, at the end of which they will re-negotiate for a longer term contract of one to three years. In one case, an employer paid a herder a whole month's wage even though they were in effect not re-hiring the herder to stay on more permanently and in fact cut short the time period because the herder was lazy. Some herd-owners do not like the trial period because herders will work hard for that short period of time and then get lazy when they set terms for the longer contract period. Others said that this was ridiculous (*uchir utgagui*) because they could fire herders at anytime for any reason and have no obligation to pay them if they make mistakes. In order to better understand these trials and other aspects of the search and negotiation process, in the next section I look at a case of hiring I observed in the field.

### ***Batdalai and the Herder***

In March of 2008 I moved from my first host family's winter camp in eastern Bayankhutag to a new host family's spring campsite in Uguumur. The herder, Batdalai, is the senior herder introduced in the cooperation case study above. Just prior to winter, Batdalai's long time hired herder branched out independently to start herding on his own in his home soum of Murun. During the winter Batdalai split his animals up amongst a series of client households. In spring his animals, back in Uguumur for the birthing season, proved to be too many for just he, his sons, and adoptive son/herder to tend. As small-stock birthing began he went into the aimag center to find a new employee. He had several potential people in mind who he knew were mostly doing odd jobs in Undurxaan. When he went into town he met with several members of the provincial branch of the MPRP. Since Batdalai is a Hero of Labor, the MPRP has guaranteed to provide him a pension and services for his political support, and, indirectly, provide him a broader social network than most herders.<sup>108</sup> This is important because one of Batdalai's preferences in hiring a new herder was someone from a different soum. While I was with him in the aimag center we met briefly with members of the MPRP who suggested a number of people whom they know well including a relative from Bayan-Adarga soum who was currently unemployed, although he had been working in construction. Before we met with him, Batdalai and I drove around town to visit other herders, friends, and relatives to inform them that he was looking for a new *tuslax malchin* or herder assistant.<sup>109</sup> They would suggest names and discuss the different qualities of these potential employees. Most important to Batdalai, beyond being from another soum or aimag, was that the herder desired to engage in a pastoral lifeway as a biznes. For him, employment as his herder was an opportunity as much as a simply job. Working with him herders could learn a lot about good herd management, local ecology, animal behavior, and proper herd accounting and marketing. Moreover, they would learn self-discipline and proper labor management. Consequently, he did want to bestow such gifts on just anyone. He wanted, in effect, an apprentice.

Yet, finding someone with such qualities is difficult, mostly because someone who is desperate for work might say whatever is needed to land a job. Batdalai, therefore, offers a trial period of one month and then three months before setting the period to 3 years. Of the herders he

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<sup>108</sup> I had the impression for instance that his car was a gift of a local politician. Obviously, I did not ask him this but he did state that if he wanted to move to Undurxaan or Ulaanbaatar the party would buy him an apartment and give him a pension. Although he associated this with being a Hero of Labor he was also an ardent support of the MPRP. I presume if he had been a democrat, these benefits would be lost.

<sup>109</sup> Literally, 'herder who helps'.

has hired, all who were eventually rehired following the three month trial period have stayed on past the end of the three year period. Batdalai offered the new herder this 'graduated' contract.

The herder he found was through his MRPR contract. We met with him and the MRPR members behind Batdalai's son's apartment building in the central area of Unudrkhaan. Batdalai's first questions concerned whether or not he had livestock, what his future goals were, and whether or not he still had relatives and campsites in Bayan-Adarga soum to the north. The man stated that he did have livestock in Bayan-Adarga with his relatives and that they would be able to arrange something if Batdalai wanted to go on *otor* there. He also stated that if he could build up a good size herd then he would like become a herder. There they discussed what kind of work the herder would do and the terms of payment. Batdalai informed him about the trial periods and the kinds of work he could expect. He also informed him that there was no drinking and the workday typically starts at 6 am and ends when the sun sets or until the work is done. Most herders he found were unable to keep this strict schedule. He also explained to the herder how he would pay. He pays the equivalent of 2 female sheep or 90,000 MNT a month. He could request cash instead of sheep and would be provided with food and clothes until his family arrives during the summer at which time he is responsible for his own food and clothing. He would also pay his moving costs and any initial expenses such as food and other supplies. In addition to the herding work he could also comb goats at 2,000 MNT per goat. He would not, however, receive an *uramshuulal* until the next year if they decided to extend the contract. The two agreed and the man left on his bicycle to prepare his *del* and supplies. After Batdalai finished talking to the MPRP members we went to the store to stock up on supplies for the countryside and then met the new herder at his *ger*. His family, wife and children, were living in a *khashaa* in the north central side of town. He got in the car and we left for the countryside.

Initially, during the trial period, the herder seemed to be fitting in and working hard. He was gone most of the day from 6 am until late at night herding the older animals. He also helped brand the yearling horses and cut the manes of the older horses. He watered livestock and took them to the *maraa* and *xujir*. In April he combed goats and earned extra income. By the time I left the countryside for my short stint in Undurxaan in May, the work seemed to be going well. Batdalai had rehired him for the three month period. When I returned in June, I asked Batdalai how the herder was doing and he told me that he had '*bolison*' or quit. I asked whether or not he fired him and he said no but that he probably would have eventually. The herder was having difficulties getting up on time. Batdalai said he ate too much and slept too much and he had caught him sleeping in the pasture when he was supposed to be watching the sheep. The herder also kept asking for time off so that he could see his family since his wife had decided not to



move out to the countryside. Batdalai told him that he could not get time off, an important sticking point between employees and employers. In early June after only 2 months of work, the herder quit. Or this is what Batdalai told me. Batdalai had already decided at that point though that he would not go on *otor* to Bayan-Adarga and therefore had no need of a connection there. Whether or not the end of the relationship was due to this or other more mundane factors I could not tell. I did not see the herder again until just before I left to return home in October. Batdalai had hired him part-time to help drive the cattle out east.

### **Life Under Contract: Disciplining Labor and Resistance**

Although contract forms and contractual logics appear similar to past forms and the duties, services, and payments exchanged may appear approximate to past exchanges, living under contract in contemporary Uguumur is quite different than any time previously. Admittedly, this is hard to deduce from pre-socialist times. Although there are a number of legal documents from which scholars can draw to examine patron-client relationships and labor-livestock exchanges between the wealthy and poor, these do not give us a well-rounded view of what life was like for the contracted. The most important distinction we can make, though, is between socialist and post-socialist periods. The basic foundation of state economic practices was to provide a ‘livable’ income regardless of the productivity of any one individual. Moreover, the soft-budget constraints in *negdel* economic practices allowed the collectives to continue providing salaries and social services without connection to productivity. Contemporary hired herding is very different. Current household herding operates under hard-budget constraints and a lack of viable safety nets; consequently, labor and productivity are intimately tied to income. Employers, therefore, operate under extremely different logics than socialist *negdels*. A herd-owner’s success depends on mitigating market forces, increasing herd growth, and formulating opportunistic *biznes* strategies without which they face dire consequences. These harsh realities impact the kinds of labor employers require, the meaning of that labor, and the subjectivities of hired employees. Consequently, the way such laboring lives are lived and experienced are also very different.

My first exposure to adverse experiences of hired herding occurred only a week into my field research. On my way out to my host family, the truck I was riding in also included a local *myangat* herder, his wife, and one of his children. He had left his truck in the countryside and caught a ride into town with his sibling the week prior. Now, he and his family were returning their campsite. We exited the main road and plowed through the snowdrifts along an invisible road down a mountain valley heading south. We followed a long ridge line of hills before a campsite with the two gers and a large xashaa came into view. The car stopped and we all exited,

stretching and relieving ourselves after an hour's ride through endless snow. We entered the first ger inside of which was seated the families hired herder. The ger had a bare floor, just dirt and a few pads of esgii or felt where the man had set up a kind of bed. The ger was tiny, only a 3 walled ger, maybe even smaller. It was bare and only had a small hearth, barely large enough to cook on. Clearly, this was where the herder resided. I was appalled while also selfishly hoping that my host family's ger was more accommodating than this. We got back in the truck and continued on to my host family's campsite. Fortunately, my host family's ger was very comfortable with wood floors on top of which were linoleum laminate and various rugs. The hearth was big with an ample bucket of coal and *xurzun*. They had beds, radio, paintings, and other accoutrements. In fact, I would only observe conditions similar to that hired herder's amongst other hired herders and the poorest of the poor.

A week into my stay with my host-mother, Zulaa, and host father, Enkhjargal, I re-encountered the hired herder. It was 7 o'clock at night, probably 30 below zero, and the sun had long gone down. After watching some television in the central ger belonging to Zulaa's mother, I returned to my host family's small ger. Enkhjargal was telling Zulaa that the herder he saw earlier walking in the snow was passing by outside. We could hear the goats and sheep in the distance. My host family had long corralled their herd. My host mother asked Enkhjargal why the herder wouldn't come in and give up trying to make it home. Enkhjargal said he has asked earlier and he refused. Zulaa kept calling the man crazy or *galzuu*. I asked what had happened. He said that the man herding sheep was a hired herder and had been sent south of the mountains to do otor alone, a dangerous affair, and was returning the herd back north a few kilometers. His horse though had *dogshilson* or gone wild and threw him. Without a horse he had to walk. He was making slow progress though and was not going to make it before nightfall. Exasperated, my host mother told her husband to go get the hired herder. He went to the central ger to ask his mother-in-law what she thought about bringing the herd in next to their xashaa and she agreed. About 20 minutes later the herder comes in with my host father. His face had frost and small icicles on it. What was worse, he was only wearing a jacket over a short, clearly inadequate del and to make the situation worse he was only wearing fall boots, not the ubiquitous winter felt boots.

They took off his clothes and covered him with a proper sheepskin-lined del and wool blankets and sat him by the fire. They gave him a bucket of fried *bortsog* and freshly brewed tea. Although Mongolians pride themselves on being able to handle the cold, this was excessive. My host mother asked him where his employer was and why he sent him on this stupid otor. The next day when his employer showed up, my host mother, her mother, and my host father criticized the herder's employer for being cheap and cruel. They told him he was stupid and crazy for sending a

person on their own alone without any help in the middle of winter. Moreover, the herds had mixed in the night and consequently, they had to spend half the day separating out the herds. The employer, evidently frustrated, was acting belligerent with the hired herder, much of which I could not hear or understand. Clearly, though, he was reprimanding him and ordering him around. By 11 that morning, the herds were separated and the hired herder and his employer had left.

Evidently, contracts themselves are not the only means by which employers demonstrate control over herders. In turn, although current contracts reflect these harsh realities to a degree, we must remember that contracts are not contractual relations. The actual realities of the relationship, a part of which the contract might serve a central purpose, are much broader. In particular, I am interested, in this section, in looking at the ways employers discipline hired herders through reward and punishment and the ways herders resist or consent to these techniques. These dynamics make-up a good deal of the life of a hired herder, as even everyday conversations and engagements are overlain with strategic disciplinary tactics and conscious or unconscious consent or resistance to such regimes. For example, as I discuss below concerning the hired herder I grew to know very well over the course of the fieldwork, his employers often referred to him as ‘the marmot man’, a derogatory and humiliating nickname for a man who was older than all of them. Positioning him in this way muted his ability to draw on the social power of age and forced him to find other ways of resisting. This kind of psychological discipline is both a reflection of inequality and part of its reproduction which is key to the contract relationship.

It is in this light that I simultaneously privilege both the structural constraints of class and employer authority and the agency of both employer and employee to strategically alter or change these dynamics to their own ends whether through domination, consent, or resistance.

### ***Disciplining Labor***

As Marx pointed out so long ago, owners of the means of production derive value from the labor of others through the social relations of production which includes disciplinary tactics aimed at transforming the means of production into profit. Although Marx saw the overt control of laboring bodies as critical in oppressing workers and disciplining the labor process, he missed the much more subtle ways in which those who control the means production produce consent through hegemonic domination. Burawoy (1979) argues in *Manufacturing Consent* that although overt means are evidently utilized to extract labor value from workers, we should turn our eyes to other subtle means employers use to produce consent or at least quiet or muted resistance. Moreover, as Grasmci (1971) argues, in looking at the broader range of disciplinary techniques and hegemonic ideologies we see that discipline concerns more than the extraction of immediate value from the labor process but rather the reproduction of the very conditions of the social

relations of production through socio-cultural as well as more material political economic means.

In other words, as a number of important works have argued, part of labor discipline is the recreation of the power differentials between those that make up the social relations of labor. For example, in this instance, herd-owners attempt to replicate their positions of power vis a vis the employed (and others in the community) not simply to generate labor in the moment but rather to reproduce the conditions in which future labor can be successfully and sustainably extracted at minimum cost to both the employers economic standing a la livestock and their social and political standing contra herders and others. Consequently, it is not simply the contract itself that employers use to discipline labor, although it is an important one. In order to extract value from the labor of herders but also to recreate their positions of authority and dominance, employers survey their employees work, offer rewards, threats, and punishments some of which are violent, and use cultural and psychological tactics for manipulating the discursive and cognitive landscape in which herders consent, resist, and labor. In the section that follows I look at this broader range of practices.

### ***Contracts***

Contracts, some of which are written and some of which are not, are the primary and most evident means by which employers attempt to control the labor of their employees. By using contracts employers attempt to not just compensate employees but also incentivize increased production. In other words, employees attempt to shift labor discipline onto the laborer him/herself who internalizes this discipline as self-interest in order to increase returns from their own ‘exploitation’. Moreover, employers also attempt to shift risk through contracts. The deduction of animals from a hired herder’s compensation or from their own herds shifts the risk of herding onto the employee rather than on the employer. In this way employers attempt to increase attentiveness to risk and risk management by internalizing this exposure in the laborer in the same way incentives attempt to do so for increased production.

In Uguumur employers incentivize production through *uramshuulal* or ‘encouragement’, essentially bonuses. Similar to the *negdel* these bonuses are based on birthing rates. For instance, in hired herding relationships these are essentially the same as lease herding arrangements. A herder may be afforded 20 lambs out of every 100 lambs taken. These terms are significantly better than during the *negdel* period. However, increasingly, contemporary employers have some additional conditions. In some cases herders must reach a total number of lambs before they can take their share – literally their *xuvi*. In one case, a herder had to reach 500 lambs before they receive 10 lambs for every 100. Any less than 500 and they received no *xuvi*; more than 500 and they would receive at least over 50 lambs. The employer stated that if the herder did not reach

that amount it was ‘their problem, not his’. However, most employers, similar to the *negdel* period, also deduct any lost lambs from this count. So if a herd of 800 ewes births 600 lambs and loses 50 of those to bad weather conditions, then the hired herder would receive only 10 lambs. Without the loss they would have received 60. These circumstances can be very frustrating for a hired herder.

### ***Surveillance***

While lease herders are rarely monitored or surveiled, hired herders live under near constant surveillance and monitoring. Lease herders are given birthing stock either prior to winter or just before birthing. Herd-owners usually do not come until after birthing to examine their stock. In cases where lease herders have *tul sain avsan*, herd-owners may leave the stock until weaning begins in May. In this case, the lease herder may be taken on as a permanent herder but this is typically not the case. Most employers collect their stock in May before weaning. In contrast, hired herders live and work alongside their employers in most cases. Some live in the ger with their employer, others in their own ger to the side, and others may live permanently on their own while their employer shifts between countryside and town. Herd-owners with other investments in town are frequently absent from the countryside. For most herders, however, their labor is constantly monitored. Hired herders make few decisions on their own. Rather, herd-owners decide daily pasturing and watering requirements. They instruct herders where to go and what to do. Only in the rare case out at pasture do hired herders have autonomy in decision-making. Even this is monitored. Herd-owners often make surprise visits at pasture to check on their stock and their employee’s performance. This is especially the case in the beginning of the relationship. As trust grows between herd-owner and employee, monitoring and surveillance wane, and decision-making shifts gradually to the hired herder.

Improper behavior is often punished as I will discuss below and proper or good behavior receives little in the way of praise. Herd-owners claim they must continually monitor their herders because herders get drunk, lose animals, steal animals, and fall asleep at pasture. These are all valid problems. During my time in the field all of these problems occurred with hired herders. In one instance, a herder would not return to work and was found drunk in an alley in Undurkhaan lying in the mud. My host families hired herder was arrested for attempting to stab a police officer while he was being arrested for public belligerence. Another herder made off with ten horses and left for UB and was never heard from again. In a number of cases employers complained that herders had lost animals. Additionally, falling asleep is a constant problem. In one instance, a hired herder fell asleep while tending sheep. He had wrapped the horse lead around his boot, but the horse became frightened and jolted away the lead. As I was readying my

mount in order to head out to pasture and return the camels to camp, his horse came flying, full speed over the hillside straight at me and frightening my horse to the point that it tore down the whole hitching post. The herder came running over the hillside and the other herder who had left to bring the horses in left to catch the rambunctious steed. The sheep were left unattended and work slowed.

Because of these factors, many of which reside solely in the realm of gossip and fears, herd-owners actively and stringently monitor their herder's activity. This monitoring often extends beyond the labor exchange itself. In my experience, hired herders were constantly being told what to do and their personal decisions are constantly commented on, even decisions that are usually made within the household become subjects of extra-household discussion. I overheard employers commenting on how much food hire herders' wives waste, the dirtiness of their clothes, improper care of children, the lack of a savings account, excessive celebration of Tsagaan sar, and other 'normally' private household issues. Although these areas of life are topics of conversation and gossip amongst kin and familiar households, the severe inequality between employers and employees and the dominating demeanor of herd-owners made such comments awkward and, obviously, occurred only one way.

### ***Rewards***

Outside *uramshuulal*, some herd-owners encourage good herders with rewards such as additional stock and gifts of clothing or other items such as cigarettes, vodka, or even small amounts of money. Rewards beyond the contract in most cases, however, are few and far between. One of the biggest rewards a herder receives is time off. Herding is a 24 hours a day, seven days a week job and if a herd-owner does not have replacement labor, it is difficult to lose a hired herder when every day counts. For the hired herder though, life in the countryside 'living under another's wing', without relatives, friends, or other social contacts can be quite difficult. Many hired herders live in the countryside without their wives and children and sometimes go months without seeing them. Time off is almost never discussed in contract negotiations. Only in one case did I hear of a herder requesting time off as part of a negotiation. When employers give time off it is seen in their eyes as a benevolent reward. Herders often see it as a right. This is one of the most contentious parts of the hired herding relationship between employer and employee. Consequently, withholding time off can even be used as a threat of punishment.

### ***Debt***

Many employers lend cash or supply hired herders and their families with goods from the provincial center. Many employers keep detailed accounts of the debts their employees have

incurred and deduct stock payments and other forms of remuneration from their debt. One employer allowed me to look at briefly his annual account books. For each list of items given the employer require the herder to sign their name. He also showed me how he calculated that into payments.

For most these debts never become so excessive as to seriously jeopardize the long term viability of such employment or their ability to garner a large enough herd for an independent livelihood. Moreover, current legal frameworks do not allow employers to force employees to work off debts. However, most employees are pressured to do so indirectly as they have to continue their relationship and delay exit; otherwise they will have to find some other way to pay their debt. Additionally, the debts can offset monthly payments in stock and reduce monthly income. For some this is a major stress. Consequently, many herders opt for half cash half stock payments so that they can cover their consumption without having to sell stock on their own. Other reductions in payment can be more disastrous over the long term.

### ***Threat***

Threats are numerous. While I was visiting a hired herding family in Uguumur, their employer, who was ignorant of our presence, could be heard yelling in the distance at the herders' 60 year old mother: "What are you doing? I am not paying you to bark, I am paying you to work, now dig! Or I will get rid of you and your son!." Several times while I was in the countryside I heard threats of *xalax* or firing. I heard cases where employers threaten to withhold payment, *uramshuulal*, or would threaten to take stock from their employee. There are also a variety of non-verbal threats employees utilize. As I explain below, in one case, my host family hired another herder for part time work but did not inform the permanent hired herder that it was part time. They did this to pressure him to stay in the countryside and work harder without issuing an outward reprimand. One former hired herder reported that her employer constantly threatened to hit her and her son. Other herders reported that employers were violent with children. Many cases of outright violence were often related to alcohol.

### ***Punishment***

The biggest punishment a household can receive is built into the contract itself but the implications of which are not fully understood. Herd-owners reduce payments not only for debts but for other losses incurred through 'poor' management. These reductions in payment or repayment for lost, stolen, or dead animals threaten a hired herder's core livelihood. The loss of work, or to be *xalax* or fired, is the second most common punishment. Although herders lose an immediate income stream, there are other work opportunities and income streams to be accessed.

A loss of assets like livestock or stock payments while remaining in the pastoral economy is a much more drastic problem for them as there are significant opportunity costs as well.

In one case, while I was sitting in the ger playing *mushik* (a form of wist) with my host family's youngest son, an older man of about 55 years of age who I recognized as my host mother's younger brother's hired herder came into the ger. He said that he had been watching the stock for two days without food and the herd-owner had not come back but that he had promised the hired herder his monthly payment of a sheep and some cash before he went into Undurkhaan for a rest. He asked if they knew where he was and they replied no. The herd-owner's other hired herder, a young boy of about 15, had shown up to replace the older man. He stayed the night at my host family's ger and the next day when his employer came, the mother in the adjacent ger asked him why he had not paid his hired herder. He lashed out at the herder and told him to leave and go back to the campsite. He said that he was not giving him any stock because he had lost animals by the river which may or may not have been the case. Regardless, the herd-owner was visibly angry. I presume the herder quit because I never saw him again.

One of the most common punishments herders told me is the withdrawal of food and aid. When herders are perceived as acting lazy, forgetful, or simply perform poorly herd-owners in some cases deny them food. Although I observed control over food which I discuss below, I never once witnessed a herder denied food outright; yet, former herders complained about this. They argued that herd-owners would tell them to go back out to pasture or simply not to come in for mid-day meal. In some cases they would give them *aaruul* (an extremely hard cheese) and tell them to return at night with stock. Denial of food especially in winter can have serious consequences. In low temperatures, even when one wears warm clothing, bodies burn food and fat quickly resulting in weight loss. I experienced a weight loss of 20 pounds in winter even though I perceived little difference in my diet from city to countryside. Although I did not collect much dietary data, it was apparent that many hired herders are typically gaunt and thin. I discuss food control below.

Only in one case did a former employee relay to me an actual case of violence although acquaintances of mine rumored that it was often the case especially with young herders. I heard reports of herd-owners hitting young unmarried herders whom they treated like children rather than employees. In the case discussed above concerning the older herder, the herd-owners' other employee was a 15 year old boy who had dropped out of school. It was rumored that his employer had hit him several times. The boy eventually ran off with livestock in the middle of the night and never returned. In a case relayed to me by a former herder, she explained that her employer would often slap her and in one case whipped her on the back and across the face with



an urga or whip. She had scars across her face and was crying when she explained the circumstances. Female hired herders are generally unheard of but in this case her employer hired her and her son. She had received stock in her divorce and was residing in the countryside with her son who is now in his mid-twenties. Her ex husband had cooperated with her future employer before, but after the divorce he sold off his stock and left the countryside. Her employer, an *Aimgiin Sain Malchin* (provincial best herder), was strict she said and would yell at her to do work. Not only did she do some of the *malchnii ajil* she also did most of the *geriin ajil*. Domestic violence against women, however, is all too common occurrence. I witnessed personally an episode of domestic violence. When I said we should call the police, the women I was sitting with laughed at me. Consequently, it was not so hard to understand that this herder eventually started a relationship with her former employer despite the violence. Although they are no longer together, she still cooperates with him and is a member of his cooperative *buleg*.

## **Living Power: Manufacturing Authority and Consent**

### ***Reproducing Power***

As I stated above much of the dynamics between employer and employee in fact concern the reproduction of the unequal power relations between the two parties rather than from a desire to enforce contractual agreements, although contracts themselves also are often structured so as to minimize the potential for altering social inequalities. Part and parcel to this process is the re/production of authority and consent. In this section I look at how employers attempt to assert their authority and encourage through coercion, or otherwise, employees' consent. Additionally, I look at how herders resist these attempts, consciously or not. Power always implicates resistance and here I present some of the ways in which herders resist such attempts by employers.

In order to dominate herders, herd-owners must actively attempt to recreate their disparate social positions. Because contracts are structured initially in a way so that hired herders may in fact improve their livelihood, they might also experience an increase in social standing, both of which can be seen as threats to a herd-owners position of dominance, in relation to herders and the broader community. Without herds, they are not herders. And if they are not herders, most become unemployed. Herds are the gateway to a rural life and herd-owners are the gatekeepers. This is not lost on them either. As the above disciplinary techniques demonstrate it is control over herds, payments, and food that much of employer domination lies. From a hired herder's stand point this has more than simply an economic connotation. If control over herds is control over a rural livelihood and herd-owners control the vast majority of stock then the withholding of stock, threatening with it, punishing with it, is not just control over labor but

control over livelihoods and life itself. Psychologically such power looms heavy in a herder's experience.

It is through herds and payment that herd-owners manufacture a herders' consent to exploitation. Yet, there are also a number of subtle means by which herd-owners and their kin keep herders in their 'place'. By recreating a hired herder's low social position and generally placing them outside the pale of moral economies, herd-owners can continue to exploit them. Herd-owners and those within the household including wives, children at times, and other relatives cooperate in these practices and they do so in cultural salient ways through public humiliation and spatial and temporal control of herders' bodies.

In my experience, herd-owners would manipulate the order, timing, and quantity of food provision by serving children or women before an adult male herder, delaying their meal until tasks are finished, or giving them portions smaller than other adult males in the household or equivalent to children's or women's servings. In Mongolian cultural practices, people are served by age and sex with adult men being served first followed adult women and the children by age. Guests come after the head of household. Men receive the largest portions and eat when they so desire as long as there is food left. Women and children eat similar portions and must wait until the head of the household, an adult male typically, decides everyone can eat. By placing an adult male hired herder behind women and children, herd-owners are removing them from sources of social power. In many cases this continues in seating order. Numerous times I witnessed hired herders sitting in the southern half of the ger near the door and even outside the ger in warmer months. Moving a hired herder further away from north of the ger or the xoimor, the conceptual seat of male power within the ger, herd-owners signify not only the low social position of the hired herder but also amplify their own power to generate this effect. In most cases, hired herders may do this on their own accord, reflecting their social position more broadly.

Herd-owners would also try to control a herder's use of time and space in other ways. Forcing them to wake-up, watch animals through the night, withholding time to rest, giving them random tasks, denying them visits with their family, and various other ways. Most herd-owners prevent herders from joining in festivities such as naadam. Someone has to watch animals during this time and consequently herd-owners place this task on herders. Their absence from community social activities, prevents herders from making important social bonds. Moreover, not allowing herders to partake in Tsagaan Sar celebrations further delimits herders' social connections. Many also do not partake in community-based mountain worship rituals.

Herd-owners also accomplish this by assigning hired herders a range of tasks they themselves would not do. For instance hired herders are often charged with slaughtering stock, a

sinful activity that does not bode well for one's karmic account. I also observed herders doing tasks I rarely saw herd-owners, especially wealthy ones, doing: including, *geriin ajil* such as picking up dung, washing dishes, cooking food, and other work generally associated with women. Even in pastoral work I saw herd-owners make their employees walk to pasture, a humiliation for Mongolians where walking is a sign of severe poverty and utter destitution. Simply being tasked with the majority of *xar ajil* while the herd-owner was relieved to partake in hobbies like horse-training, relaxation, or other side business interests, is a visible sign of entrenched inequality. Moreover, hired herders must coordinate most of their own activities in and around those of their employer. If they want to sell stock they will have to wait until their employer does. If they want to go into town to get supplies they will have to wait until their employer does. The list goes on.

More progressive herd-owners I knew, including my host family, commented on how other herd-owners allowed their herders to live in terrible conditions including forcing herders to constantly wear the same old, stained, tattered clothes, all year long. In one instance, I saw a herd-owner tell his herder to stuff his pants with old wool to make them warmer for the winter. The herder described above who almost disappeared in a snow storm was walking in the snow with summer boots. My host families chastised his employer for being so cheap as to not buy 15,000 MNT felt boots for him. Hired herders and their families who live constantly in the rural countryside never bathe and rarely have time to visit the doctor or dentist. Many hired herders who live with their families in gers next to their employees often live during the warmer months and some even in the cold winter without proper flooring and in some cases the floor is simply bare ground as I describe above. I never once saw this in a herd-owner ger and I visited hundreds. Moreover, hired herders' gers often become like a cooking or storage ger for the employer. This kind of appropriation is a severe humiliation both to the hired herders' wife who is charged with cooking for another family and for the household head who is visibly not the 'master' of his own home. In some cases, employers work the herder's wife and children so hard that there is little time for their own household activities. Hired families often eat later and wake up earlier than employers.

This treatment of hired herders is not universal. These various practices are present in some relationships and not in others and simply reflect my observation and experience in the field. Conditions may in fact be worse or better depending on the employer and employee. Nevertheless, I found that in general these positions often entailed a certain level of humiliation, loss of dignity, and disrespect. I say this from the perspective of a male hired herder. This kind of employment for them, even for the most successful herder, entails a certain loss of social position

and power, at least for a period of time, and in the end may give them a pathway to move well beyond their current state.

This belief also works to employer benefit. Employers ‘manufacture’ consent through the maintenance of a narrative in which hard work, dedication, and loyalty result in herding success. In negotiations and in the broader community, herding is seen as an occupation in which the lazy fail and the hardworking succeed. Hired herding in turn is presented as a viable pathway to such success. If hired herders only worked harder, then over time they would successfully branch out on their own with their own herd. Clearly, success in herding is based on a number of factors that have little to do with ‘hard-work’, although I would not deny that some of the best herders clearly are hard-workers.

### ***Understanding Domination***

Much of the gross mistreatment employees were subject to can be found in other unequal relationships along fissures of age and gender such as between husbands and wives, parents and children, especially between fathers and sons, and men of different generations as exemplified by the *ax-duu* relationship. In fact, the pervasiveness of the inequality in *ax-duu* relations across rural society renders the inequality in employer-employee relations relevant and comprehensible. As I discuss below concerning the evolution of patron-clientelism within employment relations, *ax-duu* principles inform contractual relations to a great extent. This is critically important in understanding how authority and consent are produced; in this case, because the inherent, naturalized inequality in *ax-duu* principles culturally makes ‘sense’.

However, while hired herding draws on familiar cultural frames and social forms, it also recalls an undesirable historical past. For example, even though hired herding evolves at times into clientalism reminiscent of familial relationships and *ax-duu* kin groups, many relationships resemble, in the broader social memory, earlier forms of labor exploitation. Much of the rationale attributed to the socialist revolution in 1921 was the presence of highly unequal, exploitative feudal relationships between nobles and commoners and more simply, between wealthy and poor. Poor dependent households were referred to as *zartsiin ail* or servant households and waited at the beckon call of the wealthy. Even worse, some households at least for a time were sold and exchanged as slaves or *bool*. When former hired herders speak of these contemporary forms of discipline, punishment, and domination, they argue that they were treated like *zarts* or *bool*. For some, these relationships are highly disconcerting. The whole purpose of their socialist revolution was to do away with such exploitation. At the same time, however, the stereotypes of the rural poor match the impressions people have of hired herders: uneducated, lazy, unworthy, drunks, more likely to steal from their employer than do a real days work who live off the state (literally,

*tur xuxuulex* or ‘suckle from the state’). Although these images in my experience clearly do not match the lived reality of hired herders and their families, these sentiments resonate with many urban, settled Mongols and even some in rural communities, particularly in the aftermath of zud disasters. Moreover, ideals of personal responsibility and self-discipline increasingly resonate in Mongolian society. Consequently, the treatment of hired herders and their lives under contract are seen as primarily a result of their inability to self-manage.

### ***Resistance***

How do herders react in such circumstances? Initially on visiting a hired herder or living with an employer household, hired herders appear to resist little. They rarely talk and in their silence simply nod and seem to consent to their employers’ requests. Their lives seem devoid of choice or even thought. Such a view would be egregiously simplistic, however. In fact, hired herders do not sit idly by and passively accept their own domination without a whisper. I argue that laborers are agents in their own right. Even though, on the other hand, as others have shown, laborers themselves consent to oppressive domination and even work to its end, they also at times boldly and openly resist. I follow Scott (1992) in separating on-stage resistance from off-stage resistance. This resistance can be verbalized or acted out in material ways. But I concur with Scott that it is onstage resistance that is engaged in the work of open, immediate change while offstage resistance or hidden ‘transcripts’ often simply consents to the status quo while at other times quietly, and sometimes unconsciously, builds a case against oppressive domination. In Uguumur, behind closed doors, herders resist in their own way. In public they might consent to authority and proclaim their employer’s benevolence. In private, other thoughts flow.

Most avenues for resistance have to be balanced between immediate psychological or material benefits and possible adverse repercussions. Moreover, do actions of resistance attempt to prompt change or are they simply outlets for anxiety, stress, anger, or frustration? Offstage resistance such as complaining to friends or relatives is often aimed at relief of anxiety, stress, and everyday pressures and poses little risk to employment but also poses little benefit for a change in conditions or in the contract. Other kinds of offstage resistance, particularly material actions such as shirking and intentionally treating or managing herds poorly such as driving stock hard in the fall (*targa xailuulax* or ‘melting the fat’), not reporting disease outbreaks, purposive inattention to stock, foregoing water, or watering stock too fast are examples of offstage resistance that are difficult for employers to monitor or even trace back to the herder. Consequently, such actions, which have important implications for the employer’s herds, do little to alter the relationship, and serve largely as an outlet for frustration. But the liminality of such actions between offstage and onstage means that the cost to such actions could be the association

of generally worsening herd condition with one's management which could lead over time to being fired (*xalsan*). Losing stock also hovers around this thin line between onstage and offstage because lost stock is at times difficult to associate with culpability. An egregious loss of livestock is a serious offense that is directly related to mismanagement but one sheep in a herd over a 1,000 is difficult to associate with poor management. Clearly, if such losses occur more than a few times, employers are not hesitant to confront the problem. But an occasional loss strikes every herd.

More apparent onstage resistance takes multiple forms; yet, like its offstage counterpart such resistance is not always aimed at structural change and often simply serves as a vent. For example, as I describe below, hired herders and employers are known, at times, to argue. Hired herders also mumble unsavory comments under their breath, talk back at times, or ride off in anger. Often, when herders simply do not agree with herd-owners decisions regarding pasturing or some other management decision, hired herders may make autonomous decisions as a form of resistance. However, these kinds of arguments often only take place between trusted long-term herders and herders who are related by kinship as employers would little tolerate insubordination from new or unrelated herders. When such arguments specifically concern contractual relations or the contract itself, they are aimed primarily at changes in the conditions or at least for the maintenance of conditions, agreements, and contracts. Several employers reported firing hired herders because of contract arguments.

One of the most talked about forms of on-stage resistance was drinking alcohol. Excessive alcohol consumption, although part and parcel to broader frames of expressing Mongolian masculinity, is an avenue through which hired herders often vent but also even resist. Therefore, drinking is in a way an onstage and offstage form of resistance. When herders would take time off to go into town and visit their families, some would not even bother going home. In more than one case, I heard reports of herders who came into town, bought vodka, and ended up at a friend's ger where they spent days on a bender. Below I describe some of the problems associated with this.

Part of the open resistance herders are displaying concerns the control of their bodies and time. Freely engaging in 'irresponsible' activities and doing what they will with their bodies on their own time affords a sense of self-controlled abandoned, where they are simultaneously their own masters and free. Moreover, going on a bender requires recovery time during which employers are reluctant to have hired herders out tending livestock. Part of this outlet is simply getting lost. In Undurxaan, where hired herders go for time off, simply finding the herder while he is on a bender can take time. Although such problems are at times related to alcoholism or

other problems such as gambling, drinking is clearly a partial rebellion. In many ways, though, drinking in excess can be self-defeating and countervail their sense of resistance and in turn reinforce employers' perceptions of the necessary and inherent need for dominating and oppressive measures. Moreover, if conditions worsen, employers may simply not tolerate it and fire them.

Clear open, on-stage resistance must be calculated. If a herders' intent is to maintain their employment simply shirking or refusal to work without a contract improvement or better conditions and treatment is their only option. Moreover, combining momentary refusal with calm, verbal address of complaints appeared, in my observation, to be the most successful pathway for change. This does not always work but within the cultural milieu of rural Mongolia such acts are considered the most dignified and might be considered. However, to confront an employer in such a way attempts to make the relationship one between social equals, even though they remain economic unequals. Because in this instance economic inequality is so intimately connected with social inequality, such confrontations are an affront to an employer's dominant position. Most herders would be somewhat reluctant to engage an employer in this way. I found that most hired herders acquiesced to their employers' wills and even when trusted employees asked for more, employers found such requests galling. Evidently, not all employers bow to demands. Below I discuss how one herder found themselves in a quandary when their employer countered his refusal to work.

The resistance of last resort of course is to simply exit the relationship. I found numerous hired herders who simply refused to continue to live under these conditions. Rather than sit by and work for limited benefit, many herders simply just move on. In a number of cases, I also found that herders would steal livestock when they exited the contract. In one case, as I have described elsewhere, a young herder simply took off with horses rather than quitting verbally. He simply disappeared.

Not all relationships are marked by such dynamics and I would be misrepresenting a number of relationships if I presented this picture. In some cases herd-owners try to prevent such problems through a good search and negotiation on the front end. This prevents a number of problems and also allows the relationship to become something significantly more as I describe below.

Lastly, none of the resistance I described here are about broader societal change, they concern only the conflict between individual herd-owners and laborers. In other words, hired herders when they resist are not attempting to alter that fundamental class dynamics that

undergird contractual relations. Rather, these forms of resistance are aimed at narrow changes in individual contracts.<sup>110</sup>

### ***Understanding Resistance: The Marmot***

When I arrived in the field in December of 2007, my host, Enkhjargal, was working as a hired herder for his mother-in-law, Tuya. Her sons were not involved in the everyday work of herding to a great degree and she depended on a hired herder, Batbileg, and her son-in-law to whom she gave a salary of 50,000 MNT a month and a sheep. During the first month, however, the other hired herder was missing. They told me that he had gone into the aimag center to take a little period of rest, no more than a week or two but had stayed nearly a month and a half until the middle of January, when, out of the blue, he appeared on his motorcycle ready to work. Admittedly, he had been binge drinking day in and day out, even visiting friends far away in other soums. When he arrived I was surprised at the way the other members the family interacted with him. He was nearly 50, older than all of them and clearly, should have been their social senior. However, he was treated with a level of disrespect I only saw shown to children. They referred to him derogatorily as the marmot man, a humiliating nickname. Moreover, they would often facetiously imitate a marmot by making buck-teeth, squeaky rodent sounds, and holding their hands up their chest. Although *ax-duu* principles should afford him respect and a sense of authority; he was often shown such contempt and was ordered around by unmarried women half his age, something that would be construed as an insult by other men his age. He also did all kinds of work even *geriin ajil* including the dishes, cooking, and cleaning. He did not always do these tasks, but he would assist whenever help was needed. I never witnessed another male herder in this group doing such work unless no women were present such as during Tsagaan Sar celebrations or during *otor*.

Moreover, he often came into conflict with his employers, arguing over money and livestock. He had been working for them for 6 years, since the mother's husband died. Since they all kept their stock together, he was paid collectively. They often complained of his laziness, drunkenness, and inability to acquire a wife. Even children joked with him, teasing him about not having a wife. I rarely ever witnessed an adult interacting in such fashion with their own children much less the children of others. They tried to limit his time in the aimag center for fear he would

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<sup>110</sup> There are no organized unions or other institutions through which herders could benefit their bargaining power. All of these relationships are part of the informal economy. They are considered by law as private agreements and are not illegal. Consequently, written contracts or agreements are to a degree enforceable. In actuality, no one would take a herder to court; rather, the simple of threat of involving the police is enough.



get 'lost' and go on a drinking binge again, which he was, admittedly, inclined to do. I can recall numerous instances when he would come into my ger in the middle of the night and beg for money so he could buy just one more *shil* or bottle.

Batbileg comes from an extremely poor family in Bayankhutag. His father died when he was young and his mother worked as a janitor for the negdel and continued this work with a major pay cut following democratization. He worked in various capacities, as a soldier, in construction, and odd jobs. He had no *xuvi* and did not receive animals from privatization. As he was living a destitute life in the soum center without a job of any kind, surviving on welfare payments, he took the herding job with this family. Without a wife and children he has little purpose in building up a herd. Being 50 and without a family puts one on the far margins of society. It is also a major source of shame and embarrassment.<sup>111</sup> These attributes did not aid Batbileg's bargaining power in negotiations or his ability to resist his employers' efforts at discipline.

In the early fall of 2008, he got into a dispute with his employers about time off and payment, and, subsequently, refused to come back out to the countryside. They were considering firing him and had a lot of reasons to do so, to be perfectly fair. He had not done well on the last migration when he drove the horses to the otor campsite and had been almost intentionally lazy. He would disagree more often, more openly, and more vocally than he had in the past. He was also mumbling obscenities under his breath and would handle equipment poorly and throw things around. His demeanor appeared to be borne of resentment and resistance. He argued he was not being paid fully and that he was being treated poorly. Although he was respected for his knowledge of horses, he was generally exposed to degrading reprimands in front of other people, publicly. When he went to the aimag center in September he refused to go back to the countryside. They asked him to get his clothes together and get in the truck but he simply said no and continued kneading dough to make noodles. Everyone looked around at each other in exasperation. Outside they said he was being *mayagtai* and that he was *sonin aashtai* (strange character) and *tom tolgoitai bolson* (got a 'big' head). Consequently, they hired a new herder. When I discussed this with them, they told me that Batbileg was not very good with sheep anyway and that they might need a shepherd to take over that role and let Batbileg stick with cattle and horses. However, for Batbileg, a narrowing of roles also represented a narrowing of bargaining power. Upon returning to the countryside, after hearing of the new herder, he was very angry. He was generally grumpy and belligerent. He responded by telling the other herder what to

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<sup>111</sup> The local bag governor informed who in the sample was not married so I that I did not have to ask them such questions. My host family made a point to tell me not to ask these questions of certain people as well.

do which simply worsened the situation as he found himself competing not with the other herder but with his employers.

In late September they hired a third herder and it was clear to Batbileg that he was being pushed out. Immediately, his behavior and demeanor began to change as he put forth increased effort, appear to be more interested in the work and welfare of the stock, and simply assented to his employer's directions. They eventually kept Batbileg on and fired the other two herders. One of the herders had stolen sheep from his previous employers, something they did not know when they hired him. The other herder was only hired for a short time, Oros Jagaa or the Russian Jaga, and did not intend to stay on full-time. He planned to stay a month, but after two weeks he came into the ger after putting the sheep and goats out to pasture and asked Tuya for a sheep, he was leaving and wanted a half-month salary. With the other two herders gone, Batbileg was back in his old position. With his bargaining power weakened he was in an increasingly vulnerable spot. Although he desired to change the conditions of the relationship, particularly the way he was being treated, he now could not. His brief attempt at resistance had had largely failed.

### **Beyond the Contract: Patronage and Clientalism**

Contracts are not simply the outcome of an apolitical bargaining process nor are contractual relations simply ones of oppressive domination. Contracts like all economic transactions, events, and processes, are part and parcel to sentiments, dispositions, and ideologies rooted in moral economies. In this sense, it has been argued, economies and economic action are embedded; however, in another sense they are 'embedded' only in that economic transactions, decisions, are calculated, strategized, and acted in 'conversation' with moral economic terms and currencies. In sum, I argue that economic acts are the result of mutually interacting dialectics of moral thought/desire and material conditions mediated by social interaction and individual agency.

In this way, understanding hired herding contracts requires a broader understanding of the social relationships and moral economies through which contractual relations are calculated. For example, amongst fathers and their sons, a slew of obligations and ideas about obligations and what they ought to be are brought to bear on everyday interactions and negotiations. In the same way hired herders interact with their employers. As some employers value some kinds of labor and remuneration over others they reflect not only their own personal economic strategies but also their moral sensibility and notion of right and wrong. This is no more clear than in the contexts where hired herders have become more like clients and employers more like patrons. The patron-client modality is not foreign in Mongolian and such relations pervade contemporary

rural society and have only been reinforced by the political and economic implications of the ‘transition’.

As I heard interviews and conversations, employers attempt to position themselves as patrons rather than solely as employers. They often refer to the remuneration afforded to hired herders and others as *maljuulax* which literally means ‘to make have livestock’ or ‘to restock’. This term focuses on the beneficent element of *buyan* or charity and reinforces the herd-owners’ claim of generosity and aid. Official awards such as *aimgiin sain malchin*, *ulsiin sain malchin* and *xudulmuurin baatar* require applicants to demonstrate the extent that they have *maljuulsan* or restocked other households. In 2008 during my time in the field one of the sampled households was in the process of being nominated by the soum governor for *Ulsiin Sain Malchin*. They listed every herder who Batnasan gave animals to as evidence of *maljuulax*. Each herder had to sign their name attesting to the ‘gift’ (*beleg* and *xandiv*). Most of these ‘gifts’ were presented either to his two sons, son-in-law, and other relatives, but three of them, the largest ‘gifts’, were in fact payments to herders. When I would talk especially to local officials about the contracts and hired herding they often would expound on the beneficial social impact of such relationships: lessening unemployment, giving poor households a chance, strengthening community, and the reinvigoration of Mongol tradition. Although herd-owners tend to ignore a broader view of their role, these sentiments of charity often conflict with a deeper need for ‘turning’ stock in the marketplace. In the following excerpt a local *myangat* employer explains his rationale for offering hired herding and lease herding contracts:

D: By doing this [contracting] are you able to grow your herds well? Is this profitable?

T: There are two sides. First, I can grow my herds well. Second, they have a livelihood now. I make these poor households have a livelihood, you see?

D: Yes, but is this profitable?

T: This is necessary of course. And, in my opinion, this is much easier for me. It frees me from doing work. If there are a 1000 animals being tended, I will distribute 300 female sheep here and 300 there and the herds will grow. And I improve the other person’s life. It is because of this I lease my livestock. Right now I have 3 households whose livelihoods I am improving. This here (looking up and around his 2-story house) is enough of a life for me. From this reason I want to improve their livelihoods and make these 3 households earn livestock. And of course my herds will grow.

D: So you want to improve their lives out of good will (*sain dur*)?

T: Yes, this is how I think about this.

D: Why do you want to raise people’s livelihoods?

T: For a person who has done labor amongst the Mongolian people we should make the animals increase and they are increasing. I am giving because it means one Mongolian life will improve. I do not think just of my own life and property. This household in one year will support 3 households. After three years another 3 households. And maybe they will support another three households. It goes like this so that it will become 4,5,10,20, 30 households will have livelihoods. I think it is a good idea that we live to improve just one Mongol household. Some say ‘I just live

for my own *biznes* and that is enough'. No I do not live like this. I think to improve just one Mongolian household and raise their livelihoods.

Interestingly, in another interview he referred to himself as a bank, an odd contrast the portrayal he presents here.<sup>112</sup> This attempt to paternalize contractual relations through discourses of poverty alleviation and mutual aid draws on other cultural frames of beneficence and exchange. In many ways, as I discuss in greater detail in the next chapter, patron-client relationships are similar in a number of ways to both father-son relations and mountain spirit-worshipper relations. There are important reasons why men can be like mountains as I described in chapter 6.

But this kind of moral foreground is not just verbal gloss. In many ways, I found that herd-owners had deep convictions about the beneficial impact that such opportunities have on other households. Yet, it was also clearly evident that some relations were oppressive and dominating. The local bag governor explained this dichotomy. He explain to me that sure it was possible some employers simply feel a deeper sense of concern for the poor and desire to provide aid to those in need, but he said that much of the difference lies in the kinds of herders employers recruit and the ways they sift through possible employees and weed out bad seeds. He argued that employers who appeared to offer beneficial contracts and had higher rates of actually improving households positions by permitting them to branch off as successful independent herd-owners were able to do so by limiting such opportunities only to the most capable and evidently driven herders. Additionally, these herd-owners also had a deeper history of contracting, having been wealthy longer and with more experience than new myangat, who tend to offer the worst contracts. He pointed out that by the time a hired herder was able to reach a three year agreement with Batdalai or some other older myangat, they were nearly guaranteed to reach the end of their contract and in fact the data I collected seem to back this up. Many herd-owners who offered poor contracts also seem to go through numerous herders and for various time frames. Others, like Batdalai, have short one-month or three-month contracts and then long term three to six year agreements. It was in such situations that herd-owners offered the best contracts. There are other reasons why this is the case as I explain below. Here though, it is important to understand the dynamics of patron-clientalism and the implications it has both for exchange but also for resource use and vulnerability to various hazards.

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<sup>112</sup> One of his former employees remarked that 'he only does this for pride and to be a big man (*tom xun*)'. This is not mutually exclusive of his portrayal of such dynamics as charitable; rather, they are part and parcel to the same phenomenon. His 'charity' confers both status and privilege on his part, an important aspect of being a '*tom xun*'.

Most contracts last only 3 years, and, as I describe later, the length of contracts is getting shorter and shorter. Herders who make it to three years become a valuable resource as one who has demonstrated not just capability but also loyalty. It takes a delicate balancing act to achieve such longevity. Yet, in a number of cases I found that former hired herders continued their dependent relationship with their former employer through more favorable client-based relations. The continuation of patronage in this case is founded both on mutual loyalty, respect, and friendship and clear material strategies for both the patron and the client.

Two of the former hired herders of Batdalai continue to cooperate with him as clients, herding his animals from time to time, providing labor assistance from time to time and collectively moving as part of this *buleg*. He is able to entice their loyalty with gifts of horses and cattle, large animals signifying the graduation of their relationship from one of economic dependency to something slightly different. There is also a lingering air of duty, obligation, and respect these clients feel for their former employer whose beneficence has allowed them to attain a 'new level of livelihood' (*amijirgaani tuvshin*). But enticement and residual sentiments only masks more important reasons for the continued relationships. Bayar and Dugar, the two herders, also depend to a great extent on Batdalai's ability to mobilize a large grouping of households which helps secure access to territory. Batdalai is also an important source of knowledge and experience, an asset neither herder would like to dispose of any time soon. For Batdalai, he is able to access a greater array of resources. Bayar is originally from Tumentsogt soum in Sukhbaatar aimag and Dugar is from Murun soum to the north, both of which border Bayankhutag soum. Batdalai placed his animals with Dugar in the winter of 2008 when the zud conditions developed in Uguumur. Bayar cooperated with Batdalai in spring helping him operate the well near his spring campsite and helping with numerous activities while Batdalai completed his search for a new hired herder. Moreover, for Batdalai, these relationships help reinforce his position vis a vis members of his own kin group by lessening his need for mutual cooperation with costly kin and gives him a broader range of options. His kin, however, still rely on his wisdom and authority in mobilize the group for collective migration. This shift in power, in turn, strengthens his position within the group as he continues to receive cooperation but with less investment on his part.

In many ways the three, Batdalai, Dugar, and Bayar, act like kin neighbors do in other areas but there is a clear distinction in their social standing. The dynamics is marked not only by the principles of *ax-duu* but also by the history of employee-employer relations. These dynamics have important implications, not the least because such relationships are becoming more and more common in Uguumur. In the next section I look at the increasing importance of contractual relationships in the herding economy contra 'traditional' forms of cooperation.

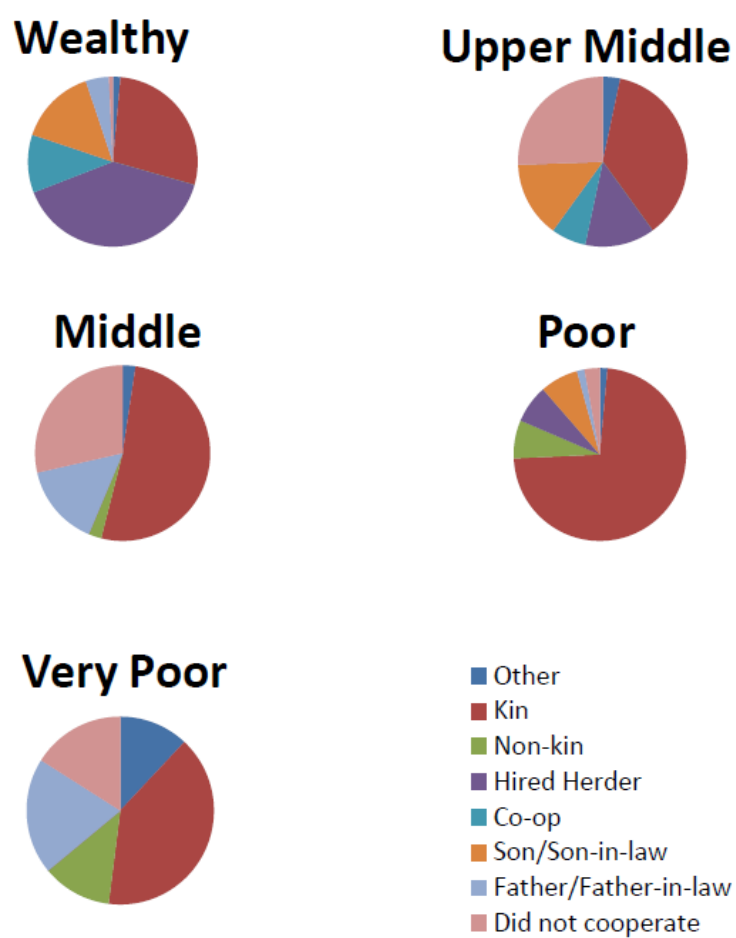
## **From Kin to Contract**

Increasingly, herders, particularly the wealthy, are accessing additional labor through contractual relations rather than kin ones. As we see below in Figure 4.1 this is borne out by a statistical analysis of household labor exchange in Uguumur. Very wealthy households disproportionately supply their labor from wage relationships and have a higher proportion of sons and official cooperative labor than other categories. In contrast, the poorer the household, the more dependent they become on kin based cooperation, except for the very poor category whose livestock holdings are below 100 head of stock.<sup>113</sup> As we see it is the wealthy and, particularly, the middle class of herders that disproportionately did not cooperate or hire labor. These households both lack the resources to employ others and to invest in kin cooperation to a great degree. The reasons for this are twofold: (1) middle wealth households have herds too large to cooperate and too small to hire and (2) middle wealth households have no labor surplus to exchange or invest with wealthy households.

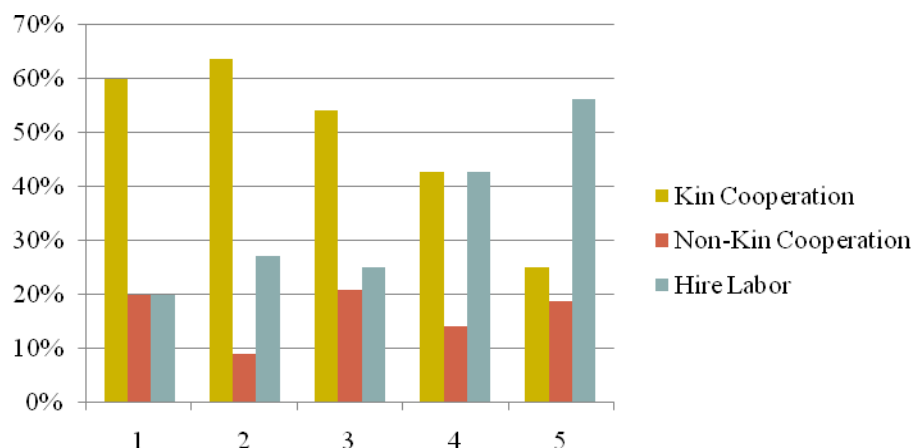
The distribution of labor resources amongst the different categories reflects the ability of households within those categories to call on diverse sources of labor. Moreover, it reflects the kind of labor they are capable of drawing on. For example, wealthy herd-owners are capable of accessing flexible and subservient forms of labor in sons and hired employees which allow them to ease the timing, sequencing, and spatial constraints that productive tasks pose. For the poor and middle classes they are limited to cooperative kin for the most part because they cannot afford to hire unrelated labor. The payment in livestock would cut into their herds. Cooperation with kin as I have described is much more complicated, uncertain, and costly than other forms of labor exchange. The time and effort needed to generate beneficial, lasting, and intensive enough labor exchange relationships through cooperation are quite costly. More importantly, the delicate balance of power and material benefit is so difficult to master as to be prohibitive. Because of the considerably clearer distributions of authority and material benefit, employment and the use of sons is significantly more flexible. This is not lost on herd-owners and so those who can afford it are increasingly hiring labor. Households were asked if they needed extra labor from whom would they prefer to acquire it, and the differences in practice are reflected in preference as well with wealthier households disproportionately favoring the hiring of labor to kin cooperation. This is displayed in Figure 4.2 below.

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<sup>113</sup> This is largely due to the fact that these households make up the employee class from which employers draw labor.



*Figure 4.1. Percentage of labor source by wealth category. (Compiled from household survey data)*



*Figure 4.2. Labor exchange preference by wealth category. 1 = poorest, 5 = wealthiest.  
(Compiled from household survey data)*

Clearly, hired herding plays a significant role in the rural labor market. Moreover, in Figure 4.3 below we see that this preference has grown over time. We also see that the number of contracts has significantly increased over time and that, with contractual relations becoming increasingly entrenched in the social fabric of Uguumur, contract periods are becoming progressively shorter. There are a number of possible reasons for why this might be the case. In 2000 a disastrous *zud* struck many herds in Uguumur leading to a number of households becoming stockless, creating a large labor pool from which wealthy herd-owners can draw on. At the same time many of the hired herders were neither from Uguumur nor from Bayankhutag. Yet, other soums were also affected, so the labor pool in the aimag center, where most herd-owners hire from and where the unemployed settle, also increased. As unemployment has increased so has the potential pool of labor. In turn contracts periods would go down as employers can afford to hire and fire herders relatively quickly. Another reason, however, could be that there has been a huge increase in the numbers of wealthy households or *myangat* who need additional labor. As their herds and the need for labor have grown, herd-owners are reluctant to cooperate with kin who are pre-occupied with their own herds. In turn, the contract period may reflect a true average as the number of contracts has risen and become representative. Regardless it is clear that hired herding is a favored source of labor provision and has become more so over time.



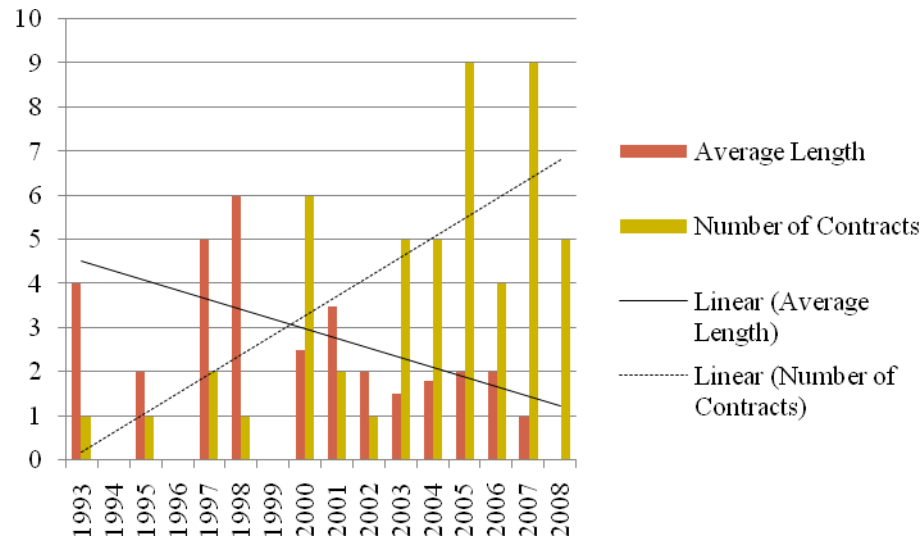


Figure 4.3. Number of contracts by year and average length of contract period with linear trendlines. (Compiled from household survey data).

These developments have important implications for discussing vulnerability to hazards like those that contribute to *zud*. In contemporary Mongolia, accessing pastures in times of distress is dependent on the ability to mobilize labor. With hired herding, wealthy households are beneficially positioned to be highly flexible and mobile in times of stress. They are no longer dependent on complex kin relationships for labor and although collective migration is an important resource use strategy as I describe in the chapters 7 and 9, many wealthy herders, as they accrue hired herders and client households, are less dependent on such cooperative affairs. Hired herding, simply in labor terms, has its benefits as I have described in this chapter. Yet, during the period of field research it was evident that hired herding and lease herding arrangements were important risk management tools not accessible to everyone. This has clear and important implications for household livestock mortality.

For the poor to middle households and even some few wealthy households who cannot afford to hire or lease out herds, they must come to depend on either intrahousehold labor or cooperation with others. But as I have shown, increasingly, child labor in households is becoming constrained as children leave for educational and work opportunities in Ulaanbatar. Cooperation with other households is also a limited option. First of all, as I have stated, middle households are reluctant to settle cooperatively with other middle wealth households, both because of the political ramifications and because of the ecological consequences of overgrazing. Additionally, cooperating with non-kin is highly problematic. Cooperating with kin is also problematic. Kin cooperation requires a delicate balance of personality and power that anyone who has siblings can

attest. The disciplinary mechanisms needed to maintain and coordinate labor tasks simply cannot be deployed because of complex micro-politics of domination and resistance. Moreover, the reciprocal nature of such cooperation can be costly and in time may even become imbalanced. Lastly, coordinating kin labor for collective migrations or other activities during times of stress is cumbersome and difficult to mobilize because of these very reasons. Consequently, many middle wealth and even poor households go it alone. Or if they do cooperate are less flexible than the *myangat* in their strategies. This is a risky state of existence in the face of the extreme hazards the Mongolian environment presents. The incapacity to increase economies of scale and manage risk render these households particularly vulnerable.

Yet, not all households are similarly exposed. Poor households have the opportunity to become hired herders. Moreover, poor households are also able to cooperate with other poor kin, although the capabilities entailed in cooperation are clearly limited by their very poverty. Additionally, many middle wealth households are sons, sons-in-law, or clients of *myangat*. In this case, they benefit from their ax's capacity for securing additional labor and overcoming the costs entailed in fleeing disaster. These dynamics are critical to understanding how some households come to lose greater percentages of livestock than others. I tackle this issue in chapter 9.

## **Conclusion: The Meaning of Labor and Work**

The shift from kin-based cooperative labor networks to contractual employment relationships amongst segments of the rural population, although not universal, is significant in Uguumur and forms one of the core processes of social and cultural change. In addition to the implication such developments have for vulnerability and risk management, such processes also have important implications for the meaning of work, the value of labor, and the ways in which certain people have become positioned within the socio-cultural matrix or rural society.

In these emergent class dynamics, the difference between *zaxuu* and *ajiltai* has taken on a central importance in rural Uguumur, dissecting society into the deserving few and the fated many. Time after time, in interviews, herd-owners said that those who get wealthy are *ajiltai* and those who do not are *zaxuu* or lazy, even the poor.

Herder S: In my opinion they must want to make themselves work. A person must live to do work if they are healthy. There are many households who just live without a care and depend on help. This means they will just live off the budget of our nation. If someone truly has no work ability, no labor ability, then we can give to them. We of course need to give to those who are not able to work. But it is bad to give money and help to those who can work. It is meaningless to give money and things to healthy people who will not work hard and just live without a care. Still, we can help provide jobs for such people. But they must be made to live by their own work. If the state keeps giving money and your foreign aid organizations keep giving money there is no need for me to tend my livestock. In that way, life will become meaningless, if a person will not do work.

Herd-owners are suspect of hired herders because clearly they must be lazy if they are poor. Some herd-owners had sophisticated understandings of the various reasons why a herder may or may not be poor, but others did not view things in this way. This is not the spread of some amorphous, super-organic neo-liberal logic, even though they exhibit striking similarities, but rather a result of the current conditions and a need to explain and legitimate the clear and unambiguous differentiation that has occurred in the last 17 years. Moreover, these sentiments of essential difference are, as Kideckel (1995) has argued, also a result of living under socialism. Herders told me that during socialism people could be lazy and still earn a living. Livestock privatization and decollectivization have only allowed such 'natural differences' to be laid bare. Differences of wealth, i.e. herds, serve as a marker both of individual merit and individual ability or *chadal*, also translated as 'power'.

Yet, this understanding is not hegemonic. It competes with other narratives about misfortune and poverty. For example, there are other equally important frameworks of aid for the deserving poor, but this is built on the idea that such aid is based on the inability to work. Consequently, ability to work becomes the prime marker of difference between the justified helpless and the lazy poor, between charity and wage. Moreover, as labor becomes increasingly inexpensive, the production of wealth becomes conceptually removed from the labor process and the material and symbolic denigration of the poor is further reinforced by low wages. One's wealth is no longer associated with actual, physical work; rather, it becomes increasingly associated with something else entirely, such as merit, fate, destiny, *chadal*, or simply 'the way things are'.

## Chapter 5 *Minii Nutag*: Changing Modes of Property and Access to Land in the Age of the Market

*When there was a drought in the pastureland of herder Dorj, what would have happened, if, on saying that he would stay with the herder Shinebayar in neighboring soum, Shinebayar chased after him with a gun saying, “What do you mean, coming onto my land without permission, you wretched animal”? When the snow fell and famine gripped the winter quarters of the herder Odonbaatar and he went to stay on the nearby fertile land of the herder Bohisharga, did Bohisharga say to him “you can spend the winter here if you give me two camel calves, twenty sheep, one horse, and three cows, but if not, then go home!”? A shepherd named Bold decided he would own a well near to which some families from a certain area would camp from time to time. Bold covered and secured the well and demanded a rent from the people. He said to them, “If you want to be here then each family must give me ten sheep each!” but of course they refused. They said to him “Don’t be ridiculous! There have been many people around this well before you!” And thus they overwhelmed him and suppressed his idea.*

*Dashbalbar, Poet and Politician  
From “The Battle for Our Land Has  
Begun”*

*In today’s market generation, there is nothing without a price.*

*Herder’s wife in Uguumur  
Summer 2008*

### Introduction

In this chapter I look at the variety of claims herders make on resources. In particular I focus on campsites and to a lesser extent pasture. As made clear in the previous two chapters, campsite access makes a mobile livelihood possible. When herders migrate through the social and political landscape from campsite to campsite they are moving through various, overlapping, complex fields of property. Although research on pastoral peoples has long held a deep interest in matters of property and access, in recent years such work has given way to, on the one hand, a ubiquitous and unquestioned acceptance of common property as the institutional foundation of mobile pastoral communities, or, on the other hand, a focus on how such institutions have given

way to state-enacted or development-induced private claims. What follows here challenges the neatness of common property theory and the unilinear pathway of privatization narratives.

In this chapter I look at what kinds of rights herders claim over campsites, the way those rights are conferred, new pathways for exchanging rights, the ways herders and formal institutional monitor, defend and enforce those rights, and the disputes that stem from the ambiguities and uncertainties of property and governance.

The quotes cited above contrast two viewpoints. The first is a quote from an urban poet, Dashbalbar, known for his valorization of traditional Mongolian ‘nomadic’ culture (*Mongol ardiin ulamjiliin nuudelchnii soyol*). In the mid 1990s as a member of parliament he resisted the emergence of policies that aimed to privatize land. The quote above is taken from a collection of his work called “the Battle for Our Land has Begun” and exemplifies to him how herders would proceed if land privatization proponents, which he accuses of being ‘foreign’-minded, triumphed over traditional Mongolian values which he believes herders hold so dear. This impression, that herders abhor ‘private’ claims to land or other resources and cling unquestioningly to tradition and custom, does not match the lives I witnessed in Uguumur. Herders, I found, are largely quite savvy and strategic about the complexities, ambiguities, and situational nature of property, access, and rights in the contemporary rural political economy. In fact each scenario Dashbalbar paints in the quote above occurred during my time in Uguumur; although, firearms were absent. In contrast, the simple quote from one female Uguumur herder in reference to campsite rents demonstrates the ways in which either rural society has drastically changed or the fact that it simply never was.

## **History of Land**

As this dissertation argues, rights and claims, whether formal or informal (or even as resistance to hegemonic property forms), are in practice bound up with the administrative regimes and the various political forces at play in historical time. Clearly, this is evident in contemporary Uguumur. This is no less true in the past. As will be shown here, claims of property and access are intimately tied to the historical elements at play in their time. The sense of a boundless, open steppe upon which a free-ranging nomadic lifestyle could exist has, at least as historical references show, never been the case in Mongolia. Moreover, with the emergence of Manchu imperial rule, ‘common’ pasturelands were intimately integrated into the authority apparatus of the state (*tur*) and strictly regulated by formal law, enforcement institutions, and various kinds of punishments, fines, and fees. Yet, it is the socialist period with the advent of collectives that control over land by the state are taken to the greatest extreme. As Natsagdorj (1967) long ago

pointed out, in Mongolian social history, it is “the authority to allocate pastures and to control the routes and the timing for shifting camp (which) has been one of the pillars of power.”

### **Pre-Socialism 1206-1911**

Little is known about land relations prior to the emergence of Chinggis Khan and the establishment of the imperial Borjigin nobility. What we are able to know, though, can be traced from the life of the great Khan himself and the famous text *The Secret History of the Mongols* (*Nuuts Tovchoo*). It is clear that territorial control over land was evinced through sheer force. Control over people and the right to rule were legitimated at times through clan structures but also through a kind of patron-clientalism in which military leadership and success in battle with rival clans were fundamental. Consequently, shifting alliances between clans and allegiance within them significantly impacted control over and access to land.

After the development of the imperial administration and the emergence of the *Altan Uрга*, or Golden Lineage as the Borjigin were called, as feudal overlords in the Mongolia steppe, however, we increasingly are able to obtain glimpses of administrative authority and the development of rights to land. Following the establishment of the Mongol state in 1206, Chinggis Khan established the decimal system of administrative and military authority amongst the steppe elite, dividing households into groupings of 10 (*aravt*), 100 (*zuut*), 1,000 (*myangad*), and 10,000 (*tumen*) (Bold 1996). Each of these administrative populations was overseen by a leader.<sup>114</sup> Originally these leaders could be derived from various clans or as individuals who rendered some kind of special service to the Khan. Over time, however, these positions become inherited titles afforded only to noble descendants in the Borgijin clan. Each were awarded territorial fiefs by the great khans over which they established administrative and military control. Groups of *aravt* or even *zuut* moved within the territory of their *tumen* or *myangad* as *xuree*, large groupings of households that moved collectively across the landscape within the territorial authorities. These groups were capable of moving great distances.

*Altan товч* one of the most important sources of Mongolia history, reports that in the 13<sup>th</sup> century Mongolian tribes who kept livestock in the spacious pasture land of the eastern Khentii mountains between the voluminous Kherlen and Onon rivers, often moved in autumn far northeast to the Ulz river. The reason for this was the salty soils. (Bold 1999: 53)

Rights to pasture were largely a function of membership in the various levels of the administrative system, depending on the level of authority. Clearly, leaders of *tumen* and

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<sup>114</sup> Natsagdorj (1967: 267): “In 1206, Temujin, in founding his realm, bestowed lands and subjects on his military commanders. These commanders had the right to rule their territories, which means that they could allocate pasture rights to their subjects and also revoke.”

*myangad* retain rights of first use above those of other smaller groups such as the *zuut* and *aravt*. But the inclusion of *aravt* and *zuut* within these groups also allowed them access. With the strict hierarchy in place, distinctions of right were clear. As William of Rubruck observed, ‘every captain according to whether he has more or fewer men under him, knows the limit of his pasturage and where to feed his flock in winter, summer, spring, and autumn’ (cited in Sneath 2001).

In the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century, after the collapse of the Mongol Yuan dynasty, the separate regions of Mongolian came under the authority of various Khan, such as the Tsetsen Khan, Tushet Khan, Zasagt Khan, and eventually the Sain Noyon Khan (Bawden 1968). These aimag became territorial units administered by the noble class or *noyod* of the *tsagaan yas* or ‘white bone’ (Vreeland 1954). Commoners, subjects or *xaryat* of the noble class, were of the *xar yas* or ‘black bone’. The *noyod*, made up of members of the Borgijin clan, were divided into classes of *taij* and *xux* or *xun taij*. *Taij* were direct descendants of Chinggis, the Altan Urga, and the *xun taij* were, rather, indirect descendants, such as through Chinggis’s brothers, but still members of the Borgijin ‘clan’. *Xun taij*, unlike the *taij*, could not administer territory and did acquire more than a few retainers. With the changes in administration coming the 16<sup>th</sup> century the *xuree* organization of movement faded and smaller groupings of *xoroo* evolved in its place (Synkiwiecz 1983). Moreover, rights to land, particularly campsites, were formalized in actual legal edicts such as the Mongol-Oirat Regulations of 1640 which stated:

If anybody hammers in a post on a site where the ger of someone else has been broken or should again be put up, he will be punished. If the site belongs to a prince, the culprit will be fined six times nine animals. If the site belongs to common people, the culprit will be fined nine animals. (Riasanovksy 19 65: 49)

Increasingly, the state apparatus governing the Mongol lands became embroiled in a complex bureaucracy, intimately woven into the hereditary politics of the nobles. The increasing bureaucratization of administration and authority, however, flourished to a much greater extent in the 18<sup>th</sup> century after the accession of Manchu Qing imperial control in 1691.

After 1691 the territories of what is now Mongolia came under the authority of the Lifanyuan, which under the authority of the Emperor, administered external affairs for the Qing imperial state apparatus. The goal was to maintain the Mongol lands as a buffer state between themselves and the Russian empire while also subduing the ability of Mongol nobility to organize and mount a rebellion against the Manchu state. Much of this was accomplished by further dividing lands and tying Mongol nobles into Qing-controlled webs of privilege and status. Within the territory of the Mongol lands, the Manchu authorities designated lands as: 1) imperial pastureland such as the Dariganga in present-day Sukhbaatar aimag, 2) territory of the relay

stations or *urtuu*, 3) military administered territory for the border watch-posts or *xaruul*, 4) monastic territories (*shavi* estates), and 5) territories belonging to *xoshuu* or princely estates. Imperial pasturelands were directly administered by the imperial state. The territory of the *urtuu* and military watch-posts were administered by the Lifanyuan representatives or *amban* in Urga. Monastic territory came under the authority of the *jas* or *ix shavi* the over-arching authority of Buddhist monastic affairs, later to be subsumed under the Bogd Khan. Finally, the territories of the *xoshuu* were administered by princes and various other ranking nobles.

Most of the territory consisted of the latter. Overtime though the system of territorial governance became more complex. In 1691 there were 34 *xoshuu*. By 1911 there were 115 *xoshuu* and 12 *shavi* or monastic estates, including other various territorial units administered in diverse ways by the Chinese representative authorities. In Urga, the appointed imperial representative, *amban*, served as overseer of territorial administration. The *amban* was in effect a technocrat who had little authority to overrule decisions made by the *zasag* princes who were subjects (lit. bool or slaves) directly only to the emperor. However, the *amban* oversaw the emperor's interests and ensured the policies of Lifanyuan were enacted. In each aimag, the *amban* assigned representatives served similar roles. With the increasingly complexity of land relations in the Mongol territory the development of administrative systems and bureaucracy became increasingly important.

Mongol society was divided, as during pre-Manchu times, into nobles and commoners. Nobles or *noyod* could attain various ranks depending on their birth and the rendering of important services to their overlords or even the emperor. At the highest level were the *zasag noyon* or 'ruling princes', followed by *van*, *beile*, *beise*, *gun*, *taij*, and *xun taij*. Each retained *khamjilga* or feudal serfs who provided various degrees of corvee and tax.<sup>115</sup> Each level of the hierarchy was subordinated to the level above it and tied territorially to their respective units. By the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, the large *xoshuu* once again became aimag ruled over by the *zasag noyon*. Within aimag were smaller *xoshuu* ruled over by various ranking members of their aimag. In each aimag and in Urga, there was a large civil service made up of various nobles and freemen or *darxan*. *Tuslagch taij* or *zaxiragch taij* were nobles charged with the day-to-day running of affairs in the various territorial units in accordance with the *zasag noyon* and the *amban* representative. Below the *xoshuu* were *soum* and *bag*. Within these units, *darga* were elected from amongst the *taij* class. A range of other deputies and specialists acted in various administrative positions

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<sup>115</sup> Various ranks were afforded a set number of *khamjilga*. For example, *chin van* received 60 households, *jun van* 50, *beile* 40, *beise* 35, *gun* 30, *tabunang* (son-in-law of a *van*) 20-40 depending on class, *taij* of 1<sup>st</sup> class 15 households, 2<sup>nd</sup> class 12, 3<sup>rd</sup> class 8, 4<sup>th</sup> class 4, and poor *taij* received none.



depending on the *xoshuu* and *aiamg*. *Xun taij*, non-governing nobles, kept titles but were excluded from any real governing role in the Manchu period. They were required like commoners to pay taxes, but were exempt from corvee to their overlords or to the imperial state. These *taij* could often be very poor and even have retainers that were wealthier than they. However, *taij* at this level had no access to formal power and must be considered generally similar to commoners.

Commoners (*xarts* or *xars*) were also divided into several classes. The *darxan* or freemen were a small class exempt from tax and corvee who had rendered a special service to the emperor or a ruling *taij*. *Darxan* were usually employed as tradespeople such as silversmiths or carpentry. *Khamjilga* as I have mentioned were feudal retainers, belonging specifically to various ranks of *taij*. *Khamjilga* were responsible for paying tax to the state and rendering corvee, a range of services including any imaginable pastoral task, even lending transport livestock to *noyod*, but not state services such as military (*tsergiin alba*) or relay posts (*urtuu* or *ulaa*). *Khamjilga* were attached to lords who in turn ruled over specific territories; consequently, *khamjilga* could only reside in and use the resources of their territorial *noyon*. *Albat*, in contrast, were not attached to nobles but were subjects of the state and therefore rendered taxes and corvee to the state. *Albat* performed military and post duties and provided horses and other material supplies to these state services. *Bool*, or slaves, were, like *darxan*, a small class made up of orphans and marginal peoples who were sold into slavery. This practice, however, gradually died out over time. Lastly, were the *shavi*.

The *shavi* were effectively *khamjilga* but on monastic estates ruled over by various high-ranking lamas, who also could themselves be *taij*. These territories however were not subject to the oversight of the *amban* and imperial authorities in the same way *xoshuu* were. Consequently, *shavi* were not subject to the same requirements of tax and corvee. However, they were required to pay a kind of tax to the *shavi* estate and render services such as herding estate livestock which most households did. Interestingly, similar to *xoshuu*, it was the wealthier herders who sought after to herd *taviul mal* or put stock. I describe this to a greater extent in the chapter on labor. In the operation of the estate, the head lama, typically a *gegeen*, *xutagt*, or *xuvilgan*, controlled the *jas* or the estate's assets include land and herds. Under the highest-ranking lama were other levels of administration including the *zaisan* (also called *santsav*) and *ix darga*. The *zaisan* and *ix darga* served as administrators of the *otog* or districts of the monastic estate. Below them were *darga* of several sorts including at the smallest level, the *arvan urxtei darga* or 'boss of ten households' who was typically a local senior male. Many of the *shavi* and other functionaries were lamas themselves, even if they had families. Many lamas were only so in name but lived lives indistinguishable from *khamjilga*. Movement and pastures within the temple territories were

formally under the control of the highest-ranking lama, but various levels controlled this to varying degrees. The terms of service in *shavi* territories were so beneficial, though, that many *khamjilga* and other classes sought to escape their home territories and become *shavi* themselves. In the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was possible to be sold from a noble to lama. However, by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century this practice was forbidden. Nobles could also donate territory and *khamjilga* to a high-ranking lama in order to form an estate. The Bogd Khan often received territories in such ways. In fact Uguumur belonged for a time to the *Ix Shavi* of the Bogd Khaan.<sup>116</sup> Uguumur was administered by the *shavi* authorities in Urga.

Whether on monastic estates or *xoshuu* territorial control was vested in the ruling *zasag*. As Bawden (1968) demonstrates:

A letter from a banner office in Sain Noyon Khan Aimak to the League Chief of the aimag in 1877: ‘Only the lord of the land, and the *zasag* (governor or prince) subject to him, may control the grass and water within pasture area. No one else has any authority’. (89)

The ultimate ‘lord of the land’ was, in fact, the emperor. Again Bawden (1968: 90) states, “In theory the land in Mongolia was property of the Qing (Chinese) Emperor, who enfeoffed the banner [*xoshuu*] princes. In turn these allotted pastures to their subjects for their use.” As Sneath (2001) makes clear, *xoshuu* princes (*zasag*) and administrators of monastic territory, in relation to the emperor, occupied a ‘custodial’ position. Although all authority in theory rested only with these authorities, in practice, custodial relations and the obligations, duties, and authorities they implied were also delegated at each successive level.

Accompanying this emergent bureaucracy were also novel legal edicts. The edict known as the Khalkha Jirum, compendium of 24 legal declarations based on Mongol common law, were issued over the course of 61 years from 1709 to 1770 (Rasinovsky 1965). These legal acts emerged from assemblies or *chuulgan* of the ruling princes of the four major aimag. The acts specifically address land issues:

If a ger has already been broken, the *utug* [site] still belongs to the owner of the ger. If two people seeking an *utug-buuts* [site] arrive simultaneously at a location favorable for the winter and spring site, then it belongs to him who saw it first. If the two saw it simultaneously then the site belongs to him who first came and struck the place with his whip. (Riasanovsky 1965: 114)

If an individual herder of his own accord leaves his *xoshuu* for a neighboring one and settles between the two *xoshuu* he must be brought back. If he does not belong to an *otog*, let him belong to an *otog*. If he does not belong to an aimag, let him belong to an aimag. (Bold 1996: 47)

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<sup>116</sup> A number of the Bogd Khan’s highest ranking clerks were from Uguumur.

Moreover, fines were assessed for those who failed to follow such rules. For example, as Bold (1996: 47) points out, “soums and *khamjilgas* who crossed *xoshuu* borders with their livestock and without the knowledge of their lord were to forfeit their entire livestock to the *xoshuu* prince into whose territory they had entered.”

As the imperial apparatus and territorial administrative system took on ever increasing complexity, land relations, too, were altered in new ways. The Lifanyuan, consistently mapped and remapped territorial boundaries. These boundaries were marked by *ovoo* or stone cairns that have been used for centuries to mark spiritually significant ‘places’ in which various spirits and entities inhabited. As legal documents show, many land disputes concerned the appropriate placement of *ovoo* (cite land relations text). Moreover, as Bold (1996) demonstrates, new words and concepts began to enter the Mongol lexicon such as: *nutgiin sav* (territorial region), *nutgiin dees* (territorial border), *nutag xuux* (territorial expulsion), *nutag xuraax* (confiscation of territory), *nutag tsagdax* (surveillance and monitoring of territory), *nutag evdex* (change of right to use territory). Additionally, the measuring and classification of land (*nutag deeslex* and *nutag savlax*) became common as new units of measure were introduced such as *gazar* (land), *beer* (mile), *on tusax gazar*, *eriin gazar* (land in which a single man could inhabit), *ald gazar*, and *xuvi gazar* (private or share of land).<sup>117</sup>

Administration of lands however, incorporated a certain amount of flexibility. Although administrative rule was strict, cross-border movements were allowed as long as users paid a fee. As Bawden (1968: 89) points out: “In another case banner officials insisted that several commoners move with their animals south of a river, but by giving the officials over 160 sheep and 20 rubles the plaintiffs obtained permission to stay on the better northern side until the weather became warm.” Moreover, Natsagdorj (1963: 107) quotes an 1885 edict by Tsetsen Khan, who ruled for a time over Uguumur: “In the event of a drought or *zud*, in order to keep livestock from their pasture, each person must carefully examine the situation, searching for a means not to scatter too far, and must return immediately to his original *nutag* when the weather improves” (cited in Bawden 1968: 90).

The shifting practices of rule implemented during the Manchu period had important effects on the use of pastureland and understandings of rights. The limitations on movement

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<sup>117</sup> “In despatches [sic] about litigation between feudal nobles and *arat* over land awards the so-called *eriin gazar* [‘adult man’s land’] is mentioned. For example, in a dispatch from Gezebal, ruler of Tusheet Khan aimag, we read: ‘In 1805, on account of insufficiency of pastures, the administration of the league allotted to me 15 *eriin gazar*’; that is land for 15 men.” (Bold 1996: 268)

forced local households to invest in various local campsites to a greater extent than in the past. *Utug-buuts* or winter and spring campsites were the most important. Natsagdorj (1967) argues that “in due course if the same family wintered in the same quarters for a long time, the spot automatically became their property”, a right that was recognized by the broader community.<sup>118</sup> Individual property claims to *uvuljuu* became so entrenched that, as Natsagdorj (1967) reports, there were even cases of the buying, selling, and renting of *uvuljuu*. Herders would mark their winter and spring campsites with stones, cairns, buildings, and other features that signified an intent to return. It was generally recognized that unmarked sites could be used by anyone as long as it was within the territorial boundaries of the *xoshuu*. *Belcheer-us* sites, meaning summer and autumn camps, were not recognized in such a way and were, in theory, common grazing land.

Yet, ruling princes (as opposed to non-ruling princes) had superseding authority in choice of campsites and would often set aside the best pastures for their own use. Sneath (1999: 36) “the banner prince had exclusive rights to fine pasture, close to good water sources, and this was managed by a servant (*zarts*). He would drive off those found trespassing, or refer the case to the banner office if he considered it more serious.” Natsagdorj (1967) concurs:

The monopolistic right of a *zasag* to rule territory of a *xoshuu* is confirmed by the fact that he selected for himself the best tracts, especially winter pastures, with the best grass-cover. Areas for the winter and autumn moves of the *noyon* were designated well in advance, and markers were set up, forbidding ordinary *arat* to camp there; and special watch-posts might even be set up. (267-8)

*Noyon* further enforced their rights by driving off non-local or even trespassing local households. They used tactics, very similar to ones I describe below for contemporary Uguumur, called *nutag xuux* and *nutag xuraax* in which they drove off households and their herds.

In order to drive the *arat* away from places where they had made long-term camps, the *xoshuu* administrations sent men out on patrol in all directions at definite and rigidly enforced intervals; even in severe winter weather they drove the *arat* away from their warm winter quarters out into exposed country. There were cases of undisciplined behavior by men on ‘restraint of domicile’ duty: they cut the outer bands which hold the felt on the tent-frame, stampeded cattle in all directions, etc. There were severe penalties in some *xoshuu* for *arat* who on their own initiative left the areas assigned to them. (Natsagdorj 1967: 269)

The *zasag*’s power over campsites could even threaten the economic viability of a household’s livelihood.

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<sup>118</sup> Wells even had a formal recognition as private property. “The man who first dug a well or repaired it brought it into use had the right to call it his property ... The feudal laws recognized the property rights of those who had first dug or repaired a well” (Natsagdorj 1967: 270).

From the deposition of the arat woman Dechin, in the administrative of the Khoshuu of the beise Tsedensodnam of Sain Noyon Aimag, dated 1876:

They do not allow me, the woman Dechin, to drive my few head of cattle to the salt-pans [xujir], and have assigned me to nomadize in the region of Ulaan-chuluut. In the stony hills of Ulaan chuluut neither I nor my livestock can survive even to the end of the year. Permit me to nomadize with Choijin, the accountant of our bag in this grassy tract so that I can save my remaining stock and stay alive'. (Natsagdorj 1967: 271)

However, even outside of such measures, access of pastures often accrued to the wealthiest. As Sneath (2001) points out:

Amongst the common people of the banner, the richer herders had better access to pastureland than poorer families, before collectivization, not only because of their better chances of influencing officials but because they were more mobile. The early 18<sup>th</sup> century legal code the Khalkha Jirum, suggest that the first to arrive at a disputed pasture should have rights to use it. Bigger herds tend to gain priority over smaller ones even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when there were disputes over pasture. Herdsmen who could remember the days of pre-collective pastoralism told me that larger herds would 'drive off' smaller ones.

Clearly, such practices continue even today as I describe below.

As Sneath (2001) argues, understanding customary ideas about land must be framed around the term *ezen* and its implications. Ezen refers to 'mastery' or possession and implies authority and a 'right to rule'. The ultimate ezen was the emperor. But in many ways the territorial administrative units, *xoshuu zasag noyod* and monastic *xutagt*, were in effect imperial representatives and acted themselves as ezen. Moreover, other ezen also ruled the land. Spiritual forces, which I discuss in great detail in chapter 6, also occupied and controlled the landscape. Human actors gained custodial rights of mastery and possession by interacting with and subordinating to these socio-political and spiritual 'masters'. Right to pasture, as Bawden (1968: 108) argues, was directly related to the corvee provided to ruling princes.

... the recognized corvees due to the banner, in fact to the banner prince, from its members were considered as related to the use of pastures of that banner, as appears from a document of 1846. At that time banner boundaries were being regulated and the office of a certain banner in Tushet Khan aimag tried to reclaim herdsmen of its own who had been accustomed to nomadize in the next banner. The people did not wish to forsake their familiar pastures and return, and they submitted to the offices of both their own and the other banner that they would be agreeable to performing corvee within both banners if they were permitted to remain where they were.

As *khamjilga* were client serfs to the feudal, patron overlords, all human actors, to varying degrees, occupied similar positions in relation to the spiritual forces or *gazriin ezed* (land masters) (Sneath 2001). These practices, coupled with other material practices such as boundary making and enforcement and ritual offerings to mountain spirits, inculcated the sentiment of community, belonging, and right exemplified in the term *nutag* or home territory. Moreover, through social

interaction under such conditions, local community members recognized and honored another's right to use of certain resources. Outsiders, who did not recognize and honor the rights of locals, were largely shunned. Consequently, as Bawden (1968: 89) points out, "there was a strong feeling among the people of a particular banner that they were the common owners of the grazing rights within their own territories."

Evidence of these sentiments found expression in various land disputes and conflict that were recorded in court cases and lawsuits brought by various actors in the *zasag* administration. For example, Bawden (1968) discusses one case:

This in 1902 a certain taij of Tushetu Khan aimag got permission from the amban of Urga to nomadize into the neighboring banner. The ordinary people of the banner took this badly, and smashed up the taij's tents on the grounds that the amban had no to allot pastures to others, the inference here being that they regarded them as their common property with which the Emperor's representative had not right to interfere. (91)

Most disputes however did not go in the peoples' favor:

In 1878 the arat commoners Jargal, Dorj, and others of the khshuun of the gun Avirmed of Sain Noyon aimag pitched their tents on the territory of the gegeen-lama of the khoshuu. The lama filed a complaint with the administration of the khoshuu and demanded the immediate eviction of the arat. The ruling handed down by the khoshuu administration stated: 'A Gegeen-lama is no common man, but equal in rank to a noble. The commoner Dorj and the other subordinate arat who dared to protest should be severely punished, and after the carrying out of this order of punishment they should be resettled, together with their relatives, in their old places...'. (Natsagdorj 1967: 271-272)

In most cases, rather than attempting to institute a new regime of territorial control, the local people perceived a pre-existing right. As Bold (1999: 60) argues:

Disputes became increasingly heated. It often happened that livestock keepers beat and even killed one another in disputes over pasture regions and water sites. In order to force someone out of a region, their yurts were burnt down and their animals stolen or slaughtered. The rising trend of violence can be followed in the files of charges. It is noteworthy that in this situation different sorts of struggles developed: accusations, destruction, of the demarcating stone piles or *ovoo evdex*.

Most cases of dispute did not seek to overturn territorial authority and administrative regimes; rather, they sought to right perceived contravention of custom and legal precedent.

The feudal system of authority and rule continued until collapse of the Qing state in 1911 with the abdication of the Emperor. In the intervening years between Mongol autonomy in 1911 and the socialist revolution in 1921, the territorial administration remained relatively intact. Monastic estates and *xoshuu* continued to operate under their respective authorities. The overarching head of state was the Bogd Khan.

## Socialism 1921-1991

The first years of the new socialist government maintained the status quo in Mongolia. In 1923, however, the new government abolished the *khamjilga* system and in 1924, after the death of the Bogd Khan the state initiated the dismantling of the monastic system. Although in legal principle the feudal system was detached from administrative authority, the overall system in practice continued largely the same until the late 1920s when nobility and high-ranking lamas came under intense scrutiny. One of the few changes was the re-organization of the aimag system. The names of the four major aimags were changed from feudal titles such as Tsetsen Khan Aimag to secular ones like Khan Khentii Uul aimag.<sup>119</sup> More important changes did not come until the first attempt at collectivization.

From 1928 to 1932 various regions of the country attempted to implement collectivization programs similar to the Soviet Union. As I charted in the previous chapter, these programs utterly failed with Stalin ordering the termination in 1932. Yet, the attempt had a number of implications. With the divorce of the feudal system from the territorial administrative apparatus and the lack of capacity within the MPRP in its early years, the steppe in effect became largely open access with little maintenance of borders or enforcement of claims or rights.

Despite these on-the-ground, de facto realities, in the years preceding the failed attempt at collectivization, the state began implementing a number of over-arching changes. In the 1930s the four aimag system was abolished in favor of 21 new aimags which came into existence with new borders and boundaries.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, within each of these aimags, *xoshuu* were converted to *soum*. Within the *soum* were *bag*.

Despite this alteration of the map, the ‘map is not the territory’. At the local level, administration of pastoral lands was virtually non-existent. The state officially owned the entire land surface and individual citizens of *soums* were permitted to use it, but state involvement in regulating or enforcing movement and resource use was largely absent. Cross-border use, consequently, was common. I asked an older herder whether there were arguments or disputes during this time.

D: In that period who regulated pasture and such things?

Herder J: Before the *negdel*? The *bag*, private individuals decided themselves. There was a *bag darga*. In Bayankhutag there were 10 *bags* then. These were *ail*. There were so many *ail* then, *zamgui*!

D: If you wanted to do *otor* in another *soum*, did you have to get permission, during that time?

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<sup>119</sup> Tsetsen Khan was the title of the noble ruler of the aimag. Khan Khentii Uul is the great mountain chain in contemporary northern Khentii aimag where Chinggis Khan began his rise to power.

<sup>120</sup> For instance, Khan Khentii Uul became Khentii, Dornod, Suxbaatar, and Dornigovi aimags.

Herder J: No, these things, no ... these frightening arguments and fights never happened like today. It was easy then. We would just move that way and settle like in the year of the monkey (1945).

D: Today these arguments and fights happen but in that period they never happened?

Herder J: No, they never did. If they did I do not know about them.

D: Were there *soum* darga or bag darga like today?

Herder J: Yes of course but there was not any real administration.

With generally small herds, reciprocal use of pastures during times of stress, and the broadly recognized right of customary possession, there seemed to be few arguments. Yet, very little is known about this period in Mongolia history particularly at the local level. Since there was little administration there is virtually no documentation. And foreign observers simply did not have access to rural Mongolia during this time. Yet, these conditions continued for nearly 30 years. As many of these herders have passed on, it is unlikely we will know very much about this period.

By the 1950s, with the advent of collectivization, this situation changes. Land remained in the hands of the state but the *negdel* (collective) was afforded controlling authority over the use of their respective territories. For the most part, the *negdel* controlled movement, campsite use, hay-cutting, farming, and the location of wells and other resources. In effect, sole authority over the maintenance and use of land rested with the *negdel*. Although many households retained their customary campsites, they were technically provided use of the campsite by the *negdel*. In other cases, the *negdel* assigned campsites to households and *suur*. Individual households could affect this process at bag meetings by requesting the use of a particular campsite or recommending a change in campsites. The *negdel* also controlled *otor* migrations. Households were assigned *otor* territories. The auxiliary transportation brigades and youth herders moved households and their herds to their campsites during these critical times. As I explain in chapter 8, the *negdel* or brigad leadership would send down orders to ‘*yavuulax*’ (to send) or ‘*gargax*’ (to make leave) herders from their home territories during drought or *zud*.

In addition to the *negdel* was the *soum* administration. The *soum*, however, had little authority over land use. Yet, one of the more important developments during the socialist period, the continual creation of new *soums*, spread the vast administrative complex over smaller and smaller territories. Currently, there are 329 *soums* in Mongolia, a massive increase in 70 years.

At the local level, *soum*, *brigad*, and *xeseg* authorities controlled the timing of movement and land use. This massive administrative system enabled the increased sedentarization of



herders.<sup>121</sup> They were able to accomplish this by building brigad centers and small villages (*tosgon*) or settlements for these various levels of administration. In one interview with a former herder who was a child in the early 1980s, he could recall the brigad village and another village in the far west which consisted of an auxiliary brigad but he could not remember what they did. In these settlements, there were small ger stores and even actual buildings for administrative officials, veterinarians, animal technicians, and other technical staff. Below is a photo of one of the buildings in the former brigad center. Much of this administrative build-up has since collapsed. Clearly, the building in the photo below is no longer used and stands as a ruin to the socialist past.

### **Post-Socialism: 1991-Present**

As I outlined in the introduction to this dissertation, the institutional backbone of the collectives effectively disappeared in a consecutive series of legal and administrative reforms beginning with the complete decollectivization of the *negdels* in 1992-1993. These reforms promoted a vision of local governance in rural pastoral regions based on decentralized, weak state models of resource distribution and management promoted heavily by neo-liberal institutions such as the IMF and the Asian Development Bank (Enkhbat and Odgaard 1996; Korsun and Murrell 1995; Mearns 2004, 1996; Nixon and Walters 1999). The dismantling of collectives, the devolution of authority and decentralization of administrative responsibility to the local level, and the fiscal centralization of taxation and budgetary responsibility left rural administrative organs as near defunct institutional shells. Yet, the state retained pastureland as state-property or *turiin umch*. This promoted a continuity of property forms, i.e. the ‘commons’ aspect of state pastureland, while at the same time removing the structures of authority and control that had regulated access to and use of those very ‘common’ resources. These policies were both a result of new models of governance as much as the immediate withdrawal of Soviet aid. Along with foreign aid and structural adjustment loans came ‘required’ reforms. Consequently, the government in the early 1990s was simply incapable of continuing its role in resource management at the local level (Enkhbat and Odgaard 1999; Mearns 1996, 2004).

For a time pastoral households benefitted from a de facto open access resource regime. Most households had small-herds and between 1994 and 2000 pleasant ecological conditions prevailed. Herders in Uguumur argued that there were few disputes. Other research however has reported high rates of trespassing (Fernandez-Gimenez 1997). Yet, in the early years it seems there was wide-spread recognition of possession rights to campsites and other resources. In the

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<sup>121</sup> Herders increasingly used otor moves rather than major migrations. Consequently, they did not have to move their main camp as often.

mid-1990s the soum and bag administrations in Uguumur began registering campsites. Other research, as I pointed out in the introduction, has argued that there was a revival of customary institutions including the *xot ail* (Bold 1995) and other social forms such as *neg nutgiinxan* (Mearns 1993). *Neg nutgiinxan*, a territorial grouping of local households, simply means ‘people of one nutag’ and there is considerable debate about what this actually means. At the micro-scale these institutions, it has been argued, formed the primary institutional framework for rural resource management.

Yet, herders were now exposed to a large degree of institutional ambiguity and uncertainty. Without reliable institutional means to organize resource access such as through clear and defined property rights, particularly in times of stress, herding households were left exposed to greater amounts of environmental and climatic risk (Swift 1995; Templer et al 1993). Herders in Uguumur stated that disputes and arguments over pasture, campsites, wells, and other resources began in earnest following the *zud* of 2000.

Herder B: Before the registry there were no arguments, between 1991 and 2000 there were no arguments. Then the 2000 *zud* happened, then we started registering campsites, and now *zud* are happening more and more. There are also many more *ail* and animal numbers are rising. The children are becoming adults and forming their own *ail*. And there is no grass, no water, and so everyone is competing for fewer spots. The registry and now the possession contracts make the arguments worse.

Following that disaster, a number of herders lost all of the stock and left the herding economy. Others became increasingly wealthy. For everyone though the real material stakes of herding in post-socialist became very clear. Moreover, herders pointed out the climate change, lack of rainfall, and increasing warmth have damaged current carrying capacity (*belcheeriin daats*). Couple with growing herds, herders now find themselves competing.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, the 2002 land law has introduced new modes for thinking and acting in property, the implications of which I discuss in some detail below.

In the data I discuss below, I show that there are a variety of ways in which broader alterations in administration and legal frameworks have brought about change on the steppe. For example, some of the enforcement techniques described here, disputes, and land transactions demonstrate aspects of rural land relations that have so far been largely missed or simply were not

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<sup>122</sup> I argue that the lack of arguments and disputes in the early years was not necessarily a function of widespread acceptance of others’ claims to campsites and support of custom and tradition but rather a temporary, strategic tolerance of others’ claims. Tolerance is not the recognition of legitimacy. The material conditions that have now pressured households into competition simply did not exist during the early years when herds were small, households were fewer, and weather was pleasant.

covered by existing research. Interestingly, many of the issues I describe here have precedence not in the immediate past but in the feudal period.

## Campsites

Campsites in Mongolia are generally referred to as a kind of '*nutag*'. As has been explained, *nutag*, a conceptual space, has various levels of meaning at different socio-spatial scales not signified so much by its borders but by a central point, such as a campsite, around which movement, settlement, and a broad range of social categories, processes, practices, and events are defined and carried out including the pasturing of livestock. Although *nutag* do represent in many ways a kind of territory they do not adhere to the bounded-ness of such geographic configurations. For example, campsites and the surrounding pasture demonstrate the differences between western notions of 'territory' as a politically bounded or socially circumscribed space and Mongolian ideas of '*nutag*' as radiating spatial vectors of control and authority. The exact borders of pasturing territory around campsites are somewhat difficult to determine. Rather, central points, the campsites themselves, are of critical importance as they allow flexible and somewhat amorphous pasturing of livestock. Control over pasture territory that surrounds campsites is dependent on the extent to which an occupant has 'mastery' over the campsite. Consequently, understanding claims and rights to campsites is critical to understanding access to pasture and other resources critical to a pastoral life-way.

Campsites are configured by several elements. The *buuri* is the actual ground on which the ger is raised and the *suuri* is the area in which household (ail) activities are carried out. Beyond *suuri* and *buuri*, where the *ail* resides, is the *xot* where livestock are kept and animal husbandry activities are carried out. Depending on the season and practical needs of the household each campsite is arranged differently. Some household campsites may have a *xashaa* or fence, a *saravch* or animal shelter (barn-like), *xevter* or bedding for rest (usually in the *xashaa* or *saravch*), and *uyaa* where the work horses are tied up. Other households may have more complex arrangements including sheds, barns, actual houses (only in summer), dung piles, outhouses, tractor areas, hay storage enclosures, and a range of various other structures. Below I describe the different seasonal campsites. However, it should not be assumed that all households maintain such campsites. For the poorest, winter campsites look similar to summer campsites.

Campsites are important for a variety of reasons. Opportune location of campsites can allow increased access to important pastoral resources such as pasture, wells, water access, *xujir*, and other critical resources. How households decide where to settle or establish *baingiin nutag* is described in greater detail in chapter 7. Here I look at the important features of each campsite.

Table 5.1. Percent of households by category that claim 'customary campsites'. (Compiled with household survey data)

Campsite	Very Poor	Poor	Middle	Wealthy	Very Wealthy
Uvuljuu	50%	88%	87%	100%	100%
Xavarjaa	17%	50%	74%	87%	80%
Zuslan	50%	50%	65%	73%	93%
Namarjaa	17%	50%	52%	73%	87%

### *Uvuljuu*

Winter campsites primarily should provide warmth for livestock and protect them from wind and snowdrifts. Warmth is provided by *buuts*, a bedding (*xevter*) material that is produced from livestock dung. The dung over time is trampled becoming a very soft, light bedding material that retains heat. In some campsites, the depth of *buuts* can reach up to a meter. As Kazato (2004) points out deep deposits of *buuts* can prevent the ground from freezing. Without *buuts*, a winter campsite can be problematic since it will not provide enough warmth for stock during the cold nights when temperatures drop regularly to -35 To camp on such a site is risky as animals legs can freeze exhausting their energy reserves while at pasture and expose their undersides to extreme cold lowering their core body temperature. Consequently, households tend to return to the same campsite each year, building up *buuts*. Without such build-up households may have to truck in *buuts* from their other campsites such as during otor migration or for those who have no access to *buuts* because they have too few livestock they may have to purchase *buuts* from others.

Location is also critical. Winter campsites tend to be in elevated hollows and on the windless eastern sides of mountains at sufficient height so that snowfall will be blown off by wind eddies or preferably melted off by the sun. Herders themselves can shovel off snow but this requires spare labor and significant time. Some winter campsites also have shelters called *saravch* and fencing to coral stock in so that the herd generates warmth and to protect them from the elements. Yet, while some herders prefer shelters in the winter others do not, as the stock must harden to the cold, *xatuujuulax* or *xatuujix*. In really cold winters as will be discussed below such structures are often critical. In 2000 when the *zud* hit Bayankhutag the freezing temps killed largely cattle because they are typically not corralled and consequently, *zudersen*, or were sapped of their energy.

Water availability is less important for an *uvuljuu* as stock are watered by snow which can with sufficient amounts allow for a wide pasturing territory. Lack of snow, though, can present grave problems and in fact can lead to *zud* as animals tire during daily treks to wells. Herders in Uguumur and throughout the steppe region also prefer *uvuljuu* in *govi* because dry

steppe forages tend to be heartier than elsewhere and have higher protein content than steppe forages which are better for fattening. By doing so they optimize forage in locations that otherwise would be considered marginal. Additionally, this also allows them to minimize their dependence on hay and other fodder to which livestock are not adapted.

### ***Xavarjaa***

In spring, more so than the average winter, animal shelters or wind blocks of some kind are necessary, without which livestock could easily freeze as animals are exposed to cold winds that weaken livestock and prevents them from grazing. Herders also try to avoid damp ground where snow has melted or around water sources, since temperatures are low enough to freeze the soil which can drain animals heat. Spring is also birthing season and herders need to occupy campsites in lowland areas or where they can provide shelter for the newborns. Although some households prefer to expose their new young to the cold during mild springs, most who can utilize saravch. Protection from dust is also a concern as dust storms can easily cover forage. Herders also expressed desire for sites that are exposed to the morning sun.

Herders in the 3<sup>rd</sup> bag prefer spring sites that have a high percentage of the feather-grass called *ders*. This grass grows to heights of two meters and not only protects stock and newborns from wind but also serves as a dependable fodder with high protein content in a time when fodder of other kinds is scarce. Herders prefer a mix of standing dry forage with new shoots. A number of good forage species grow in the *ders*. It also is not susceptible to dust cover and collects mist and dew, which would otherwise be absorbed into the soil, allowing for other more palatable forages to emerge either in the *ders* or around it. In this same vein, where *ders* is not available, sheltered valleys are also highly valued as morning mists and dews will encourage early spring growth in more nutritious forages. Overall though, *xavarjaa* should have readily available forage, minimizing the grazing orbits of herds as herders *malaa nogooluulax* or ‘green their herds’

### ***Zuslan***

Summer campsites, in the past, were generally easy to find in Bayankhutag because of the Kherlen river on the northern border. Households, however, try to look for sites that are generally windy and cool as both heat exhaustion and disease exposure are highest in the summer when temperatures can reach the mid 90s. They also avoid the build-up of dung which retains heat and exposes animals to disease. In summer, herds require greater access to water as the temperatures climb. Herders water animals twice a day rather than once and try to minimize activity in the middle of the day when temperatures are highest. During the early summer months, livestock need access to good recovery grasses, and fattening grasses in late summer.

In order to take advantage of as wide a grazing orbit as possible some households move around a central campsite so that herders can put on the hard fat (*xatuu uux*). Grazing day lengthens with increase in daylight. Many households simply camp along the river without a specific campsite location. Besides pockets of *ders*, the landscape is quite uniform and has significant deposits of *maraa*. Those who are deterred by the excessive number of households move to locations where there is easy and close access to springs, wells, seasonal ponds, or small lakes such as in the southeastern corner of the soum where there are a number of springs. During summer it is also important to find a campsite exposed to wind that will cool livestock in the summer heat and discourage insects such as mosquitoes and flies. During this time herders worry less about close proximity to forage as animals are willing and able to trek longer distances in search of good forage – it is usually in summer when continuous short otors are made maximizing the grazing orbits. Herders are able to do this because there is no need to xotlox or return animals back to camp at night. Although herders also try to situate themselves close to water points some avoid flood plains because of the risk of flash flooding.

### ***Namarjaa***

Fall campsites typically concentrate around salt pans or salt-lick areas and high quality fattening forage. Salt is important because it warms the body, improves appetite, balances water in the body, maintains nervous and muscular condition, and encourages fattening. It is also supplements sodium deficiencies in forage in spring and fall. In spring there is little new growth and by fall forage has matured losing nutrients. The importance of salt licks cannot be stressed enough. When I asked herders why many of the wealthiest herders were from western part of the bag the response many would give was because the west is xujir ixtei or has a lot of xujir (salt pan). The region know as Tsaidam is considered to be of high value because of the presence of a wide salt lake, xujir, and maraa; consequently, a number of fall campsites are located in this regional.

If livestock have not sufficiently fattened in summer, fall becomes critical to winter preparation and the following year's success. Good forage, water, and salt are critical to fattening. Herders also prefer a flat landscape and close proximity to good resources in order to minimize energy expenditures and limit movement. Herders also explained to me that one should not drive livestock or stress them in any way in order to encourage the build-up of soft fat (*zuulun uux*). At the same time herders try to build up cold endurance; so herders let their stock rest on the cold, hard ground and limit bunching by using large corrals. According to customary models of the annual migration cycle, it is during such times that herders traditionally would go on *otor* in

search of better pasture or utilize reserve pasture (*nuutsiin belcheer*)<sup>123</sup> that has been set aside either by the local soum administration or by herders. According to elder herders, before collectivization almost all herders typically tried to keep pasture in reserve, rotating between an *otor* site and their customary campsite. The socialist negdels maintained this practice to a large extent; however, since decollectivization this practice has been in decline due to local administration and institutional collapse.

### ***Otor***

In the Mongolian literature and Western literature on pastoral practices in Mongolia there are a wide variety of definitions of *otor nuudel*, *otorlox*, *otort yavax*, or *otroor yavax*, or simply *otor*. Consequently, there are also a wide variety of ideas about what constitutes an *otor* campsite. Erdnebaatar (1999) refers to *otor* as a secondary grazing movement rather than a primary one and that the goal is to optimize geographically variable resources. Purev (1990) defines the practice as ‘to go a long way from home territory, looking for better pasture in a bad season’ (47). In other cases, *otor* has been defined as a move that utilizes customary reserve pasture. In others, it is defined as the rapid movement of livestock over the landscape to encourage fattening (Fernandez-Gimenez 1997). Traditionally, Mongolians consider *otor* as a mobile strategy conducted in early summer to help livestock recover and in fall to help livestock fatten. Some argue that *otor* campsites are or can be customary campsites, while others argue that *otor* are moves to non-customary campsites. Even amongst herders in Uguumur there was not a general consensus on the meaning of *otor*. For some, *otor* referred to movements outside their customary *nutag* which in effect means that any move outside of the territory in which their customary campsites are located would be referred to as *otor*. In many cases, herders referred to their *otor* campsites by seasonal names such as *uvuljuu* or *xavarjaa* while recognizing they were not customary sites (*baingiin nutag*).

Considering the apparent confusion, it is somewhat difficult to present a customary view of *otor* campsites. However, *otor* are almost always utilized in 3 different scenarios: (1) avoiding hazards and shocks such as disease, drought, or *zud*, (2) as a means to hasten recovery after a difficult winter and spring, and (3) to fatten livestock in late summer and fall. In the second and third cases, *otor* campsites typically require features described in regards to *zuslan* and *namarjaa*. However, in the case of the first, *otor* campsites must exhibit attributes according to the season in

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<sup>123</sup> Although herders discussed setting aside reserve pasture in the past, it had been years since they had done so. Increased drought, mobility, and grazing pressure around their customary sites has prevented them from reserving pasture in any regularized fashion.

which the move is being conducted. I discuss otor and otor campsites in greater detail later in this chapter and in chapters 6 thru 9.

## **Rights in Campsites**

Rights to things are conceived in various ways. Rights of access, use, possession, and ownership are among the various ways in which human actors socially regulate the ‘property’ connections between things and other actors. As the introduction plainly makes clear, they are not the only way, however. Moreover, such regimes also include rights of disposal, alienation, exclusion, and inclusion all of which are temporally and spatially restricted and recognized as legitimate to varying degrees of consensus. In this section I look at the primary categories of rights regarding campsites in Mongolia including the dynamics of disposal, alienation, exclusion and inclusion. Additionally, I look at the various kinds of claims herders deploy to secure these rights. Rights in and over things depend on the legitimacy of those rights and broader recognition and consensus. In contemporary Uguumur herders attempt to legitimate claims of right in various ways, the primary institutional pathways of which are formal ones via the state and state-sanctioned entities such as NGOs and informal, customary ones via local socio-political configurations and interactions. In rural society there are a number of different sources of ‘right’ or *erx* including the state (*tur*), custom or tradition (*yus zanshil* and *ulamjlal*), exchange, and sheer ‘force’. The strength of these rights is based on the processes of recognition that reinforce and materialize the claims as legitimate practices.

## **Categories of Rights**

There are three basic categories of rights recognized both in formal and informal frameworks concerning land: (1) *umchlux erx* or ownership rights, (2) *ezemshix erx* or possession rights, and (3) *ashiglax erx* or use rights. These three categories, however, are in practice cross-cut temporally and spatially by rights of disposal, alienation, and exclusion in regards to certain kinds of ‘things’ and certain actors or sets of actors.

### ***Umchlux***

*Umchlux erx* are ‘ownership rights’ that refer to ‘*umch*’ or ‘owned property’. Campsites however are not recognized by formal or informal institutions and actors as being *umch*; although, other kinds of property referred to as *umch* maybe the primary mean by which a household establish rights of mastery or possession rights. *Umch* rights are exclusive by nature and alienable depending on the ‘thing’ and the actors involved. For example, in certain circumstances state ‘*umch*’ is not always alienable. State property such as pastureland currently cannot be owned (*umchlux*) and generally is not alienable although the state finds other ways for



contracting more restricted possession (*ezemshix*) or use (*ashiglax*) rights to state *umch* such as mineral exploration rights. These kinds of inalienable properties, however, are a source of much contention in contemporary Mongolia. For other kinds of generally private held property, *umch* is protected and secured by state laws, as long as one can demonstrate those rights of ownership. Some kinds of *umch* are registered such as cars, houses, and other kinds of large assets. *Saravch*, *xashaa*, and other kinds of movable properties are considered *xuviin umch* or private property. These can be alienated and transferred in any number of ways such as through private sales.

### ***Ezemshix erx***

*Ezemshiglex erx* or possession rights are rights of mastery and refer to the exclusive right of possession. The use of the term and its root *ezen* highlights the importance of the exercise of control and authority outside the realm of formal rights per se. But even in contemporary state institutions and legalese the right of mastery is recognized as a formal realm of rights. Those with *ezemshix erx* can not only use but also improve and alter the thing possessed. The degree of alienability, though, is dependent on specifically defined institutional stipulations. For example, in some instances possession rights are not exchangeable through market transactions but they can be forfeited. In other cases, rights can be transferred. For example, rights of possession to campsites are amenable to inheritance transfers only but not to sale or rental transactions.

### ***Ashiglax erx***

*Ashiglax erx* refer to the right to use something and refer to ‘*ashig*’ or ‘gain or profit’. These rights are highly dependent on exclusionary/inclusionary principles, rights of disposal and alienation. In some cases use rights can be alienated and transferred in a whole host of ways. For example, *otor* contracts between *soums* regulate who has rights to use pasture resources. In other cases, these rights of use may be forfeited but cannot be transferred. For example, while a herder may be able to forego his *soum* citizenship which gives him the right to use pasture resources he cannot transfer that right to other non-*soum* herders. Still, in other cases use rights may not be denied. For example, no Mongolian can be denied *in toto* the right to use pastureland for the purpose of grazing livestock; although this right is severely restricted.

### **Hierarchy of Rights**

In campsite rights there are clear hierarchies of rights. While the state owns the pastureland as *turiin umch*, a herder may possess a campsite through possession contracts. Still, other herders also have a claim to other nearby campsites by virtue of being citizens. Even in the way herders attempt to stake claims to sites, they utilize this hierarchy to various degrees. I will examine these claims in greater detail below.

## **Rights in Practice**

In actual social practice these categories of rights, clearly, are highly context specific. For example, the social topography of rights in Uguumur include both formal and informal tenure regimes in addition to variously legitimate and illegitimate claims all of which overlap in multiple, complex ways. Additionally, each of these variously conceived rights are conditioned temporally and spatially. At different times and in different places some rights may supersede other rights while at other times the hierarchy of those rights may be flipped. In the following sections I look at formal and informal ‘rights’ practices including the various claims herders make on resources.

### **Formal or ‘State-recognized’ Rights to Campsites**

As explained above the state recognizes certain rights in land above others. Most rural land is technically ‘*turiin umch*’ or state property and is administered in various ways by the formal state apparatus. This, however, does not exclude more complex, overlapping rights and management regimes. Since 1994, campsites located within state-owned pastureland can be exclusively provided to individual households with possession leases or *ezemshix gerchilgee*. A similar law was passed in 1998 and then in 2002. Between 1994 and 2002, however, most local administrations had not made progress issuing possession leases and only after 2002 have such programs begun in earnest. Campsite leasing, however, is not the only means by which state institutions have formalized rights to campsites. Soum citizenship and campsite registries are kept and various contracts between soums provide citizens in certain cases rights to campsites.

### ***Law on Land***

The primary legal framework regarding campsite rights is the 2002 Law on Land. Although there are prior legal acts including the Constitution which speak to land issues, much of the formal framework is subsumed within the 2002 law. The law states that there are three rights which the state recognizes in reference to land: (1) the right “to own land” which ‘means to be in legitimate control of land with the right to dispose of this land’, (2) the right “to possess land” which ‘means to be in legitimate control of land in accordance with purpose of its use and terms and conditions specified in respective contracts’ and (3) the right “to use land” which means to undertake a legitimate and concrete activity to make use of some of the land’s characteristics in accordance with contracts made with owners and possessors of land’. These 3 definitions reflect the categories outlined above.

Land in pastoral areas technically cannot be owned except by the state and is to be used for common use as outlined by local administrative codes and regulations.<sup>124</sup> However, possession and use rights to common lands such as pasture can be leased or contracted to individuals or groups. Other resources such as water points, wells, salt licks, and reserves cannot be owned, however, and remain under common tenurial regimes. Wells though can be leased to cooperative groups and other citizen-based NGOs which assume a custodial right to wells rather than exclusive use unlike campsites. In this way, well contracts do not contravene the spirit of the law; although in practice, as I will argue, they clearly do. Yet, these common resources including some kinds of land are to a certain degree exclusive. One of the most important promulgations is that only citizens of the respective administrative unit may utilize common use resources such as pastureland. All citizens in essence have use rights then to this resource, although they can technically lose such rights through improper use.

Aimag, soum, bag governors and the ITX at each administrative level are afforded great authority in regulating land resources including campsites for which they designate a finite number of for leasing.<sup>125</sup> For example, they are given authority to designate lands for hay preparation, reserve pasture, form otor contracts, set pasture capacity and stocking levels, enforce local codes, regulations, and administrative decisions by resolving disputes, expelling households, and taking fines, and even to designate areas for group pasture use. They are even given wide berth in the management of campsites. As stated in section 54:

54.1. Soum and district Governors, in cooperation with a relevant professional organization and taking into consideration land use traditions, rational land use and conservation requirements, shall initiate land management activities according to the general schedule of pasture separation for winter, spring, autumn and summer settlements and reserve rangelands, and take measures on protecting pastureland and on regulating its capacity.

54.2. Zuslan and namarjaa [i.e. campsites] and rangelands shall be allocated to bags and xot ails and shall be used collectively. Winter and spring pastures shall be prevented from livestock grazing during summer and autumn, and shall be carefully protected with public efforts.

Such authorities are broad and ambiguous. The consequence of this is that much of the local understanding of the land law is subject to local interpretations and practices.

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<sup>124</sup> 2002 Law on Land Article 6: 6.2. The following [types of] land, regardless of whether they are given into possession or use, shall be used for common purpose under government regulation: 6.2.1. pasturelands, water points in pasturelands, wells and salt licks.

<sup>125</sup> See Article 20 in the Law.

For example, as part of this management authority, in Uguumur bag citizens are required to register their campsites. In the negdel period herders' campsites were formally registered not as a possession right but rather as assigned territory. Since decollectivization, however, the registry has acted as a kind of formal method for recognizing prior right. Yet, the registry does not ensure or secure a herders' claim to a site nor does it confer any actual rights as it has no legal basis for doing so. Rather, the registry acted and still acts in Uguumur as a means to settle dispute in the case that one arises. Moreover, it allows local administrative bodies to maintain a record of and monitor household locations.

Local authorities have not asserted much of the authority given to them in the Land Law, however. As much of this chapter discusses, many of the legal provisions here contradict local customs or do not match local realities. The ability of a soum or bag governor to allocate campsites and pastures is limited by the degree to which local households accept and acquiesce to this authority. In Uguumur, these powers are limited.

The more drastic measure in such legislation is distinction made between pastureland and campsites. In 1994 the Mongolian Ix Xural passed land legislation that sought to formally regulate and manage pastureland. However, as has been documented by several other scholars, the 1994 law and a subsequent law in 1998 did little to encourage local administrations to begin the process of leasing out campsites. Part of the problem was the very ambiguous nature of the legislation. However, other problems such as a lack of demand and budgetary finances also hampered the implementation of the program.

In 2002 the Parliament passed further legislation that sought to clarify and extend these provisions. Currently, herding households are permitted to lease campsites for periods of 15-60 years and may extend the period for an additional 40 years not to exceed 100 years total. The lease in case of death or prior to death may be transferred to an heir who is permitted to possess the land until the expiration of the original lease. Registering for lease also incurs an annual 4,000 MNT or 3.30 US\$ fee.

One of the major problems in the law is the ambiguity concerning the right of the possessor to sub-lease or enter into an agreement with other potential campsite users in exchange for a right to use the site according to their own agreement. However, every official I talked to argued that this is not the case and herders are not allowed to enter agreements with other households as a kind of exchange. Whether they 'let' others use the site is their own prerogative; however, they are not permitted to take rents or sell their land to others. Clearly, the officials recognize that this happens as discussed below and that this would be extremely difficult to monitor and enforce.

The codes also make mention of the possibility that local soum governors along with the soum ITX could lease out hay fields and even pasture to groups of citizens if not individuals. As I discuss in the next chapter, some groups are pushing for these very measures. Additionally complicating the law are provisions which afford governors the authority to establish settled ranch style livestock-rearing practices. In article 54 section 5 the law states soum governors have the following authority: 'Pastureland fenced for purposes of developing intensive settled livestock breeding or farming of tamed animals can be given for use to citizens, companies and organizations regardless of the season'. Similar random, contradictory provisions dot the law and have created further uncertainty rather than clarification. In most soums including Bayankhutag these provisions so far have largely been disregarded. Rather, other important provisions are currently impacting households.

For example, the number and size of campsites is regulated by the local ITX as set out in the legislation in article 29 section 3. The ITX is charged with setting the number of possible campsites and the size according to 'rational' land use plans taking into account pasture capacity and stocking levels. In Bayankhutag 155 winter and spring campsites are available for contracting and each site is limited to 1 hectare. The locations of leasable sites are not required; rather, there is simply a set maximum number of sites. Evidently, this means that there is a limit on the numbers of households that can receive campsites through the lease process. Bayankhutag has just over 300 herding households, meaning that there is only one campsite for every two households. Other soums have greater or lesser numbers of campsites based on these factors and the size of campsites is also diverse. Out of all the soums in Khentii aimag, Bayankhutag has the second highest household to campsite ratio. The soum with highest is limited by the Kherlen Bayan-Ulaan otor reserve in which possession leases are forbidden in the law.

Adding to the problem of lease limits are local soum codes that allow each herding households to possess 2 winter and 2 spring campsites. In Bayankhutag this means that if households with leases acquire all four campsites the max number of households with leases would be 38, far below the population of 300+. In some soums these campsites must be within the herder's home bag and in others they must simply be within the soum further limiting some households. These regulations are decided at the soum level by the local ITX and soum governor.

The provision of contracts began in Bayankhutag in early 2006 after the soum ITX passed a *togtool* encouraging local households to lease. The lease system is operated out of the *gazriin daamal* or MoNE extension agent's office. Despite the long process dictated in the law concerning the leasing process, in practice it is much simpler. Herders are required to have registered their campsite prior to obtaining the contract and provide documentation of citizenship

and residency. The land name is registered with a registration code. Annually they are charged a 4,000 MNT fee (3.30 US\$) for their campsite lease. Although the process has been shortened, the adoption of campsites has been rather slow it would seem. Yet, if one compares Bayankhutag to other soums in Khentii, the rate of adoption is amazingly fast (see Figure 5.1 below).

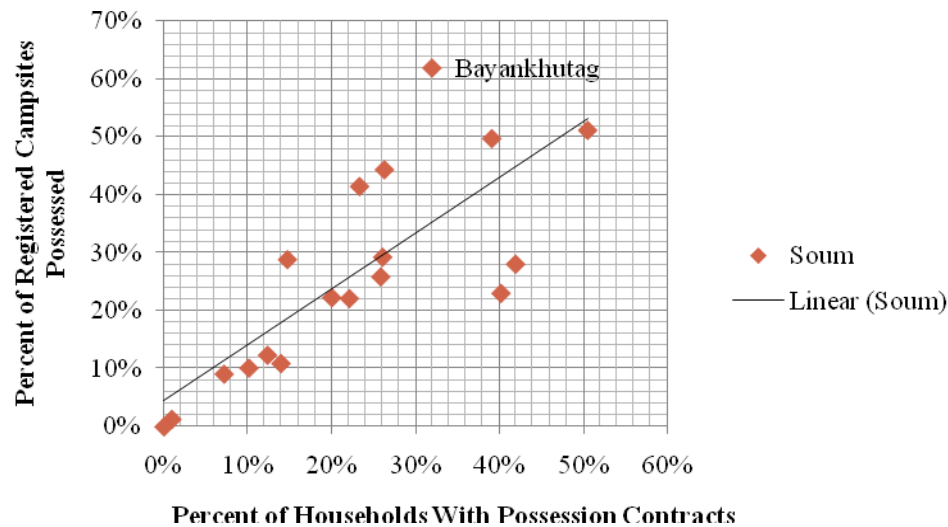


Figure 5.1. Comparison of possession contract provision amongst soums in Khentii aimag as of December 2008.

Here we see that Bayankhutag soum has a high participation rate (38%) but the highest percentage of leased campsites (62%). In fact this is the most unequal distribution of campsites amongst the various soums. This is interesting because others soums began much earlier in contracting. Part of this is related to the year in which the IFAD RPRP project began implementation in each respective soum. The RPR project requires that participants acquire possession contracts for campsites. Although the project began elsewhere prior to 2006 and other soums have greater project participation rates, only in Bayankhutag have nearly all the cooperative group members individually acquired possession campsites. The local ITX requires that all cooperative groups do this. In other soums, I was informed, the rate of contract acquisition was limited mostly to cooperative group heads and the leasing of campsites to *xot ail* rather than to individual households such as in Bayan-Ovoo. I would also argue that this rate reflects the significantly higher level of competition and scarcity of resources in Uguumur which has half of all contracts in Bayankhutag (48 of 96). It is also a reflection of the high level of socio-economic inequality. 52 % of contracts in Uguumur are held by *myangat* (25 of 48). Most of the other contracts are held by the relatives of *myangat*. With limited numbers of campsites, many

households will not be able to obtain formal recognition of their right over campsites unless the ITX alters the official numbers. The implications of these dynamics are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

### ***Herder Perceptions***

The possession contracts were intended to provide greater security for households and encourage proper maintenance and investment in campsites. With growing competition and disputes over campsite claims contracts provide, it is argued, a clear and unambiguous way to prevent such disputes and encourage proper resource use practices. However, herders are split whether they see leases as positive or negative. Here I look at some of the ways herders have evaluated the development of campsite possession contracts.

D: Other people haven't gotten the possession contracts yet. In your opinion if someone has not gotten the contract, then is this almost a bad thing? Whether or not there is a contract, you said there was no administration, so should it matter?

Herder M: If they do not have a contract, then anyone who wants to can come and stay on his campsite and he has no right to expel (xuux) them. Households with customary campsites must get the contract. Only in this way can we continue to bring administration to such land.

Here Batnasan points out the frustration with the lack of administrative capacity to fulfill their role in enforcing prior institutional rules. For individual households the ability to expel trespassers is critical. Trespassing can lead to overgrazing around ones campsite and compromise its future capacity. Another herder points out additional benefits of the program:

Herder S: Now we can protect pasture a little bit better, so in that it is beneficial and useful. The main thing is we will become 'masters' (possessors) on divided pastures. First, outside otor households cannot come in and settle. Second, by protecting pasture for a longer time then grass will grow and become plenty.

Here Chuluun points out the relationship between a secure claim and preventing overgrazing. Like many of the proponents of the contracting law and the cooperative group projects, some herders recognize the connections between new property regimes and conservation. However, not all herders agree that campsite contracting is an appropriate measure.

D: What do you all think about the possession contracts?

U: Well, now, if the output is good and everything is nice, when I am wintering I am at the winter campsite, when I am summering I am at the summer campsite, yet if, suddenly, a disaster happens now in the rural soums and aimags we have the work of moving to do, of course! Mongolia is a country that works by animal husbandy, it is the key, so America, Japan, Korea, such developed countries like this are not my countries! We cannot follow such far off flowery thoughts and visions, it is not connected to our work!

A number of households expressed reservations about campsites leases and the possibility that they may not only encourage households not to move but also limit the ability of households to move where they need to go. The problem they argue is that if everyone has a campsite and the right to expel others then where will they go when disaster strikes. Yet, the pressure to follow others is immense.

D: In your opinion is it useful or not? The contracts?

Herder B: If everyone gets them and I don't, then what?! For me, if I don't take land then I won't find any other land. Of course, I will take it then! Every man will have his own land. I will not say 'I won't take it', I will take land. My own land.

Bayanmunkh recognizes the snowball effect leases will have considering the high level of competition for grazing resources, particularly in Bayankhutag. Even though he disagrees with the legal provisions he also understands the reality of the situation and will not forego a benefit simply to protest.

D: What do you think about it then? [re: campsite possession]

T: Now, it is possible to possess buuts. They should require that each man have one contract. But if they give many, if people take 3 or 4 xavarjaa, then it will become very dangerous.

Ochirbat recognizes here one of the major problems herders stated concerning the contracts. Households are allowed, according to the Soum ITX's decision, to possess two winter and two spring campsites. The interesting thing here is that Ochirbat was a member of the ITX who set the numbers of campsites. However, he has been solidly against the measure since the beginning. He understands fully the implications of increasingly scarce resources and what this might lead to.

Herders' understanding and acceptance of the law is not *sui generis* but rather is conditioned by the broader landscape of overlapping, complex rights including customary ones. The degree to which a household accepts or concedes to the new law is dependent on the ways a household can use the legal provisions to legitimate their resource use strategies. Moreover, it is dependent on the degree to which such legalities adhere to customary principles.

### **Custom and the Laws**

Fernandez-Gimenez and Batbuyan (2004: 146) argue that "in practice the distinction between use and possession is not clear" and the legal provisions in the Land Law are somewhat incongruous with rural custom. This may be the case in their field site. I argue however, that one of the reasons why the law has largely been successful in Uguumur is the fact that is culturally salient with customary modes. As I describe below campsite leasing further legitimates other more private or corporate claims to campsite possession rights. Even the implementation of the law in practice has followed customary principles recognized by herders themselves. In the



following excerpt I ask the local bag governor, who is himself a herder, to explain the difference between the registry and contracting. He argues that really these practices are extensions of custom.<sup>126</sup>

D: What difference is there between the registry and the possession contracts?

T: My local government in providing contracts is doing thus ... well, as bag darga ... ok, for example, we have been saying all these land names, yes? For example Togoot, Xuviin Am, all these places in our land have names, yes? Now, Shanag mountain valley, Rashaan, now and oh yes Xar mountain peak, these names we take from households [for the registry], yes? So, they say my father's father's father used to winter on this or that campsite. Many generations have been visiting and settling on this here campsite. For example they say, my father wintered here, and his father wintered here and his father also wintered here and many generations have done so. Yes like this they register [in the bag registry]. Then they can get contracts.

In fact, I argue that by providing leases the state here recognizes that campsites are not pastureland and are not for common use and in so doing supports some kinds of customary claims. One of the important distinctions here is that campsites are not common property and can be exclusive. This contradicts to a degree some customary ideas about campsites use including past legislation like the Khalkha Jirum. Yet it also reinforces in a way competing customary claims such as rights conferred through inheritance versus rights of use as we will see in a case study of conflict below.

### ***Informal or 'Customary' Rights***

Beyond such formal regimes, herders in Uguumur, and elsewhere in Mongolia, recognize to varying degrees, at different times and in different spaces, a host of various 'customs' and norms of use. Technically, the legal system of Mongolia takes into account 'customary law' in areas where formal legal law has not penetrated. This is particularly important in rural regions where the importance of 'land custom' (*gazriin yus zanshil*) is highly respected and to a degree venerated and worshipped as in the *ovoo taxix yus*. Clearly, what is 'custom' and what is not is highly debatable. Nevertheless, there are a wide range of 'customary' claims and norms of use that are deployed in social practice. Here I refer to these tenurial claims as 'rights' or *erx*; although, herders themselves did not use this language. In contrast they often referred to these practices and claims as *yus* (ritual or custom) or *ulamjlaliin yum* (traditional thing) when the practice or claim was viewed largely as an institution and would say whether or not something

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<sup>126</sup> The bag governor is a local position almost always held by a herder and member of the community. These are not appointed or political positions. Consequently, here he is speaking as a member of the community. Additionally, he has been significantly critical of the possession leasing process as largely unfair although, as he does here, does support that in principle it supports some aspects of customary regimes.

was either '*bolno*' (permitted) or '*boloxgui*' (not permitted) for practices and claims that have not been institutionalized to the point of a broad community consensus, when habitual dispositions are unvoiced, or when such beliefs were individually strategic. I look at the three categories of rights as they apply to campsites.

Similar to formal framings of rights, customary rights discourses and practices generally adhere to the 3 fold configuration of rights. Herders can *umchlax*, *ezemshix*, or *ashiglax* various kinds of things and do recognize, contrary to other impressions (Fernandez-Gimenez 2004), the difference between a right of possession and a right to use. In customary terms, *ezemshix* and *ashiglax* *erx* do not necessarily have any connection to formal tenurial regimes; in contrast, *umch* is recognized, at least in practice, as having some kind of connection to formal regimes even though on the ground such rights are enacted, interpreted, and utilized in informal ways. Campsites, as state above, cannot be *umch* or property; however, they can be possessed. Moreover, the objects through which a herder may make a claim of right may in fact be held as *umch* such as a *saravch* or *xashaa*. As I discuss in the section on rights conferred through use, herders often use these rights to back up other kinds of claims. Consequently, understanding the complex, manifold topographic web of various rights lays a critical groundwork for demonstrating the ways 'rights' are deployed.

Here, I argue that these *erx* can be conferred through claims in four ways: (1) rights conferred through use, (2) rights conferred through inheritance, (3) rights conferred through 'belonging' and (4) rights conferred through exchange. All four of these categories, however, overlap in multiple and varied ways. For instance, rights retained via group membership can be exchanged or inherited.

In the sections below I discuss the most prominent configurations of 'rights' claims made in Uguumur. I do not claim to have an exhaustive knowledge of all possible claims and norms of use. These are constantly mutating as they are resisted, challenged, over-turned, or just simply fade away. Moreover, although other regions of Mongolia may subscribe to legitimate rights in other ways, I do not intend to portray Uguumur as representative of rural Mongolia as a whole. Although there is such a strong tendency to do this in current research, in my experience, Mongolia is simply too vast and diverse to be portrayed through such a small lens. Lastly, prior to all such claims or 'rights' frameworks is the importance of a herding livelihood. Every sampled households argued that to 'possess' campsites, or even use for that matter, one must be a herder with livestock. Without livestock one does not have a right to a campsite or even the use of pastureland. The idea of 'possessing' land in a pasture area seemed incongruous and a meaningless question because herding is the *sine qua non* of land 'possession' or mastery in rural

Mongolia. Although not the case in Uguumur, one can foresee the potential implications that the introduction of new activities including mining may have in other areas where herders view ‘rights’ in a similar fashion.

### ***Rights Conferred through Use***

One of the most common rationales herders submitted in legitimating their position as ‘ezen’ over a particular campsite or campsites were ‘rights conferred through use’. These rights are in effect built up in practice through the use of land.<sup>127</sup> Evidence of use is critical to making such claims; consequently, a number of outwardly visible signs of use are utilized to underlie such claims. For example, herders pointed out the importance of animal presence, household presence, animal droppings or *maliin buuts*, permanent or semi-permanent structures such as *xashaa*, *saravch*, sheds, wind-breaks, hand well (*shand*), or even actual buildings. A ‘customary’ method of marking the *geriin buuri* or ger-site is the deposition of a large stone at the center of the ger imprint in the soil signifying the former presence of the ger’s hearth. According to custom, another household cannot settle on the same *buuri*, to do so would be to question the legitimacy of the household and the position of the ezen within that household. This is a serious insult.

The most common ezemshix claim to campsites I collected was the deposition of a herder’s *maliin buuts* or animal droppings as evidence of use.<sup>128</sup> Technically as herders pointed out, they owned the animals (over which they have *umchlux erx* or ownership rights) that dropped the *buuts* and therefore they owned the *buuts*, too.

Herder B1: If people do not have animals they cannot have campsites, they have no right to use campsites and pasture. There is no *buuts* of course, if they have no livestock ... so they do not have campsites.

By owning the *buuts*, they de facto also ‘controlled’ the land on which the *buuts* was deposited. Moreover, on customary *uvuljuu* the *buuts*, a valuable resource in winter, can be extremely thick, built up from generations of *buuts*. As will be discussed below, herders assert ownership of the deep layers of *buuts* through claims of patrilineal inheritance.

*Buuts*, however, can be somewhat of a weak claim of *ezemshix erx*. Whose *buuts* have been deposited and, often the more important question, whose animals deposited *more* *buuts* can

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<sup>127</sup> A wealth of research in anthropology has shown how both agriculturalists and pastoralists utilize land as a means to make a claim to it. In some cases, such land is not put into productive use but rather utilized in ways so as to create buffers, other defensive mechanisms, or held in speculation for future sales or more extensive cropping.

<sup>128</sup> *Buuts* are also highly flammable. One herder lost his customary *uvuljuu* because a tracer from a hunter’s bullet set the *buuts* on fire. It burned for days he said smoldering down into the deep layers.

make such claims complicated. These assertions, consequently, are dependent on a broad community memory. Sole dependence on buuts as a basis for claims also presents other problems. As one herder argued in frustration:

On my winter and spring campsite I can only protect my maliin buuts. Beside the buuts, their animals come and settle next to my uvuljuu and eat the pasture which has no connection to me because I have no right to expel! Now households can just settle right next to me and use the pasture all the same, what is the difference, so they will not use the buuts! Its meaningless! They will use the pasture!

In contrast, a more outward sign are actual, physical structures such as saravch, xashaa, sheds, buildings, outhouses, and even houses over which they have clear umchlux erx. Yet, a households claim of 'ownership' over a structure rather than buuts is a degree stronger as it would be significantly more difficult to claim a house one did not build versus animal droppings from someone else's herds. The importance of structures for campsite use-rights is expressed by a local myangat in the following interview excerpt:

L: Accordingly, if you do not keep you own animals on your own land of course another person will come with their animals. In this way, I do not want to have another person settle on my camp site.

D: How do herders own this? For example, how can they say this is my uvuljuu?

L: They chose by saying here there is good water and good grass so I will build an uvuljuu.

D: If you go on otor though and another person settles on your nutag does this person then become the owner?

L: He cannot become the owner. Beside me, no one can become the owner. On this nutag there is my saravch and my fences. I am the owner.

D: Yes, but if your saravch and fences were not here ...?

L: Well, then he could settle.

D: If these things are there, though?

L: Then he is not allowed. In that case this is my land.

D: Why is this important?

L: It is needed for the animals. If I was to say why, to protect from difficult winters. This saravch of mine is a livestock 'ger'. And it is important for the animals 'to survive the winter'. [ond orox or 'enter the year']

D: What about outside ail? If there was no saravch or fence?

L: They can settle too.

The importance of such evidence for rights to campsite may seem to contradict essentialized notions of 'nomadic culture' and the impermanence of pastoral settlement. However, such images do not adhere to the Uguumur context.<sup>129</sup> The buildings themselves, clearly, do not limit movement but, as some herders argued, can encourage movement by maintaining a secure claim. Clearly, theft of these structures could inhibit movements and in many cases, herders did say they were reluctant to leave behind these belongings beyond their

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<sup>129</sup> I discuss disputes over claims and dispute resolution in some detail below.

ability to monitor; yet, at the same time I did not encounter anyone who would not move because of this threat and clearly, considering the average number of moves (6) and distance of each movement (158 km), households have largely retained a highly mobile livelihood.

Although evidence of buuts and other signs of use are critical to securing long term claim to a site, it does always deter households from settling there for short periods of time. As my host explained:

B: Everybody knows each others' nutag, ail from other soums know this, too. People who come know that it is somebody's place, they can see the buuts, they can see the well, and the saravch, there is no confusion, they understand, that is why they are there.

Here the 'visiting household' is claiming momentary ashiglax rights in opposition to long-term eземshix or rights. Although it is true that outward signs of use confer greater security in terms of long term use, in practice, though, a variety of other short-term claims-in-use can counter these customary rights of 'mastery'. In short, I call these 'claims by occupation'.

The idea that ashiglax erx or use rights are based on 'occupation' date back to the Khalkha Jirum discussed above. Such claims are still made. The first to occupy a site has first right. In contemporary Uguumur, I found this 'customary' claim to be the most contentious, partly because of its immediacy in the sense that someone must already be camped for a dispute to take place, but also because it rewards opportunists. The verb ashiglax implies 'gain, benefit, or profit' rather than the English sense of 'use'. Consequently, this can have a slightly negative connotation. Claims by occupation though are lent weight at certain times by what Fernandez-Gimenez (1999) calls the 'moral economy' of the steppe. I discuss this in detail below but here I wish to point out that such moral economies are based simultaneously on claims by occupation and secondarily on reciprocal moral economy in the context of disaster.

### ***Rights Conferred through Inheritance***

According to contemporary portrayals of Mongol tradition and custom campsites, like nutag generally, are tied to individuals through both ritual practice and patrilineal descent. Some households in the sample received their campsites through inheritance from their fathers. In normative terms, sons should obtain their customary campsites via their fathers who in turn have received the campsite from their father. This has practical implications and ideological ones. Firstly, campsites benefit from deep layers of buuts, which as I have described is also of critical importance for distinguishing a claim of possession. More importantly, such practices adhere to broader ideas about kinship, land, and social power.

The evocation of ancestral lines is one of the most widely recognized claims to campsites. In the discussion of privatization that outline much later in the chapter, we see how

critical notions of ancestry and lineal descent play in herders' perceptions of the relations between themselves and the land. Moreover, in arguments these claims hold a level of respect and legitimacy not accorded even to legal rights. The weight of these claims are supported by a range of other practices that herders themselves engage in, including ancestor and mountain worship rituals. The right of *ezen*, of mastery, transfers most often from father to sons. One herder explained:

... these are campsites that people have come to possess from the ancestors, their *uvug*, their fathers, their mothers. For example, here on my campsite one of my relatives' father and mother settled here in the past. Exactly here on this campsite they were settling. And his children got it from him and settled here. This is how it is here and now I am here.

As will be increasingly evident in descriptions below patrilineal descent and ancestral heritage are of critical importance at numerous levels. Herders, for example, invoke Chinggis Khaan as the father of the nation in order to lay claim both to Mongolian ethnic identity and territorial rights. At the other end of the spectrum, herders will invoke community memory of past inhabitants and patrilineal connection to lay claim to both territorial units such as *soums* or *bags* and even campsites.

One of the most interesting cases I came across was a herder who explained to me how he obtained his well. My host household every morning in spring would take the sheep and goat herds to the well for watering. On occasion I would accompany them down there, but rarely did I ever go with the household head, Batdalai. One day his herder was out tending to the flocks of sheep a few kilometers away. Batdalai asked me if I wanted to go with him to check the herd and make some phone calls from the mountain-top. I said yes and we took off in his Toyota Camry. After making some phone calls on his satellite phone we left to check on the herds. We sat in the car for some time and he told me stories about the old days, about things of *deer uye* or the old generations. On our drive back we stopped next to the well where he had a massive water tanker and concrete troughs. Once in while he would pump water up from the well into the tanker so that on most days all he had to do was turn the spigot and water would flow into the trough. Next to the well was a long, seemingly out-of-place, smoothed-over log (Figure 5.2).



*Figure 5.2. The old trough. (Photo taken by author)*

I had no idea what it was other than a remnant of a tree<sup>130</sup>. I asked Batdalai what this was for and he said that it was an old trough from before socialism. In fact, it was his grandfather's trough. Before socialism, his grandfather had gone north to where Binder soum is today and brought the log home to hollow out for a water trough next to the old hand-dug well where he was camping. That well was eventually repaired with concrete well-walls, troughs, and head by Soviet Russian engineers during the negdel period. When livestock and other negdel assets were being privatized, the negdel 'gave' the well to Batdalai, recognizing that his grandfather had dug the well. The trough, he said, tells everyone that this was his ancestors well and now it is his well. When I asked Batdalai what did it mean that the negdel (socialist collective) gave him the well, he said that he did not own it but that he was the master and that everyone knows this. He keeps the old trough there as a reminder of his and his ancestors' presence.

Herders made similar claims to campsites. As we will see in the dispute case studies below claims of inheritance are critical in sorting out who has rights to use and possess campsites and who does not. I explore the connection between patrilineality and land in significantly more detail in the next chapter. There I tie these notions of rights to broader territorial configurations and practices. The importance of senior males is not simply important in inheritance ideology; rather, it is central to contemporary kinship practices and territorial politics. Moreover, I

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<sup>130</sup> Outside of the soum center and the willows along the Kherlen river, I only saw one tree during my time in Uguumur.

demonstrate how these connections are related to mountain worship to produce a spiritual politics that pervades and even transcends human-environment relations.

### ***Rights Conferred through 'Belonging'***

Although herders clearly display differences in the kinds of claims and norms they considered legitimate, the root of these differences hinges primarily on whether or not the claimant is a member in particular social groupings to whom rights are attached. Conceptualizations of 'belonging' are tied to historical processes of community making. The intersection of state policy and local processes in the formation of territorial communities has a critical impact on the kinds of 'rights' herders deploy in social practice. Ties to feudal lords, monasteries, and imperial masters in the Manchu period and restricted movement and strict employment management in *negdels* during socialism have had impacts on the various ways herders view community, belonging, and territory. While local views of 'belonging' are not exclusive of state-driven citizen-making practices, they are not encompassed by them either. This is seen most clearly in the next chapter where I examine mountain worship rituals; although even this practice has long had ties to the state. Moreover, in this period of 'transition' who belongs and who does not is highly uncertain; consequently, this uncertainty is reflected in the various ideas respondents had concerning the difference between '*bolox yum*' and '*boloxgui yum*'. These sentiments highlight the importance of 'belonging' in theorizing notions of property, access, and entitlement.

### **Nutag**

It is at the intersection of community, belonging, and territory that the term *nutag* takes on its social meaning. At various scales, *nutag* not only refers a territory but also to its inhabitants, and consequently, reflects the mutual simultaneity of the social and the natural bound up in Mongolian conceptions of nature and territory. *Nutag* can variously refer to national, ethnic, racial, regional, local, clan, or familial homelands or territories. Consequently, it is through the idiom of *nutag* that exclusionary and inclusionary principles in local resource regimes are expressed.

### ***Exclusion***

At the level of the nation, the Mongol national territory, the *nutag*, is exclusively Mongolian. But land does not just belong to a 'people', the people in turn belong to the land and the two therefore are mutually constitutive of each other. In other words, the *nutagiinx* or those who belong to the land are exclusively Mongolian. The exclusive nature of the national *nutag* also extends to non-citizens with the legal proscription against foreign ownership of land. Moreover,



as explored by Bulag (1999), Mongolian nationalist discourses and practices are highly racialized. In terms of the national nutag such racialized notions exclude not just non-citizens but also non-Mongols. However, as Bulag argues, who Mongols are is not always so clear. The various ethnic groups that make up the broader Mongol cultural world are not all recognized as such by the majority ethnic group in the Republic of Mongolia, the Khalkha. Khalkha make up roughly 85 % of the population. Citizenship building practices and rituals during socialism, in spite of a surface level veneer of respect for ethnic difference, largely equated Mongol-ness with Khalkha cultural beliefs, practices, and even language.

In Uguumur and other regions, I would presume, where ethnic diversity challenges Khalkha hegemony, such conceptions are challenged. Uriankhai and Durvud ethnicities make up 30 % of the district. In everyday discourse, Kkalkha do not refer to these groups as ‘Mongol’. In fact, in a few cases where Uriankhai or Durvud have the same name as a Khalkha, they are referred to by their ethnicity. For example, Uriankhai Chuluun versus Mongol Chuluun. More than once, a Khalkha whispered to me that these groups are not really Mongol but Turk. In contrast, the territory of the Mongol uls or nation, not including Bayan-Ulgii, is synonymous with the traditional Khalkha homeland, although the west is seen as a strange admixture of ‘hybrid’ ethnicities (Bulag 1999). There is a sense that these groups are to a degree out of place in Uguumur, being seen as an oddity. Khalkha often disparaged Uriankhai and Durvud by calling them ‘zavaan’ or dirty and ‘thrifty’ while simultaneously arguing that these groups were ‘ajiltai’ or hard-working. There is a slight envy though in such sentiments as these groups are seen as being singularly obsessed with herding and their lack of ‘hygiene’ is borne of their Spartan-like approach to the herding life<sup>131</sup>. This is in contrast to their Khalkha ethnic group who are seen, largely by themselves, as ‘lazy’ and ‘violent’.<sup>132</sup> Khalkha also frequently voiced admiration for the degree to which other ethnic groups cooperate while their own people are seen as independent and individualistic. Despite the fascinating interconnections between these racial and ethnic discourses and ideas of ‘traditional’ nutag, theses differences rarely emerged in disputes or counter-claims. I only heard once about a dispute between Uriankhai/Durvud and Khalkha herders in Uguumur, but this concerned a well and did not involve inter-ethnic tensions. Moreover, most individuals were extremely sensitive to such discussions and most attempted to

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<sup>131</sup> I did not find this one group to be any more un-hygienic than another; although, it did seem that wealthy Uriankhai and Durvud were less likely to invest in conspicuous consumption particularly things like silver belts, bowls, and saddles.

<sup>132</sup> Although not to the degree of the Buriat in the north who are constantly rumored to be sporting large knives with which to stab random people! This is an oft heard ethnic stereotype in Khentii.

avoid them. This reluctance may emanate from socialist proscriptions against ethnic and racial tensions. In my experience, the young were more likely to partake in such stereotyping.

At each successive level of territorial configuration, aimag, soum, and bag, are corresponding territorial affiliations and sentiments. People who are not citizens of an aimag or soum are referred to as *gadniinx* or ‘outsiders’. This is generally reserved for those who are not soum citizens rather than between bags or other territorial levels. Herders expressed disdain for *gadniinx* by arguing that they did not know or understand their *zan setgel* or character/personality. The idiom of *zan setgel* (and *setgel sanaa* or *zan aash*) is powerful. More than a psychological phenomenon *zan setgel* refers also to a person’s essence or ‘nature’, a quality that is rooted in their birthplace and homeland or *nutag*. Although this sentiment reflects in an etic sense real cultural difference, it is believed to be rooted more deeply in the landscape and in peoples’ *udam* or lineage.<sup>133</sup> Without this basis of understanding rooted in the socio-cultural landscape herders could not cooperate or engage in positive ways with non-local households. In fact many feared physical confrontations and violence with non-local households because they simply could not reach mutual understanding and *zoxitsox* or harmonize.

These exclusionary principles are reinforced by legal proscriptions against trespassing into other soums. These territorial practices have a deep past and are intimately intertwined with other kinds of community-making practices and rituals such as *ovoo* worship. This is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter where I demonstrate the real material implications of such exclusive rituals and beliefs.

### ***Inclusion***

Although deployments of *nutag* are marked by exclusionary beliefs and practices, they are also illustrative of inclusionary ones as well. Members of all groups are, despite various degrees of diversity, marked by some sort of commonality whether this is perceived or ‘real’. Amongst *neg nutgiinxan* or people of one *nutag*, it is the land and the powers within it that hold people in common. *Nutag* are not passive, they have a kind of innate force or power of attraction called *chadal* that exudes both *buyan khishig* or good fortune and a deep landscape of memory in which people are inextricably rooted.

A herder in Uguumur relayed a story that illuminated this powerful attribute of *nutag*. During an interview where we were discussing gifting practices between herders in Uguumur, the herder explained that in customary gifting practices only horses and sheep are gifted to men. These animals are referred as having *xaluun xoshuu* or ‘hot snouts’ whereas goats and cattle are

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<sup>133</sup> *Udam* can also be interpreted as ancestry or heritage.

referred to as *xuiten xoshuu* or ‘cold snouts’. Men give to each other ‘hot snout’ animals reinforcing ideas about male virility and patrilineal connections to the home territory. Horses also confer prestige while sheep encourage greater wealth. Moreover, in horse breeding practices, *udam* is critically important as it is in human patrilineal connections. Horse gifting and horse racing are tied to patrilineal ideals and through mountain offerings which reinforce the connections between land and ‘men’. Additionally, as is the case with other kinds of livestock, but horses in particular, livestock instinctively return to their home territories. In this way land has a power over livestock and thereby over men as well.

The herder, in earnest belief, explained to me that 10-15 years ago a horse from Mongolia was sold to an Australian who was going to breed the horse for racing. Much to the dismay of the Australian owner, the horse missed its ‘nutag’ (*nutagaa sanaaj baina*) and returned on its own accord, running all the way back to Mongolia and on to its home ‘nutag’. Although I was evidently dumbfounded how this horse could have accomplished such a feat, being that he would have to cross vast areas of ocean via plane or boat, I realized that it reflected Mongolian ideas about nutag and the combined power of memory and descent. This has important implications for thinking about rights in land.

This quality of nutag does not reflect solely the inverse of exclusionary principles. Nutag can attract additional occupants via the force of mountain spirits, the primary power in the land. One of the herders in the sample explained why he migrated to Uguumur in the early years following decollectivization. At the time he was living in Batnorov soum working as a financial accountant in the company there. He and his wife however decided to purchase a herd of livestock and set out for the countryside. Her relatives were natives of Bayankhutag but in the second district not Uguumur. However, as Lkhavgadorj explained to me, he takes mountain worship very seriously. Bayankhutag and especially Uguumur have some of the most powerful *xairxan tsaxildag uul* in the steppe areas of Khentii. Being the protector mountains of the great Undur Khaan uul in Kherlen soum, he saw the local mountains, Bayan Uul, Xuree Uul, and Erxtii Uul, as important sources of *buyan khishig* (literally ‘charity blessing’ or good fortune) Bayan Uul is also particularly kind to foreigners or *gadniinx*. Moreover he knew that there were a number of *myangat malchin* in Uguumur. He believed at the time and still believes that the mountains in Uguumur *bayajuulax* or enrich these herders and himself. Because he has chosen to worship these mountains he has been able to carve out a space within the faithful and by proxy become a legitimate member of the bag. Herders connection to their nutag through the powers in the land, whether through memory, history, birth, descent, or faith are enacted at various territorial scales of community and ‘belonging’ including campsite, locality, bag, soum, aimag,

and uls. Herders in this sense however ‘belong’ (or rather, are emplaced in) both to the community and to the land. Herders on otor would frequently comment that, just like the horse, ‘*nutgaa ix sanaj baina*’ (I really miss home).

### **Groups and Claims**

The extent to which these ideas impact whether or not a household has a ‘right’ to utilize a campsite differed greatly between respondents. Ethnic differences between Khalkha and other groups, for example, I found rarely played a role in disputes and were not vociferously challenged. But broader nationalist claims to ‘Mongolness’, combined in concert with inheritance claims to Chinggis Khaan and ‘traditional’ codes such as the Khalkha Jirum, were frequently deployed. For example, as one herder put it, “Mongols can settle and camp wherever. I think that we can freely move and settle anywhere.” This sentiment, according to the bag darga, is often expressed in cases of trespassing by non-local or *gadnii* households.

D: What do some of these households say?

BD: They say that this is all Mongolian’s nutag. This is Ezen Chingiis Khaan’s nutag and I am a Mongol, so I am allowed to be here and I can go anywhere in the wide Mongolian territory.

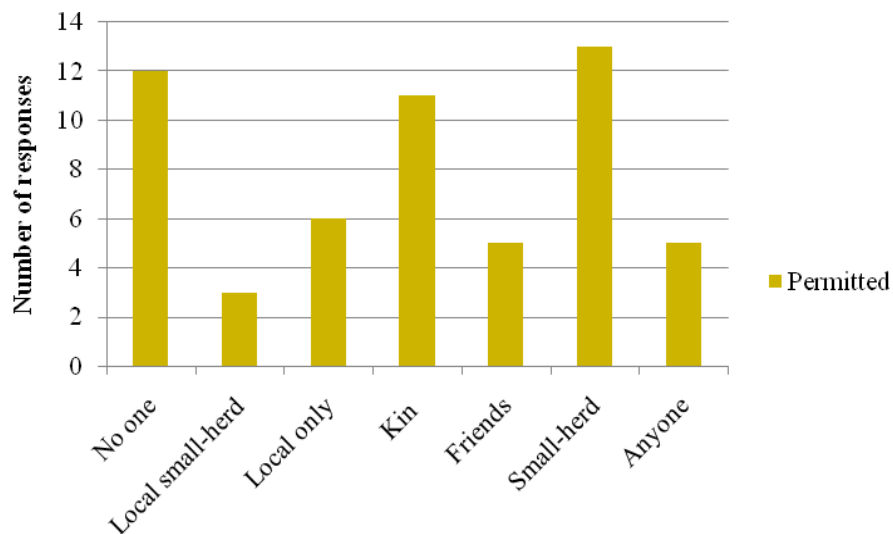
D: When they say this what do you say to them?

Ts: I say there are territorial laws! This is a nation of laws! You are a subject to what soum? Then I make them understand that wherever they answered is where they should be.

However, the bag darga does recognize that this is partly true just not in the way *gadnii* herders deploy this claim. Individuals can live wherever they wish, as spelled out in the constitution; however, this is highly regulated by a bureaucratic set of laws and regulations that constrict the right to movement, residence, and use. These *gadnii* households can become citizens and freely camp as Mongols in Uguumur; but, they have to go through a number exhausting and time-consuming legal steps to make this happen.

Claims of Mongolness, the broadest notion of community identity and belonging, often come into conflict with other community-based claims which support more exclusive local framings of territorial attachment. In fact, they are often intentionally deployed to do so. Yet, even though legally any soum citizen can settle in most places in the soum, except of course on contracted campsites, many herders resist such claims. In household surveys, I asked respondents to check off which category of households were either permitted or not permitted, in their opinion, to settle on their customary campsites. The results are summarized in Figures 5.3 and 5.4 below (respondents were allowed to list as many categories as they felt necessary).

22 % of herders claimed that no one, in their view, should be allowed to stay on their customary campsites.<sup>134</sup> They are argued that this was ‘*boloxgui*’ or not permitted. Others claimed only members of the bag, or their ax-duu, or in many cases only poor household with few stock could settle on their campsites. Others claimed anyone can settle. Although herders stated such preferences, in practice it would be difficult to defend some of these claims.



*Figure 5.3. Categories of households permitted to settle on respondents' customary campsites (Compiled from household survey data)*

<sup>134</sup> The differences in responses between different wealth categories are not highly correlated. Herders, even of the same classes, could have wildly differing opinions about who could settle on their campsite. The interesting thing here is how exclusive their perceptions are between outside, non-kin, and wealthy households and local, kin, small herd households. This is in stark contrast to Fernandez-Gimenez (2004).

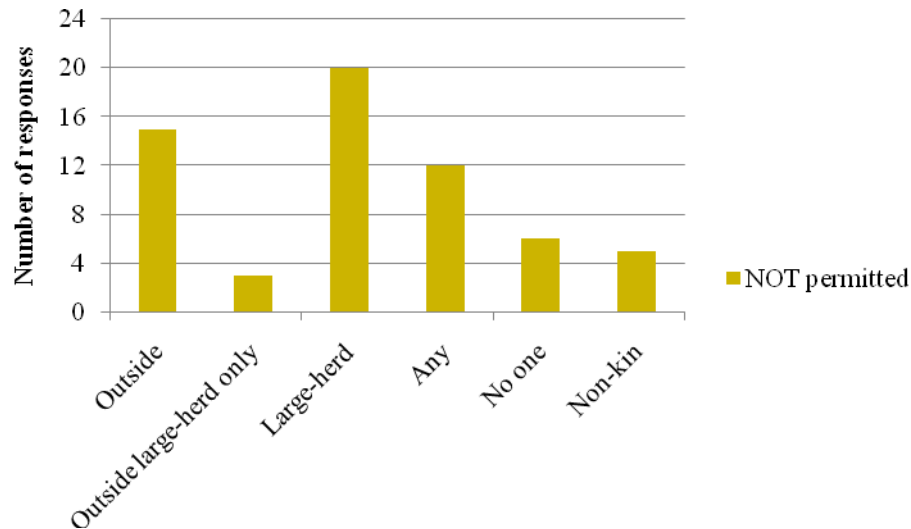


Figure 5.4. Categories not permitted to settle on respondents' customary campsites (Compiled from household survey data)

The problem of defending such claims is highlighted by a phenomenon herders called ‘*taniliin nuur*’ or ‘the familiar face’. This is a ‘*xaluun ug*’ or ‘hot word’, meaning a colloquialism with a negative connotation. The phrase signifies a common social situation in which a person with whom one is acquainted, but would rather not have anything to do with, comes up next to you and sits down with their ‘hat on’ or *malgaitai*. In this situation one is forced to be hospitable and tolerant of their presence whether it is welcomed or not. This phrase is used to describe a similar situation in settlement practices. One might settle in a region with good pasture when a local acquaintance comes and settles close to you. There are a number of problems associated with close settlement including herd combining, pasture degradation, water and grazing competition, and of course unwelcomed social intercourse. However, as herders explained, in such a situation one could not ask them to move much less ‘*xuux*’ or expel them. The bag darga explained that not only is this not allowed ‘*boloxgui*’ that one simply cannot ‘*chadaxgui*’, a much stronger statement of proscription. Yet such benefits do not accrue always to *gadnii ail*.

If a local person wants to stay they just have to ask and we will say go ahead and stay but not outside ail.

If they stay without permission and we are far away, we of course won’t say anything to them, but if we are close of course we will say something if they don’t have documents, we will say they are not allowed. We will try to expel and drive them away (*xuux*, *tuux*). We will check our campsite if we are close and if there is someone there we will expel and drive them.

Clearly, in practice, administrative units and territorial governance are tightly integrated with local moral economies.

These dynamics are also highly situational. For example, rights conferred through membership in these groups are built on a broader moral economy of reciprocal exchange in which recognition of long-term rights are exchanged for a recognition of short-term rights in the context of duress. I explore these conceptions in the following section.

### ***Rights Conferred through Reciprocity***

Above I explained the difference between long term rights of an ‘ezen’ versus short-term rights for those avoiding duress such as in a drought or *zud*. As Fernandez-Gimenez (1999) has argued, land relations in rural Mongolia are undergirded by a moral economy of mutual aid and support that includes temporary suspension of long-term rights. She refers to this as the ‘moral economy of the steppe’. As one herder explained when I inquired why he did not ‘*xuux*’ an outside ail that settled near his customary campsite:

D: Why don’t you speak to these other ail?

S: What will, these households have come and settle because of ‘natural rules’ [referring to drought]. We cannot openly expel and drive them away. So there is no ‘*xel am*’ or ‘tongue-mouth’. [argument].

This suspension of ‘normative’ organizational modes also lent him support the next year when, avoiding the danger of *zud*, he left Uguumur and went north to Kherlen. Here he found aid from a local herder.

D: So, in Kherlen soum whose nutag did you settle on?

S: I settled on a new nutag, ‘*ezgui*’ [master-less] nutag.

D: Your friend that you mentioned before, where did he winter?

S: Well we were both settled on an otor nutag. The two of us settled, one on the buuts, and the other on the steppe nearby.

D: Did you work together?

S: No, no.

D: Why did you settle in this ‘vicinity’ [*xavi* = neighborhood] near your friend?

S: What will, before I knew this guy as an acquaintance, and he is a citizen of Kherlen soum, so when I ran into him we decided to settle near each other.

D: Ok, so when you visit that campsite you got permission and then settled?

S: Yes. He is a citizen of course.

D: So when you visit a different territory you think that one must meet with and get permission from the bag or from the owner?

S: Yes.

D: Why?

S: Afterwards, life will be easy of course. They will not expel and drive us out and there will be no nasty arguments and fights. I say to the local people that I want to settle.

D: So it is difficult if you do not get permission?

S: Of course, very difficult.

D: Why might happen if you do not get permission?

S: Nothing might happen. But you must find a reason to make it peaceful.

Such sentiments reflect, to some degree, images of the ‘moral economy of the steppe’ deployed in song and verse. The ‘tradition’ of welcoming households to a new campsite with a visit and freshly brewed tea is often acted out in TV commercials and songs such as ‘Eejin chantsan tsai’ by Javxlan.

This reciprocal relationship, argued to be a foundational institution in rural Mongolian land practices, however, seemed to be less apparent than some would argue. It was clear in Uguumur that such notions do not represent a full picture. Although in some cases households do perceive reciprocity as an important institution, they are based on an understanding that these are short-term and also *exclusive* to members of specific social groups. Moreover, such practices do not override a more fundamental long-term ‘property’ claim of an *ezen*. Whereas others argue that institutions of reciprocity are foundational, I argue they are secondary. This is seen clearly in herders’ view that other households must ask permission (*zuvshuurul*) in order to settle on a campsite. The degree to which other households were subject to such requirements depended on what groups they belong to and broader sets of perceived rules and regulations. The absence of ‘politics’, for example in Fernandez-Gimenez’s (2004) ‘moral economy of the steppe’, ignores the fact that even apparently benign moral economies are underwritten by power-laden ‘communities of belonging’, broader property regimes, and structures of governance.

My first host household, who did not leave the soum, recognized such ‘rules’ during the *zud* as well.

D: How did you find out about this campsite?

B: From a local *nutgiin ail*. I asked around if there were any *buuts*, or a *buuri* around where we could winter. If we went to a far place, like in another soum that was not our *nutag* we wouldn’t have done it this way, we would not speak with local households. But here we can speak to each other, there is understanding. We know each other’s personalities and psychologies (*zan setgel*). So, we asked them permission and they gave it.

Here they do not question the right of mastery but rather acquiesce to such claims by asking permission. Even in the example above when the herder settled in another soum, he sought to do so through a ‘local’ or *nutgiinx*, recognizing the conditionality of his own presence in that soum.<sup>135</sup>

Such reciprocity, clearly, is not unquestioned nor is it absent of strategic logics. Many herders maintained that these households, the ‘*ezen*’ and the ‘visitor’, must ‘*zoxitsox*’ or harmonize (i.e. arrange an agreement). The reluctance of many to make definitive statements on exactly what the protocol of such situations should be highlights the importance of individual

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<sup>135</sup> I understand that acquiescence to another’s prior right is at the heart of ‘exchange’. However, my point here is that reciprocity is not unconditional or assumed in the Uguumur context.



rights not only of the use of campsite but also of the disposal of them, whatever the time frame, through exchange. Moreover, households argued that one of the prime factors taken into consideration are practical ones such as the ability of surrounding pasture to be ‘revived’ (*sergeex*). A number of households said that ix maltai ail could not settle on their nutag, or that they would not let them, because their animals would exceed the belcheeriin daats or pasture capacity. In contrast, *tsuuxuun maltai* ail or poor households with few animals would be allowed. The latter was a near universal response. The universality of the responses highlights both a moral economy and the exclusivity of access to the aid and support in that ‘economy’. Households with big herds are perceived as being ‘opportunistic’ while poor households are seen as acting out of desperation.

Ezed clearly take into account practical material considerations when giving permission. The problem of belcheeriin daats and sergeex are vital concerns of households in ‘receiving’ regions. Yet, even in cases that seem on the surface to be clearly altruistic, are infused with strategic behavior. For example, one household in Uguumur discussed actually ‘giving’ a campsite away.

There is a local example of this. 4 or 5 years ago, I was at a campsite for about 10 years before giving it up [literally ‘freeing it’]. So, this was my uvuljuu and I said to the person ‘I am giving up my uvuljuu so you come and please settle here, I will go to my old uvuljuu’. In this way I arranged it.

Yet, wealthy herders like this one often recruit ‘poor’ households to settle on and maintain ‘old’ campsites. This allows them to control greater territory and return potentially in the event of future adverse conditions. I explore these practices in greater detail in the next chapter.

Even in cases between friends from other soums, the use of others’ campsites is not free. Visiting households are expected to present a gift of livestock to the *nutgiin ezen*. When herders stay on another’s campsite and they benefitted from that use in the sense that their livestock did not die, they are obliged to return the favor. One herder explained that when he went on otor and none of his animals died that his friends campsites *bayajuulax* or enriched him and so therefore he must say thank you by giving a *xandiv* or donation. These practices are synonymous to a great extent with mountain worship practices I discuss in the next chapter. These examples highlight the strategic nature of ‘altruism’, ‘reciprocity’, and ‘gifting’ even in the disposal of campsites.

### **Conclusion**

The practices and attitudes concerning campsite rights and access are constantly shifting. Nowhere is this more true than in the ways herders are accessing campsites or gaining access to campsites in new ways such as through rents, donations, gifts, sales, and bribes. Before I look at

these new modes of exchange I examine some of the ways in which both rural administrations and local households attempt to secure and defend rights to campsites. Many of the new modes of exchange have evolved as a means to skirt defensive practices.

### **Defending and Enforcing Rights in Campsites**

Herders in Uguumur practice a variety of methods for deterring the settlement of other households and expelling them when deterrence has not worked. In addition to these practices rural administrative functionaries, in particular the bag darga, are responsible for ‘regulating’ the homeland (*nutag devsger*). According to the land law of 2002, the bag and soum darga, with authorities approved by the Soum ITX and parliamentary bodies at superior levels, are the sole responsible parties for fulfilling monitoring and enforcement of territorial lands. The defense of campsites and other pastoral resources such as pasture, wells, and xujir entail a number of enforcement activities including monitoring resource use and sanctioning improper or illegal actions through fines or *torguuli*. However, while local functionaries, according to the law are given the authority to carry out these legal roles, they are not ‘required’ to do so. This distinction is critical because one of the primary divisions between the herding populace in Uguumur and the administrators centers on these institutional responsibilities.

Below I discuss the various tactics herders deploy in defending their perceived rights to campsites and, by extension, other pastoral resources. I also describe the roles and responsibilities that local rural administrators fill in resource management and enforcement. Many of the tactics herders use are in response to the legal uncertainties in resource management and enforcement authorities created by decentralization policies immediately following the collapse. In concluding I explore the tensions that exist in this space between herders and administrators.

### **Local Practices**

In Uguumur herders defensive strategies and tactics are largely nascent in the sense that none of these practice existed during socialism, at least as herders see them. There simply was no impetus for deterrence or expulsion as migrations were strongly regulated by negdel officials and herders had no incentives to prevent trespassing or illegal resource use if there were any. Even before socialism, elder herders argued that such practices did not exist. An elder herder explained to me that prior to the negdel herders sold their products to the beltgel or the ‘preparation’ and ‘xorshoo’ or cooperatives; subsequently, herd-owners had little incentive to cause problems such as ‘margaan’ or arguments (*bulaatsaldax*) over campsites and other resources. Moreover, according to herders, drought was rare and even large scale zuds were much rarer than today, so

households rarely left their own areas. Lastly, he argued that most herders were related in a single locality and, even when they were not, customs were much stronger.

Clearly, as the historical sections have demonstrated, such practices not only existed before socialism but were integral to the administration and governance of xoshuu territories. In fact, it is somewhat amazing the degree of similarity of pre-socialist practices and those of today such as xuux, tuux and the use of uldsen ail or left behind households. In many ways this highlights the impact of ecological and similar structures of governance on the evolution of territorial practices at the local level. I have separated these practices into two categories: (1) ex ante deterrence and (2) ex post xuux or expulsion.

### **Deterrence**

Herders in Uguumur attempt to deter other households from settling on their customary campsites. Even poor herders have utilized a range of deterrence tactics to prevent settlement. Here I explore some of these practices.

### ***Collective settlement, saturation***

Households, typically of large kin groups, deter other households, even local ones, from settling by ‘saturating’ a territory within the bag. In essence, the households are spaced out in such a way as to prevent other households from accessing pasture. Most households do not like to be within 1 kilometer of each other although the distances can be greater if herder sizes are also greater.

Herder B1: Of course usually ax duu nar stay close together so this is rare that someone will camp so close, there is not room. We camp together, or in sections, one section of my family is over there in Murun with our relatives

Settling in a saturated landscape where most of the households are related can pose serious problems for the ‘visiting’ household. Moreover, settling on customary campsites can be doubly problematic. The lack of pasture resources and the threat of xuux (discussed below) mean that such territories are inaccessible to all except the most ardently righteous.

D: Do you work with local people when you do otor?

Herder B2: No. There is not foundation for cooperative work. How could I with so many animals. Going across someone’s territory, I would be trying to get myself expelled! I go and find open land, there I will go, somewhere where neither a household nor animal will settle. (*Zeluud*) I go where there isn’t much water. I go where there are no spring campsites, I just go across the land. If you camp on a local households winter or spring campsite of course they will be nasty.

Some argued that this strategy is very successful while others argued that it is not. The bag darga pointed out that this strategy encourages over-grazing and pasture degradation and often forces the group to move more frequently. He also argued that such practices do not deter

*taniliin nuur* practices. Other local households can legally settled within such configurations negating their purpose. In other words, this strategy is only useful for the most part against outside households. Nevertheless, nearly every group I talked to that practiced this strategy argued that these costs are manageable.

### ***Building***

Because the presence of actual structures represents one of the strongest claims a household can have to a campsite it also serves as a strong deterrent. In some cases, herders in Uguumur build structures simply to deter other households. For example, one of my host households leaves simple sheds on all his campsites as a means to deter long-term out-of-season settlement. This does not work in all cases though. Although households may settle on customary campsites for short periods of time, up to a week for example, these momentary uses do not threaten the long term viability of the site as a camp. Since short-term stays will rarely be contested, ‘visiting’ households will look for the best campsites. In this sense, the presence of a structure can in fact be a draw for short-term stays but a deterrent for long-term ones.

One example of the use of structures as deterrents concerns Batnasan, one of the wealthiest herders in the whole aimag, built a sizeable house on his summer campsite or *zuslan*.<sup>136</sup> He then registered the campsite as an *uvuljuu* and in 2007 obtained a possession contract for the site. He does not use the site as a winter campsite despite the designation. By building the structure and claiming the site as an *uvuljuu* he was able to protect the site as his *zuslan*. These kinds of strategies are becoming increasingly common.

### ***Use of motorized wells, without motor***

Another tactic herders use to deter other households is through the control of water resources. This can happen with both natural resources such as springs, streams, rivers, lakes, and wells. Household groups seeking to deter ‘visitors’ will crowd around water resources like wells. Clearly, the goal is to be close to a water resource. The secondary benefit of this, though, is that it deters ‘visitors’ from camping around the resources.

Control of wells is more obvious. Through the IFAD and WB development initiatives wells are being repaired all over Bayankhutag soum. In the case of IFAD’s RPRP household groups organized as cooperatives are receiving well-contracts for repaired and upgraded wells. Most of these wells are motorized. However, the wells must be operated by personal motors, there is not a motor present in many cases. Consequently, by controlling the motor they control

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<sup>136</sup> His wife stays here during the summer if he goes on *otor*. The house has a satellite dish with television, kitchen, and a large generator for lighting.

the well. Moreover, as the contracts state, these groups can collect user fees from other households for well up-keep. Non-coop herders stated that in some cases, when coop households want to keep people from settling in the area, they will request many animals and even cash, which many herders would be unwilling to pay. As the cost of staying around a well goes up herders are forced to find other campsites. Also by forcing other households to pay for well ‘services’, ‘visiting’ households ‘feel’ less welcomed because the tactic appears to non-affiliated households to be a kind of ‘xuux’ tactic, in which case it might foretell more severe penalties as time goes on.

### ***Reputation***

Another way in which herders are deterred from settling in some regions are through reputations. Some soums and some regions of soums are notorious for things like livestock theft and strong ‘xuux’ techniques. For example, households in Uguumur are reluctant to go on otor in Batnorov because the area is notorious for both theft and other harsh measures. Although these other soums may not actively seek to enlarge these reputations, they nevertheless present a serious deterrent.

### **Xuux, tuux: Expel, drive out**

The terms *xuux* (to expel) and *tuux* (to drive out) represent a variety of different tactics aimed at forcing non-approved households from campsites or even from the use of other resources. Many Uguumur households experienced these attempts at ‘xuux’ during their winter otor migrations discussed in later chapters. The threat of xuux was an important variable in how households make migration decisions. Expulsion and the need to move again increases the cost of migration. Long-distance migrations are already very costly for households, a factor that prevents the poor and socially unconnected from making critical moves during times of stress such as avoiding zud. The possibility of moving again because of xuux tactics is a constant worry. In response households try to avoid these situations by accessing campsites in a whole host of new ways as discussed in the next section. Here though I will look at a variety of tactics. However, similar to rights above, I do not claim to have an exhaustive knowledge of all the tactics households may deploy. Herders are very creative and so the tactics described below only represent those in a particular moment. Lastly, the techniques deployed here, and xuux in general, are not so much a means to prevent access to campsites, they are meant to prevent access to pastures via campsite settlement. Because campsites are the central node around which pastoral practices are organized, by controlling campsite access, one can control a broader range of land and pasture use practices.

### ***Resource Control***

Local households use a variety of methods for restricting resource use and access for ‘visiting’ households. The tactic I call ‘pasture eating’ refers to a practice of wealthy households whereby they intentionally pasture their animals as close as they can to the ‘visitor’ household and ‘eat’ the pasture closest to their campsite. With herds of a 1,000 or more they can force a household to leave very quickly as pasture resources will diminish rapidly. Herders also harass animals out at pasture causing the animals to run wasting energy, increasing animal anxiety (which raises metabolic rates), and delaying grazing time. Another similar tactic is to intentionally allow ones animals to combine with another household’s herds in what is called a *xonini nair* or ‘sheep party’. This is problematic because a day of grazing is wasted separating the animals. In winter these tactics can prove extremely dangerous, particularly in the context of a *zud*. In other seasons, herders often use control over well use to expel other households. By forcing a household to wait at a well while local households water their animals can decrease grazing time. Overtime the ‘visiting’ household will be forced to move on.

### ***Theft***

Livestock theft is one of the most frequently used tactics to expel households. Many households that go on *otor* expect to lose stock to theft at some point. Livestock theft has become an increasingly common phenomenon across Mongolia as livestock prices have tripled in the last 3 years. However, ‘*xuux*’ theft is different from professional livestock theft rings. *Xuux* theft usually involves few animals and often small stock rather than large stock such as horses or cattle. Moreover, households often know that a theft was *xuux* or not depending on whether local households had also lost stock. The use of theft is important more as a psychological tactic than a material pressure. Losing 2 or 3 sheep is not a drastic loss to a herd-owner with over a thousand animals (although it can be for an owner of 200 or less). The idea though that one has come across ‘bad luck’ or that their herd is not in harmony with the land is a potentially bad omen. This is juxtaposed to gifting practices discussed above where a household will reward the people of *nutag* for a successful *otor* through a *beleg* or *xandiv*. In contrast, theft portends a possible reign of misfortune.

### ***Visiting***

A household visit can mean two things. In some cases households visits are extremely threatening and in other cases it is the most cordial and appropriate thing a local household can do if a ‘visitor’s’ presence is unwelcome. In cases where a household uses reserve pasture at an off-season campsite, a visit could be the least of their worries.

D: What if they camp too close to you?

B: If someone stays too close to me I will visit them and tell them this is not allowed. Outside ail, people I do not recognize I will tell them to move – but local people I will not say anything.

D: Do you reserve pasture?

B: Yes, we reserve pasture,

D: What if someone uses it?

G: We will expel them. If our own animals go there, we will expel them. If other ails use it, we will expel them.

SH: We will punch them and fight or argue with them. No, they will not use reserved pasture, we will fight. We will visit them and punch them in the face.

B: True, we will argue, this cannot happen ...

SH: We have no reserve pasture now. But if there were we would expel other animals and protect it. But the grass is not growing so there is not opportunity to reserve pasture. For example, around our spring campsite we will reserve pasture so that it is tall. But there isn't any. If there was I would send Batbileg out to beat up anyone who comes (haha). 2003 there was reserve pasture. We had so many lambs and kids they ate the pasture. And this past fall they ate the rest but now it is finished. There are few problems because it is mostly relatives around and they eat it and that is okay.

Physical violence, although voiced as an option, seemed rare. The difference is largely in what occurs during the actual visit. Visits typically follow Mongolian customs with an exchange of greetings and snuff-bottles, some quotidian questions about livestock, weather, and prices, an offering of tea, biscuits, and then a ubiquitous 'za' before the important information is exchanged and the visitor will state their purpose. Yet, in some cases this protocol is breached, signifying a problem. In discussing the content of these discussions with herd-owners, these conversations are often cold and to the point: 'this is my home nutag, there is no contract, you are not allowed to be here, leave'. Such visits may continue for some time, nearly every day. In other situations arguments ensue, threats are made, and occasionally full-on brawls break-out. In one case reported on the television news during my stay a ger was burned to the ground by local people after a severe argument.<sup>137</sup> Such stories also fill part of local legends. In some visits, requests of livestock and money are made. In still other cases where the visits are more 'tame', the next step,

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<sup>137</sup> There are a number of local 'urban' legends about thieves in the night, roaming lamas, and other nefarious characters who prey upon 'ignorant' or 'defenseless' herders. In one story a wandering lama or badarchin comes to a ger and tells the ezen that he can cure his illness. He instructs the herder to lie down on a huge unfurled piece of felt. The lama proceeds to roll the man up in the felt and then steals his horses. While I was in the countryside, a story on the news concerned a roaming band of thieves in a Nissan Sunny in the far south in Umnugovi. The thieves drove around to unsuspecting gers in the middle of the night and robbed herders at gunpoint for religious artifacts, money, jewelry, and other niceties. While doing the household survey we ran into a local, well-known thief multiple times. It was explained to us that he roams the countryside looking for gers where people are not home and he steals things. In other cases they said he was a spotter for horse thieves. This did not stop people from providing him tea and biscuits, or even a place to sleep for the night. In essence, though, many people I knew were profoundly afraid of being alone.

if the visitor has not left, is to request the assistance of the bag darga and bring formal measures to bear on a household. These disputes are discussed below.

### ***Left behind households or uldsen ail***

When households go on otor as a coalition or with their cooperative groups many recruit or even employ a household to stay behind and defend their customary nutag.<sup>138</sup> They support this household with hay, food, and other needs to ensure that they can weather potentially risky conditions. Households do not typically want to be an *uldsen ail* but in some cases they are so poor that there is little reason to move. In other cases, the offer is attractive. My first host household was recruited as an *uldsen ail* during the summer of 2008. The group leader asked them to stay on his xavarajaa or uvuljuu and use his saravch. He tried to entice him to stay arguing that there was plenty of *xurzun*, *buuts*, good *ders*, a well, and plenty of *xujir*. Although true, it was also strategic on the leader's part. The 'left behind' household is charged with expelling outside households or other households that would be considered a threat.

### **Formal Enforcement and Defense**

Deploying the tactics listed above are difficult in themselves and do not always work. They are near useless when a household leaves on otor and their campsites are left unmonitored. In such cases, they depend to a great extent on the activities of formal rural resource management institutions such as the bag and soum governor. Yet, even when they are present and attempt to resolve situations through deterrence, xuux, or sanction, they are not always successful. In this section I look at the legal institutions and formal actors that regulate, enforce, and defend certain kinds of rights particularly the rights of local citizens vis a vis non-citizens and more rarely, between local citizens.

### ***2002 Law on Land***

According to articles 20 through 22 ITX and soum, aimag, and bag governors are given the duty to monitor and enforce any legislation and any decision they or their superiors have issued related to land management. They are given the authority to set, monitor, and enforce "efficient and rational use of ... land resources." In particular, the soum and bag governors are given the authority to 'to regulate common tenure land' and ensure its protection. Additionally, they must ensure the enforcement of decisions issued by higher level authorities.

Disputes are to be settled by the respective administrative unit's governor. Other authorities are also given formal powers in dispute resolution. The police are obligated to assist

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<sup>138</sup> This practice is noted in a number of pastoral societies; particularly, those in agro-pastoral regions of the world where cropping is used as a means to monitor and defend unused pastureland (Moritz et al 2002).



any governor's decision regarding eviction and vacation of land and are to take due measures in the case of resistance. The courts are responsible for implementing the decision of soum governors and district governors. Any dispute that concerns possession leases are dealt with by the courts after referral from the soum or bag governor. The courts are specifically not permitted to interpret the law but simply carry out legal enforcement (i.e. the decisions of authorities). Any dispute that arises from a decision is sent to the next highest level of administrative authority.

The law also spells out specific fines for trespassing or other legal transgressions. Individuals who fail to vacate contracted use areas are to pay 300,000 to 500,000 MNT fines. Those who 'deliberately graze their livestock in winter or spring pastures' are to be fined 100,000 MNT. And for 'use and disposal of land without permission or decision of the relevant authority' can incur a fine of 4000,000 to 500,000 MNT.

However, the actual implementation of these provisions in practice is somewhat limited. Firstly, there are a number of factors that constrain to a great degree the activities of soum and bag governors. Local budgets, approved and transferred from the central government via the provincial government, are not sufficient for governors to carry out all the duties that are implied in the law. The vast distances, limited budget for travel, and the limited time available all limit the degree to which they can organize and carry out these tasks. That being said the most significant problem is the evident ambiguity in the law. The law states that governors are given the authority to monitor and enforce legal provisions and decisions they make in reference to land. However, the presence of authority does not mean the use of it. Moreover, the law places little to no limits on the kinds of actions and decisions governors can make. In other words, the law gives governors a wide berth to do as they see fit, when they see fit. Consequently, how governors perceive and interpret legal provisions and their own roles in local resource management is critical.

Unfortunately, most of my experience with governors is limited to the bag governors in Bayankhutag. The soum governor whom I interviewed only a few times, and knew well informally, passed away in the countryside while conducting official business in the middle of the summer in 2008. Consequently, besides losing a friend and a supporter of my work (even when we debated these issues), a wealth of knowledge about governance in Bayankhutag was lost. Yet, it was clear during the time prior that the soum governors' active role in monitoring and enforcement was very limited despite his great authority. In practice bag governors are significantly more involved in the day-to-day monitoring and enforcement. Here I look at their role in relation to enforcement through xuux and dispute resolution. These dynamics can be seen also in the dispute case studies below.

## ***Xuux***

The primary way in which governors defend land is through xuux. Unlike rural households, governors are given the expressed authority to regulate their territorial unit including the expulsion of ‘trespassing’ households or households who are improperly using resources.

Herders come from Murun, Kherlen, Umnudelger, Bayankhutag, Galshar, Batnorov, Bayan-ovoo. We have to protect the winter and spring campsites here. Outside ails come and decimate the pasture, eat it all away (iduulne). We will say ‘you cannot visit this winter campsite or that winter campsite’. We organize this and tell them what they can do. This is one way we try to handle this situation. If not we expel them. (Norovlin soum governor)

Outside of otor contracts, only citizens of the local soum are allowed to utilize the pasture resources in the soum including land. In other soums herders may only be able to use pasture within their bag. In each area, it is presumed, there are also seasonal pastures which governors are given the authority to protect. In other words, governors can even expel local households for trespassing into out-of-season pastures. The process of expulsion is not spelled out in law and so follows local practice.

In most cases of campsite trespassing, according to the bag governor, he will scan the horizon for non-local households while he is driving around the bag and when he does not recognize them he will visit them. In other cases, local households will inform him of the presence of non-local households. And in some of these cases genuine disputes arise between local and non-local households. Whether or not the bag or soum governor become involved depends on a whole host of issues and their support (*nemer*) is not guaranteed.

In cases where the bag governor actively monitors for non-local households, he will visit the household initially and inform them that they are trespassing and must leave. Often he says he must visit multiple times in order to make his case. Sometimes this can take weeks. Technically he is authorized to bring the police in to enforce the eviction and take fines from the household as outlined in the law. Yet, in an apparent misreading of the law, he argued that the police do not have a duty to assist him. But the previous year at the behest of the soum governor and in accordance with an order issued by the provincial ITX which stated all non-local households must be expelled from drought affected areas, he did just that.

D: So do you, the soum governor and the police look for these households and visit them?

Ts: Yes. But the soum governor will not go. I will go, a police officer, and the official land inspector. They have the right to take fines and fees. They set the fine.

D: Has this happened, with the police?

Ts: Yes we went. Last fall around here there were many Galshar ail. In the west from Enkhbat’s to Erxtii mountain, between these two were many, many households. And there was no water in Galshar. From south of here people enter to get to the Kherlen river. Because they won’t pull the

well pales and water their animals by the well, the decided to water their animals in the wide Kherlen river. But here in Mongolia the water capacity is bad and insufficient.

D: Did those households leave?

Ts: Yes they left, they spent winter and spring and then we expelled them.

D: You expelled them all?

Ts: They left. We expelled and they left. They are on the other side of Tsaidam.

Clearly something was amiss in this recounting of these events. Although they are given clear authority in the law and a very specific order from the provincial ITX, they did not expel them until six months later in late spring. I presumed the case had something to do with a possible bribe, but I do not know for certain; regardless, I pushed no further as to save embarrassment on both our parts and retain the governor as a vital participant in the research. However, the possibility of bribery or corruption is not far-fetched. I discuss below in the section on ‘exchange’ the ambiguous legal space that the Law on Land and current administrative configurations have created in allowing such practices to emerge. Moreover, I discuss how these practices, whether bribes or just simply gifts, are an extension of customary forms of exchange.

Beyond the possibility of ‘bribing’, a practice only open to wealthy herders generally, the extent to which formal xuux is successful is based on the kinds of claims those households make. Because the bag governor has immense authority in resolving these cases and the soum governor is too aloof to consider appeals from local herders who might not agree with bag governor, trespassing households can via various claims bend the situation to their favor.

D: What exactly do you say to these households?

Ts: When a Mongolian person enters they say ‘hello’ of course. ‘Now you have entered and settled on my territory without permission. Now this is my people’s winter or spring campsite or they summer their animals on this land’, or in other cases, ‘we are trying to revive the pasture here that has become desert. So we must free it from pasturing pressure. I place the requirement that you have come and settled on a nutag that has been vacated for revival so you must either move and return to your home nutag or go to somewhere where there is a contract.’ And they will say ‘oh, my family has some difficulty! My children are at school in the aimag center.’ So one ger is in the aimag and one in the countryside. Now, they move close to the aimag center in order to put their kids in school. And my territory is close to the aimag. They can save gas. If they move far away this is difficult.

D: What might they say for example?

Ts: ‘I understand the expulsion. On top of the 4 or 5 days I have stayed please allow me to stay 7 or so more.’ In this way they will plead with me, ‘Please do not expel me let me stay longer, my children, my wife are sick and in the hospital. Let me stay until their treatment is done.’ That request is difficult for me too. You know Galshar is really far from the hospital. Here we are only 30 or so kilometers from the aimag center, we are very close. Or their wives are pregnant and they could birth any day. So they want to be close to the hospital and that is difficult for me. It is difficult to tell these people to move. But I am doing the state’s work and must place these

requirements. And so I say it, sometimes they leave and go. And others will say, 'I can't move I have no gas, no money, there are no means to move.' And ten days will turn into a month. But Uguumur herders will come and tell me all the time. 'Tsolmon governor, you must make them move and kick them out, they have spent 'summer and fall here' and they will say it again and again. So this is a big problem for me. Some people will say this is all Mongolians' nutag and I am allowed to be here. I can go anywhere, whenever.

D: What do you say?

Ts: I say there is government and administrative territorial laws.

Only when he is unsuccessful and when there is a clear dispute between households will he inform the soum governor. If there is not an on-going dispute and the household is not causing serious problems he lets the problem slide. One bag governor in Norovlin soum expressed this sentiment:

D: What about households that are not under contract? There are households here from other soums not under contract.

BG: We can't go around taking fines from everybody. We Mongols are 'ax-duu' brothers, we can't go around doing this. Some came from Murun and we told them were to settle and they have followed this.

One of the major issues regarding xuux is the legal provision of authoritative powers rather than authoritative obligations to local governors. Not only do governors hold immense power they can at will decide to enact them or not. In other words, the law, for example, does not require that bag governor expel non-local households; rather, it simply gives him the authority to do so. In such situations governors like the one Norovlin above can use whatever logic they please in settling disputes. Herders, for the most part, believe the governors have the authoritative responsibility to resolve disputes and xuux on their behalf. This is not splitting hairs, however, there is a major gulf in these perspectives.

### **Dispute Resolution**

This problem is seen most clearly in the case of dispute when a household, local or not, settles on the campsite of a local bag household. In these cases, the trespass is reported to the bag governor by the local herder who requests him to resolve (*shiidverlex*) the situation. In many cases, herders deal with trespassers and the work of xuux on their own. In some cases, particularly when a group of households have collectively migrated, these methods are difficult to impose. Herders perceive the involvement of the bag governor and authorities as being a more forceful pathway to expel trespassing households. Yet, for those that limited to or chose formal methods, the likelihood of expulsion at the hands of the governor is not always guaranteed.

Over the course of the research period it became clear that there was a significant debate amongst rural citizens as to the role of local administrative bodies and actors in the management

and enforcement of resource institutions. Many herders feel that governors should assume a greater and more prominent role in regulating resource use and campsite trespassing. In cases of dispute herders were often incensed that the bag darga would suggest that there was nothing he could do to resolve their dispute and, as he put simply, they must '*uursduu zoxitsox yustoi*', meaning that they should resolve the problem themselves. Time and again I heard this complaint amongst herders. The bag darga even said this to me directly, although with conditions. He argued that he cannot go driving around inspecting everyone's campsites. Herders themselves must monitor the situation and attempt to deal with things themselves first, before coming to request his assistance. When households simply ask him to 'xuux' he tells them they should attempt to deal with it first on their own and only when they are unsuccessful should they request his assistance. Herders who had confronted disputes and conflicts disagreed. Even when the case involved a leased campsite, herders experienced the same level of ambivalence. Here a herder makes his case concerning a trespassing household on his leased campsite:

D: A household settled on your winter campsite, right? When?

Herder X: Yes this happened. In fall, about August, or so. Everywhere grass was bad, but they would not expel and drive away these households. In the end we came this way (to Kherlen soum). Those households there spent spring and summer and some of them have made these places into their own uvuljuu and xavarjaa. I said something but there is no support (*nemergui*). This year is no different than the last. Last year they were everywhere and the pasture capacity became so bad! And we said something but there is no support. The bag governor was expelling and driving away but in the end he said we should expel them ourselves.

Herder X's Wife: The bag governor told us "You should expel them yourself! If you do not expel them, they won't go! So expel them yourself"

Herder X: I said at the bag meeting, this one ail's campsite nutags, down south, became nice and pleasant but still they do not expel. If I expel what would happen?! I've said many times but there is not support. "You all need to harmonize this and make them move, take measures on the steppe" the governor said to us.

D: They settled on your campsite in fall right? Did you visit the household?

Herder X: No. They came last august and stayed until June of this year without moving! This household stayed for fall, winter, spring on my campsite. We said this many times, but it wasn't working. Just "move them yourself!."

D: Who do you think has the right to expel?

Herder X: The governor has the right to expel, to make them leave our nutag.

D: In your opinion whether you visit or not they won't move?

Herder X: If they won't move after the governor has told them, of course they won't move for us.

D: Why did you not visit the household?

Herder X: The governors know these things. They must do as the governor says. If they won't do as he says, they will not do as we say.

D: How did you know about this household?

Herder X: I visited them.

D: Why did they move in the end?

Herder X: Good grass had grow in their home territory. So they moved themselves.

D: Was this a Gaslhar household?

Herder X: Yes.

D: Was this your uvuljuu or xavarjaa?

Herder X: The same.

D: Do you have a lease?

Herder X: Yes, I have the lease. We have to as a cooperative.

This lack of enforcement, borne of much broader material problems rather than some fundamental disagreement in philosophies of governance, poses serious problems for the constitution of possession or even private rights over campsites. Without monitoring, enforcement and defense, possessory or even private rights became largely de jure abstractions open to increasing dispute and conflict.

The bag darga also state that if anything does happen, a serious argument where two herders claim a right to a campsite, they can go before a judge and a judge will decide who has the greater claim. They do not have to come to him. Moreover, he argued that he was just too constrained and that herders just do not understand. He argues that the role of bagiin darga has too many obligations and duties and he simply cannot fulfill them all. Moreover, before 2007 his salary was next to nothing. In 2007 a new law approved higher salaries for bag darga duties. Adding to the problem is the fact that he like most bag darga is a herder himself. Herding takes up a considerable amount of his time. So much so that he says he only visits the bag center for meetings, votes, and formal occasions; otherwise, he rarely ever visits the center. Consequently, herders have little access to the darga, since he too like everyone else must be on the move. Lastly, and most importantly, the position of bag darga, at least in Uguumur, has little force to back up his attempts to 'xuux'. There simply is no repercussion for households that do not do as he says. According to him, he has no ability to take fines and physically force people to move. This gives the impression that he is '*nemergui*' or without *nemer* (support). Consistently, herders complained about the lack of effort on the bag governor's part. Contributing to this problem is the contrast between contemporary administrative activities and past ones.

G: In that period the negdel, the governors, all knew where to go and made these decisions. Now, they have quit work. Now there is no administration and no livelihood. In the last ten years, now, there is all these aid goods, for example. All these international aid groups. They do all these projects and provide all these aid goods but the administration does not do anything.

The debate, evidently, is not solely about differing ideologies of governance. Clearly these arguments and current formal enforcement capacity are shaped in the material exigencies of contemporary Uguumur realities. The bag darga is clearly beholden to a decentralized administrative structure encapsulated within a fiscally-centralized budgetary system that little appreciates his service, rewards him (or her) poorly, and provides little in the way of material or institutional assistance. Herders, especially young or socially unconnected ones, have little recourse outside of rural government institutions. They hold little power in the social arena and therefore cannot force the weight of local seniors or state actors to affect positive outcomes for themselves. This is seen most clearly in case studies of dispute and conflict. Before I explore these case studies, in the following section, I examine the various ways in which herders access campsites through new modes of exchange.

### **Exchange and Access to Land**

The exchange of use-rights to land such as campsites has a long history in Mongolia. Despite the appellation of rangelands in Mongolia as ‘state property’, they have never been considered ‘open’ resources. In contrast, as laid out in the history section above, rangelands in Mongolia have long been under exclusive ownership or territorial control. For the exchange of ‘things’, even ‘rights’, to take place a resource must originally be exclusive, hence the need to exchange, and alienable, even if only to a certain degree. Clearly, as rural administrative bodies have long engaged in agreements over use-rights to pasture and campsites, such conditions have a past in Mongolia.

In the sections below I look at the ways local administrative institutions and other governmental bodies amongst themselves and with individual herders, engage in the exchange of use-rights to specific kinds of land, particularly campsites. Secondly, I look at the variety of ways that herders themselves, in the margins of the state, have created new modalities for transacting in land. These strategies, in some cases meant to circumvent the state and legal institutions and in others simply to fill a void left by the state, have altered to a large degree the way that people are thinking about land. However, what these transaction are and how they fit with the rural political economy are not always so clear. Lastly, I look at the case of ‘bribes’ to explore the strategic ambiguities some herders exploit to their advantage.

## **Exchange and the State**

### ***Geree ba Gerchilgee: Contracts and Certificates***

As discussed above in some detail, respective levels of government contract land use-rights for a variety of activities including herding. Soums establish winter otor contracts during adverse conditions and aimag governors formulate contracts with MoFALI for the use of national otor reserves. Local soum governments according to the land law of 2002 now offer possession contracts to herding households for ‘possession’ of winter and spring campsites. Moreover, local governments, along with facilitation assistance from international development institutions like IFAD provide well operation contracts to herder cooperative groups. The most advanced contracts occur in urban regions like the national capital, provincial capitals, and soum centers where land can be privately obtained, sold and purchased. Moreover, other kinds of contracts such as mining exploration rights and agricultural land use leases mean that local practices exist within a wider field of property relations. Contrary to a number of portraits of rural Mongolia, clearly, land relations have evolved drastically and to a great extent contradict the simplistic image of ‘open’ or even common access. However, these ‘legal’ or formal venues for transacting in land are not the sole pathway of exchanging rights; in fact, there are a variety of informal ways in which herders themselves transact in land.

### **Exchange in the Margins of the State**

In this section I look at the ways herders enter into agreements and exchanges outside the purview of the state. This includes not only informal evasion of taxes and other state tools of ‘economy’-making, but also the informal recognition of various attributes of different kinds of property and exchange. Moreover, some of these practices are extensions of the state, dependent on state institutions, and invariably interconnected with state practices in various ways. In many ways these practices at times challenge the informal/formal distinction while at other times showing clear subversion. Some practices intentionally avoid state-connections while other kinds of practice typically labeled informal seek out and attempt to draw on state power and legibility. Here I examine these as they intersect with land.

### ***Gifts and Donations***

As discussed above, most herders recognize and have recognized in times past, the benefits of providing gifts for a successful tenure to a campsite ezen. These *beleg* usually come in the form of sheep or, more rarely, horses. After a successful stay when few animals have died, a sign of *buyan xishig* or good fortune, the visiting household who is *bayarlaj baigaa* (happy) will, from a sense of *sain dur* or good will, gift animals to the ezen as a sign of thankfulness (*talarxalt*).



This is similar in many ways to the relationship between men and mountains and patrons and clients discussed in the next chapter. Such relations can occur on unequal terms as discussed in the previous chapter when gifting increases indebtedness but also on more equitable grounds as between friends. Nevertheless, in the case of gifting, it is almost always wealthy households presenting gifts to relatively poorer households in other areas; it is rarely poor households. This is largely due to the fact that poor households are less mobile and are less likely to occupy another's campsite or be in the position to ask permission. But the expectation of 'gifts' is also part of the reason why poor households are less mobile and why they rarely occupy another's campsite as I explain in chapter 7. They simply cannot afford a loss of sheep or a horse. Moreover, when poor do occupy a wealthy persons' campsite they are often recruited to do so or are a client to that herd-owner.

Similar to *beleg* are *xandiv* or donations. *Xandiv*, in the way herders explained the concept to me, refers to the lack of an expected return and the sense that the transfer is immediate, singular, and non-continuous. *Beleg*, however, are intended to maintain and cement an on-going relationship, or as Sneath (2006) argues, to 'enact social orders'. In many cases though there is little distinction. The difference in these terms serves a strategic purpose as I will describe below. *Xandiv* can also be literally donations to the poor, lamas, or other less fortunate or materially lacking members of society. However, the difference between *beleg* and *xandiv* are not always so clear-cut. Moreover, they are not always distinct from other kinds of social exchange. Some argued that *beleg* are at times disguised rents and many argued that *xandiv* were in fact *xaxuuli* or a form of corruptive bribery not some altruistic act or a simple form of thanking. By strategically positioning an exchange as a *xandiv* separates that exchange from prior or future exchanges. Additionally, it makes the relationship between giver and receiver more socially distant than with *beleg*. Below I discuss these complications and the fuzzy boundaries between gifts and rent and donations and bribes.

### ***Rent***

Herders talked about campsite 'rents' in two ways: as *xuls* or sweat which is more equivalent to a wage and *turees* which more approximates western ideas about rent. *Xuls* or *xulslux* (to make sweat) has a much more negative connotation than *turees* and implies a significantly more impersonal or opportunistic transaction between unequal actors on the margins of the moral pale whereas *turees* implies something less exploitative and more formal. For the most part, herders called such payments (*tulbur*) *xuls* rather than *turees*. This is largely because payments come in the form of cash rather than livestock. As forms of 'currency' the cultural distinctions here are important. Livestock are a commodity but one that signifies more than its

market value at any given time. Livestock have symbolic meaning. As explained in the previous chapters, sheep and horses symbolize masculine principles and tie men to the powers in the land. Cash on the other hand has less prominent prestige in the pantheon of gift-able things. In some circumstances money is a symbol of fortune and wealth and as a symbol can be gifted to *burxan* images and *ovoo* mountain spirits. Yet, in transactions money assumes a quality of ‘something-that-which-it-is-not’. In other words, its equivalency is in itself problematic. For example, in the work of Wheeler (2004), market related transactions in cash and trade are seen as a ‘lie’. The term for trade (*xudaldaq*) as he points out is the same for lie (*xudalaa*). By being symbolic in nature, money can easily misrepresent as represent value. This negative connotation bears out in such transactions. With *xuls* there seems to be a sense that the value of transactions, done in cash, are somewhat uncertain because they may or may not equate with the service rendered. Whereas with *turees* there is an assumption of equivalency or with a *beleg* or *xandiv* there is a belief that ‘charity’ or *buyan* glosses over issues of pure economic value. The distinction is signified below:

D: Some people say that when they try to settle on other peoples campsites they ask from money or animals, like a rent ...

Former Bag Darga S: Yes, this is *xuls* [in disgust]. If they take money, yes. And this is happening.

D: When did this begin? What if the person has few animals?

Former Bag Darga S: Well, it was like this – in a drought or *zud*, herders come on *otor* and they want to give, they say I want to give a cow or I want to give a sheep, yes sheep ... to the *ezen*. But now, people give and take money sometimes.

D: Is this recent, did this just begin recently?

Former Bag Darga S: Yes, since 2000-2 [the ‘big’ *zud*] this has been happening, now people take money.

The charging of rents for campsite access is a result not only of the increasing integration of the rural herding economy into a monetized economy where private property and ‘ownership’ are possible but it also the result of shifting material conditions in which *zud* risk has increased, resource use is increasingly opportunistic, informal defensive strategies pose serious costs, and decentralization policies have emptied rural administrative institutions of important enforcement and monitoring capacity. Consequently, the need to ‘*zoxitsox*’ or harmonize between herders becomes increasingly important and cash is a liquid means for doing so.

This does not mean that rents are universally accepted. At the same time that rents satisfy some herders, rents signify to many people the possible advent of privatization. Although, many willingly pay rents because such exchanges ensure not only immediate access but a ‘peaceful’ or ‘harmonized’ situation (*zoxitsson*) without the threat of *xuux*, these transactions also reinforce ‘*ezemshix*’ claims over campsites at the expense of more common ones as exemplified

by ‘customary’ reciprocity. Yet, the conflict between these proprietary frameworks is apparent. Below a wealthy herder highlights the challenge of *xuls* and other transactions for the future of a pastoral commons.

D: You have given animals to stay on campsites?

Herder T: Yes, I have done this before.

D: Is this rent? Do they ask for rent?

Herder T: So, if that happens where he says he wants to take rent, I will give him money.

Eventually he will take all my stock. Because of this we move about eating the pasture and settling here and there.

D: But if they privatize pasture do you think people will have to give so many animals?

Herder T: I will give animals, of course. I say I will give money, but really I have to sell animals to get money of course. Just recently they repaired the Bayankhuree well, you know? So when I visited I said I wanted to water my animals at the well. To do that, they say for every 500 head I have to give 1 sheep. So in one month I will have to give 6 sheep. If every year and every month I have to give this many sheep my animals will be finished. So if it’s one month 6 sheep ... 70 head I will have to give! Just to water my animals! I have 1,000 stock there, right, so I will give a horse, a cow and no less than 6 sheep it seems like. So if all my animals were there, I would have to give 24 sheep each month! This kind of privatization is dangerous!<sup>139</sup>

D: So you think that if they privatize pasture too then people might say you have to give 10 or 20 sheep to use the pasture or even campsites?

Herder T: Yes, but now this is happening. Last year I went on otor and settled on someone’s uvuljuu and they said give me a 2 year old cow! They did not say ‘will you be here a long time, one month?’, nothing like this, just ‘give me a cow’!

D: Did you give it?

Herder T: No, I did not give. Other people gave and settled, but I did not. I moved elsewhere.

D: Is this problem happening a lot?

Herder T: Yes, it is happening and so if they privatize it will be dangerous. You won’t be able to send your animals this way or that way and people will just say ‘this is my pasture, give me animals’ and so something dangerous might happen.

### ***Zarax, xudaldax: Selling***

Over the course of fieldwork I was surprised to uncover cases where households in essence ‘bought’ or ‘sold’ campsites. Although such practices are uncommon, they are not rare even though they are largely considered secrets or ‘*nuuts*’. These transactions are not in themselves illegal and do not contradict land laws because herders do not in fact buy land per se; rather, they purchase or sell the structures, buuts, and other non-land *umch* over which they have alienable rights. Clearly, by doing so they are in effect ‘selling’ the land by selling the means to access it and claim rights to it. This is not lost on those involved in the transactions. In the four

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<sup>139</sup> His calculations of what this might cost him are incorrect. Nevertheless, his point is salient.

cases I found just in Uguumur all participants understood that the main object of the sale was access to the campsite and surrounding pasture not just the structures on the land. However, public admission of such illegalities would be problematic; it is for this reason that these transactions are *nuuts*.

One of my host households sold his customary *xavarjaa* in 2006 to his wife's cousin, a young but very successful herder who is on the verge of becoming a *myangat malchin*. My host household, poor by local standards with approximately 150 head of stock at the time of sale, simply had little need for the spring campsite with the *saravch* and *buuts*. What they were in desperate need of were additional stock. Consequently, in selling the campsite for roughly 1,500,000 MNT they were able to purchase 50 female sheep to add to their diminishing herd. With few animals they simply did not have the need of a *saravch*, well access, and deep *buuts*. Rather they planned to herd for three seasons as a hired herder to his mother-in-law and her sons who have their own spring campsite near the Kherlen river in Xaya, a region with large swaths of *ders*. Batzorig, his wife's cousin, had no *xavarjaa* and his herds were growing rapidly, especially his goat herd. He is the largest goat-owner in the *soum* with over 300 animals in addition to 500 sheep. He could have purchased the wood and materials to build his own *xavarjaa* but the situation of buying an existing *saravch* with deep layers of *buuts* was a good opportunity. Interestingly, it was Enkhjargal, the original owner of the spring campsite which he received via inheritance from his father during the *negdel* period, who instigated the sale. In other words he was looking for a buyer. Enkhjargal no longer camps there and seems largely satisfied with the sale despite the fact that it is a glaring symbol of his failure to succeed in the 'age of the market'.

Batdalai, the leader of the *buleg* to whom Enkhjargal and Batzorig belong, has been active in 'land sales' for some time. He sold two of his former campsites to other herders in the *bag* including his younger brother-in-law. Currently, Batdalai has a standing offer to a herder named Purevjav. Purevjav is a small herd-owner but mostly of choice rather than circumstance. He herds a small herd year round on a campsite just off the main east-west road before it splits into Xaya. The campsite is located in the middle of *ders*. He herds his stock with his son, occasionally moving off the primary campsite and moving around the campsite, but never farther than 500 meters (see campsite in Figure 5.5 below). Purevjav is from Galshar *soum* originally where most of his relatives still live. He has no relatives in Uguumur. His daughters live and study abroad in Switzerland, the US, England, and South Korea, but his son who lives with him is unsure of whether or not he will remain in the pastoral sector. Without relatives or others to cooperate with, life will be hard when his father retires to the *aimag* center. Currently, they cooperate with Batdalai's group largely in a monitoring function because they live at the only

entrance to Xaya. There is no other way to drive into Xaya except by the road unless one is willing to drive over the extremely rough landscape. The road controls access both to the surrounding pasturage and access to the well and the river.



*Figure 5.5. The campsite Batdalai is attempting to purchase. (Photo taken by author)*

Batdalai has a standing offer of 3,000,000 MNT. This has risen over time. His first offer was in 2006 for 1,500,000 but Purevjav turned him down. Over time the offer has risen to 3 million. Batdalai has told Purevjav that if he ever plans to leave the countryside for the aimag center or UB, he is willing to buy. Batdalai is constantly looking for new campsites. Although he has maintained his customary uvuljuu and xavarjaa in Tuxum (both with possession leases) and has invested a considerable amount of time and material in those sites, he has a number of clients and others he can settle on other sites with his taviul mal. Moreover, he would control the road, the main well, and provide him a much wider grazing territory.

One of the sample households also discussed a campsite they purchased in Umnudelger soum that they use for otor. Lkhavgadorj is a wealthy herder who works with his son and little brother in addition to a number of hired herders. His son's wife is originally from Umnudelger sum and in bad years they have gone there on otor. However, during most years he leaves a considerable number of taviul mal there. Because his son's wife visits often and interacts with kin in the aimag center he is able to maintain tabs on his animals. In 2002 when they went on a 2 year long otor he purchased a campsite outright from one of his daughter-in-law's relatives. They were elderly without children and were planning to retire to the soum center in Umnudelger. Lkhavgadorj purchased the campsite for cattle and cash. In 2007 they moved a considerable amount of the saravch to Bayankhutag after some of the wood and metal had been stolen. They have discussed simply moving the entire structure and essentially giving up on the site.

Not all households believe that the buying and selling of land is appropriate. As another senior herder explained in an interview, such transactions contradict a number of ‘customary’ beliefs about human-land relationships.

D: Some herders want to be able to buy or rent campsites, what do you think?

Herder S: Such things are happening like this in the west [of Uguumur], people selling campsites to other people. Now, the government will resolve this, though. Before, of course, they [government] wouldn’t privatize. Yet, why would people say this or do this, “I will sell my father, grandfather, and ancestors’ settled campsite”, what will?! I know that they say this. But this person must not understand, it is just so hard to see by this meaning. These thoughts are very difficult for us.

Sales, though, are not the only means by which herders or other actors transact in land. In addition to gifts, sales, rents and other exchanges are transactions that one might label as bribes. However, as Sneath (2006) has cogently argued, the distinctions between bribes, gifts, and other transactions in a Mongolian cultural context are not always so clear cut.

### **‘Twilight’ Exchanges**

Here I use the term ‘twilight’ to refer to the murky transactions that are neither formal, legal exchanges involving the state nor are they local forms of practice largely outside the purview of the state. Lund (1999) uses the term ‘twilight institutions’ to refer to non-state institutions that serve or are contracted via the government to serve state functions. Like the difference between night and day at dusk, these institutions are neither the state nor are they not the state. The exchange practices I discuss in this section occupy a similarly dusky space. These exchanges, one might now call bribes or corruption but in the past something else entirely, occupy a familiar space within Mongolian cultural history. In the practices described below there is also the additional fuzziness concerning the distinction between ‘gift’ and ‘bribe’.

As Sneath (2006) argues there are several different kinds of exchange in Mongolia cultural frames. As I have discussed above *beleg* and *xandiv* are gifts and donations respectively. These two forms of exchange are considered benevolent and maintain a positive connotation in daily social life, although, as I argue, they may be used strategically to discursively gloss over improprieties. However, there are other kinds of exchange that are less than savory. *Xaxuuli* are a kind of inducement or ‘sweetener’ where someone extends a favor or gift in clear expectation of a return service. In other words, *xaxuuli* renders another indebted. The phrase people use to describe this is *gar xunduulex* or ‘to make another’s hand heavy’. *Avilgal* or *avilgalax* is initiated by the taker who makes a request for the rendering of a service. In practice, this is described as *gar tsailgax* or ‘to make one give tea’. In other words, one compels another to render a service or good through a sense of obligation. *Gar xarax* describes those who look for these opportunities.

Sneath makes an important distinction between exchange as the enactment of obligations and exchange as transactions. The distinction between instrumentality and the reconstitution of moral order are important to recognize in these terms. For example, *gar tsailgax* does not always connote instrumentality or self-interested action. In fact, the term stems from the practice of hospitality where one is expected to give tea to visitors and guests. Clearly, this is open to strategic manipulation, but it is also foundational to important moral codes. Yet, though Sneath makes a distinction between the urban and rural implications of these practices, in essence arguing that the instrumental nature of exchange is confined to the city and moral orders of social obligation are relegated to the rural countryside, I argue that during my research I found numerous examples where rural herders utilize obligatory exchanges and gifting in very instrumental ways. Moreover, though some attempt to represent certain acts as proper, positive forms of ‘customary’ exchange, many others herders disputed such claims stating that although certain exchanges are structurally similar to benevolent gifts of a positive social order, they were also highly instrumental and self-interested acts.

In Uguumur it was clear that many of the exchange practices that the local administrations are authorized to transact through are wrought with corruption and bribing. Although corruption and bribes are illegal, as Sneath (2006) points out, many transactions are assumed to be the ‘nature of things’. In otor contracts for example, a number of wealthy herders made monetary or in-kind gifts or donations to secure new contracts or to renew old ones. The otor contract discussed in chapter 8 is largely the outcome of a gift given to the soum governor whom the herder sought out to initiate a contract for Bayan-Ovoo soum. Other herders also arranged ‘verbal’ contracts or *amiin geree* for other soums. Moreover, both during the period of research and prior to my arrival it is well known that the Bayankhutag soum governor is more than willing to accept such ‘gifts’ although most herders referred to these presentations as *avilga* or corruption.

B: People must ask permission, people who come can stay but they must ask permission. These things must be here, but the current soum governor, these things aren’t here, there is no administration, he takes money, sheep, lambs, horses, cows, whatever, and soon we will be without a nutag. They come, and give money or animals and eat the pasture. They have no documents and eat our pasture, terrible ... it’s all Galshar ail and Suxbaatar ail, they come in these big groups, they must have documents, of course, but if they came without them they should be expelled, they use the wells, pasture, they must pay taxes, land payments, and these things, but they don’t – the soum administration is terrible, they take just for themselves (*xuviin ashigaar*). They came last year and now our pasture in our territory has become *xurs* (dirt, dust) and now we have to go on otor. This place is my nutag, so this is different, I’m here on my nutag, but here everybody is a Suxbaatar ail, look outside, all of those ail are Suxbaatar ail. They just come and eat the grass and go. Households with many, many animals come and eat it all up ... the soum governor will expel poor households or people he might not like and only his favored (*durtai*) ail will he allow to stay.

D: What do you think are the responsibilities of current administration?

ShTo: They should not allow outside households to come in. And if they do they should expel them!

ShTu: Yes, because if they come, there will be desertification. The soum darga is not responsible though. The bag darga must deal with these things in the bag. He must take taxes and set fines.

AN: Yes, but when they enter they must get documentation from the soum governor. There must be documentation. It is not the bag darga who does this it is the soum darga but with this governor this has become his own private business, he takes peoples 'private' money and so people with big huge herds come in and he settles them here ...

ShTu: He is taking a bribe ... do you understand? Bribe (avilga)?

B: Dan aa, do you understand?

D: Yes, yes, I understand.

AN: For himself!

But there is not universal consensus about the nature of these exchanges. Clearly, those involved tell a different story.

Those involved invoke what might be called the 'moral economy of the steppe' where recognition of authorities in the land and proper restitution for abnormal use of resources must be provided. Yet, it is also unavoidable that they have clearly done so as a means to serve their own instrumental purposes. Moral economic positioning in this case, serves as a means to discursively re-orient representations of what are simultaneously moral and instrumental acts. Sneath (2006) argues, in a highly structuralist argument, that instrumentalist or transactionalist approaches fail to appreciate that exchanges of various kinds 'institute social orders' because they do not attempt to 'get' something but, rather, maintain moral orders of obligation. I argue that it would be premature to exclude transactionalist approaches from our understanding of rural exchange practices in Mongolia because self-interest and instrumentality are not exclusive of enactments of a moral order, and as Polanyi (1944) makes clear, can be constitutive of a moral order itself.

## **Dispute and Resistance**

Part of the research methodology as described in the introductory chapter was to collect 15 case studies from the research sample and do intensive case histories. However, in the field this proved to be quite difficult. In fact, attempting to get a larger sample of conflicts worsened my ability to gather in-depth data for each individual dispute. One of the major reasons why this was so difficult to accomplish were the vast distances I had to travel in order to obtain dispute narratives and interviews from all of the principal actors involved in each dispute. Even when I could travel the distance, arranging times to meet with herders and officials took a considerable amount of time and energy. Consequently, while I was additionally witness to small disputes, I was able to collect significant data only for a handful of disputes despite the revelation that there were in fact a number of disputes over the course of the year. 30 sampled households had been



involved in a dispute over campsites and 26 were involved in disputes concerning reserve pasture. Only in 7 cases did households become embroiled in heated arguments' or *margaan* over these resources. The numbers below only concern sampled households own campsites and reserve pasture. A number of households however were involved in disputes while they were on otor in other soums. Very few would admit to this, but a number still did. Only in one case did the dispute turn violent. In the 3 studies below, I was able to investigate at least one of the primary disputants and the formal institutional actors including bag governors, soum governors, land extension agents, and, in one case, the police.

*Tables 5.2. Number of incidents of trespassing and dispute from July 2006 to July 2008.  
(Compiled from household survey data)*

Campsite Trespassing and Dispute					
Incidents <sup>140</sup>	Permission	Spoke	Argument	Req. BD	Req. SD
30	9	9	4	10	7

*Table 5.3. Number of incidents of trespassing and dispute from July 2006 to July 2008.  
(Compiled from household survey data)*

Reserve Pasture Trespassing and Dispute					
Incidents	Permission	Spoke	Argument	Req. BD	Req. SD
26	0	9	3	5	4

### **Case studies of Dispute**

These case studies demonstrate several important facets of the sections discussed above: (1) the kinds of claims that herders make on campsites and their effectiveness, (2) the ways they , protect, defend, and enforce those rights, (3) the ways in which the state , and (4) the outcomes of the dispute. Also the case studies I have chosen involved three different configurations of principal disputants: (1) one case between local households, (2) one between a local Uguumur household and visiting household from another soum, and (3) one between a local household in another soum and an Uguumur household on otor. These three different configurations are important in that they bring to the forefront critical issues.

### ***Nasanbayar***

In the fall of 2007 herder Nasanbayar was going to settle on a winter campsite he had been using for some years. When he got there he found another household camped on his site.

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<sup>140</sup> Permission = permission was given, Spoke = confronted trespasser, Argument = argued with trespasser, Req. BD and Req. SD = informed and requested help from bag or soum darga.

The follow excerpt describes, in his own words, the dispute that followed. Although I interviewed other actors including his hired herder, son-in-law, daughter, and the 2 bag governors, their accounts did not differ greatly or in any substantial way from his own.

D: You said that a household settled on your customary campsite. When did they settle there?

G: In October, in autumn, this past year. It's an uvuljuu I settled on [before they came]. Now, so ... my household camped there for several years. Before that, my stock were dropping buuts on a different site. For 4-5 years before I came to this uvuljuu [where the dispute occurred], I was settled on another old uvuljuu. Their ax duu were wintering here [the disputed campsite] in the past. After that, almost 10 years after that [when they last settled there], that became my wintering land. I wanted to winter there, now we are quarrelling. It was such a thing you see? If one tries to take ownership, another will quarrel. Before this happened I was wintering there for 5-6 years of course. Until my household came, they had not winter there for 10 years. "Now it is my uvuljuu" they said, of course because the site has buuts. I worked very hard to come here. In general, this is the situation.

Here, Nasanbayar points to several sources of rights including the 'dropping of buuts' and presence. Moreover, he also presents the case for the other household whose ancestors camped there in the past while also accusing them of being opportunistic and seizing his animals' *buuts*. He argues that their right to the campsite was forfeited when their ancestors left ten years ago; consequently, he should be considered the *ezen*.

D: In your opinion then who is the campsite ezen?

G: Well, it's not that I got it through privatization or something, I simply was wintering there for many years. For my livestock this was their nutag [home territory]. That household though had recently married and separated out from their parents, and came out to herd and settled on my old wintering site [the site under dispute]. Basically, according to inherited tradition they said they will settle there on their elders' uvuljuu and so they did. Now, to appropriate things this way is traditional. My household ... That land though was for many years without an ezen and my household and livestock settled there, revived it (*sergeesen*), and although we took it, now there is this problem that has arisen.

I ask him here to present his argument for being the campsite ezen. While dismissing the issue of legality, he argues that for his livestock this was their home and that he, over the years, had camped on the site, had revived (*sergeesen*) it and the pastures around. In other words, he took an *ezengui* space, meaning both 'without a master' and therefore 'untamed' and 'wild', and rendered it useable through his own mastery. At the same time he also outlines the case for the other household who, according to traditional inheritance practice, has a legitimate claim, even in his eyes to the campsite. Moreover, he situates their claim within household cycles, understanding their needs as a new household. Yet, he still believes his claim is greater.

D: Was that household a local household or outside household?

G: Local household.

D: Did you visit the household?

G: Yes, well, I told them I wanted to meet and discuss this. So, they gave this answer, “before this was my uvuljuu and my father’s uvuljuu and so I am now wintering on my uvuljuu.” You know, they did not say anything brilliant. This kind of problem is happening ... with uvuljuu and xavarjaa and pasture, the ownerships problems are happening a lot now.

D: How did you find out about that household?

G: I was settled just nearby when they came. I myself saw them, visited and met with them, discussed this with them and here we have this problem.

D: Did you inform the bag darga?

G: Well, this is not in my bag territory. I was settling in the first bag territory. I am a subject (xaryat) of the western side of the soum, but I was in the east side of the soum.

Here is the crux of the case. Nasanbayar’s uvuljuu was actually in a different bag which has a different bag darga. Such disputes are at the discretion of the bag governor who has the authority to resolve these situations according to how they see fit. The other household however is originally from the first bag and has a number of kin in that bag settled nearby.

D: So did you meet with the first bag darga?

G: Yes, I said “this was my old wintering site. I am doing ‘frightful’ (aixtar) migration and settlement so ....” Well, I did not speak to that.

D: What do you say to her?

G: To the bag governor ... well that this was my old site. She knows me, she knows this is where I was wintering. She saw it the same way as me. That other household was not able to stay at Ulaan Tsaim [where drought was very bad]. So, she had to decide according to tradition. If I say I want to settle [in the future], she would let me settle. Now I am going like this but it does not sit well with others (sanaand oroxgui).

Here Nasanbayar retells how he explained the situation to the bag governor. He makes a claim to aid-in-distress, hoping to evoke moral economic sentiments of mutual aid and support. He also appeals to her memory of his stay at the uvuljuu. However, none of his claims are enough to overpower the other household’s customary claim of inheritance which the bag governor recognizes. Because of the difficult times, she had to decide in their favor, and at one level Nasanbayar recognized this. However, he also argues that she, in fact, agrees with him. In the last sentence he refers to his overall strategy and his personal prioritization of claims. ‘Going like this’ refers to his utilitarian, somewhat opportunistic mode of movement, a strategy that he readily acknowledges *sanaand oroxogui* or literally ‘will not enter into others thoughts’. In other words, his movement strategy is somewhat ‘unthinkable’ even though he might find conceptual support from others outside the ‘customary traditions’ of the countryside.

D: Did that household move?

G: No, they did not move. Now they say it is their uvuljuu and so they won’t move. I will not pay great attention, so I will take from that and it will pass.

D: That households ax, his buuts are there, is that important?

G: Those buuts are basically gone. [Neg yusondoo] in recent years they have not been settling. They settled there in the past. So in recent times they have not been 'possessing it' (ezemshix). But I for many years was 'possessing it' and then this problem comes up. After depositing so much buuts ...

D: Why does that person need to 'possess' the winter campsite now?

G: Well, they just became a new household with a ger. There were not wintering or springing anywhere. But now in order to become with a winter and spring campsite, they strove to 'possess' it.

Here I try to get a better understanding of how he views valid claims. He argues that possession is important and by possession he means 'use'. Over the years, he maintained and invested in the campsite, with his buuts deposits and proper pasturing, and should be able to securely draw from that resource. In the end he recognizes that their strategy was also a means to possess the site but through a claim of inheritance rather than use.

In this dispute we see not only the kinds of claims herders lay on sites and how those claims fit in their strategies but also the nearly autonomous role of the bag governor to decide however she sees fit. Rather than having a clear code, the governor can come to the conclusion that at one time seems the most legitimate. However, in this case I would be reluctant to conclude that her decision was simply borne of a reasoned judgment of the 'facts of the case'. This year was both a year for disaster and an election year. This would not be the time to rule in favor of another bag's household in a local dispute, a decision that might jeopardize her re-election. In the brief conversation I had with the bag governor, it was more than apparent that she made the decision because of local ties not out of some adherence to legal or other jural principles. Her method, however, is legitimate and within her authority, but it does highlight some important problems.

### ***Purev***

In the following case, a local herder in Uguumur was attempting to move his main household to his customary uvuljuu but a Galshar household was already there. After visiting several times and requesting the assistance of the bag governor, he gave up and the household moved on two months later. In this case, I was able to talk with the bag governor and Purejav. The other household had already returned to Galshar, the soum governor had died, and I could not arrange a meeting with the provincial governor. Similar to the previous dispute I will follow the herder mostly in his own words; although, I will also use excerpts from my interviews with the bag governor. Both of them however saw the case in the same light. In essence, the herder from

Galshar was good friend of the provincial governor and consequently, there was no *nemer* (aid or support).

D: A household settled on your fall campsite [actually his uvuljuu]. When did they settle?

P: Now they did not settle exactly on it. September of last year they settled next to me and until entering their uvuljuu they had not moved.

D: You were gone so how did you find out about this household?

P: It was in September when I was here. I was here.

D: Oh, so did you try to visit them?

P: I tried. My household you know is always settled here [year round at the uvuljuu].

Purev has an interesting resource use strategy. All year long his wife and children are camped on a permanent uvuljuu in a place called Suij in the middle of Uguumur bag near Bayan Erxtii mountain. He, however, goes on otor all year long. Occasionally, in order to relax the grazing pressure of his cattle around the customary campsite they will move around the site. In 2007 he had moved his main ger with his wife and children about 500 meters away easily within sight of his uvuljuu. There the household from Galshar settled in September. As he explains below he visited the household numerous times in order to expel them (*xuux*).

D: Oh yes so did you want to settle on the namarjaa?

P: Yes, my uvuljuu.

D: So, you visited?

P: I saw them, every day I had to see them.

D: But did you visit them?

P: Yes, I visited.

D: What did they say?

P: "I am settling close to this uvuljuu." And then he said "I will move soon." But he stayed and stayed and then when he entered the winter he moved.

D: What did he exactly say to you, though?

P: I will move he said. Soon I will move.

D: But after they said they would move they didn't, right?

P: Yes, they did not move. Only when they went to the uvuljuu did they move. They stayed until November and then they moved.

When Purev relayed this incident to me he did so with great frustration because his attempts at *xuux* were met with essentially stone-cold stubbornness. The bag governor confirmed this as he visited this household as well. They simply did not respond to his requests and just went about their business.

D: After you spoke with them did you speak to the bag governor?

P: Yes, I told him, I told him many times.

D: What did you say to him?

P: I told him to make this ail move. They are going to eat my uvuljuu, so I told him to make them move away from my uvuljuu.

D: What did he say to you?

P: I told him, but it was uncomfortable. It was uncomfortable because the aimag governor Jargal told them to go ahead and settle.

D: This was a Galshar ail, right? So what did Jargal say? And then what did the bag darg say to you, "I cant"?

P: Bag governor told them to move but it doesn't count, and they did not move.

The preceding excerpt reveals the central problem. The household had gotten permission from the provincial governor whose authority supersedes that of the bag and soum governors. According to most, however, the provincial governor much less any other governor has no authority to allow a non-local household to enter the soum for the purpose of using pasture *without* a formal contract. Yet, the laws state contradictory authorities that give governors broad latitudes in deciding whatever they please within the confines of the institutional hierarchy which places the bag governor at the bottom; hence, the situation was 'toxic' or uncomfortable. Without a clear sense of delegated responsibility, the primary resource management actors are here beholden to the provincial governor's favoritism.

D: After he spoke to them did you speak to the bag darga again?

P: No I did not, by then it had passed.

D: Did you speak with the soum governor?

P: I told him but there is no support (*nemer*). He said there are no methods for dealing with this and he can't expel and drive them out. If he tries to expel they will not do as he says (*ugend oroxgui*) because there is no *nemer*.

D: But they have the responsibility to expel them, right?

P: Yes, of course.

D: In your opinion why did they not expel them?

P: Whether they try or not doesn't matter because there is no *nemer*. The aimag governor said 'settle' so he of course won't say anything and anyways it passed. The aimag governor is originally a Galshar man, you know.

D: Do you think he is allowed to do such things?

P: No, he is not allowed. The main thing is he had help to seize this opportunity (*dalimduulj baij baigaa*). So there are no methods for dealing with this and if you go south the pasture is bad, what will? There are no methods, meaning that one must have superior rights (*davuu erxtei*).

After he spoke to the bag governor, who could not expel the household, he effectively gave up. Although he spoke to the soum governor as he says, the governor could, or would, not do anything. He argued that the connection between the household and the provincial governor prevented anything from happening. His use of the term *dalimduulax* or ‘to seize opportunities’ points to the current system of resource management which creates considerable space for strategic partnerships between local and state-based actors.

Soum darga, according to the law, must enact the decisions of higher level institutions. This is highly problematic, though, because the law also explicitly states that they should regulate their own territories. Moreover, higher level authorities must inform lower level authorities of decisions which should be arrived at in consultation or at least with the awareness of lower level authorities. The aimag governor never informed the soum governor. However, the soum governor is not in a position politically to question the aimag governor, considering the distribution of political power between them. In turn, this creates a situation in which patronage at successively higher levels in the administration trumps the lower level ones; which, therefore, presents a significant challenge to ‘decentralization’ measures by the central government.

Purev highlights this very problem by connecting the seizing of opportunity to rights. Here he says that the important thing is to find ‘superior rights’ or *davuu erx*. What he means, in other words, is that in order to effectively deal with problems one must integrate into webs power and patronage that control access and the distribution of authority. *Davuu* is a stem adjective of *davax* or to overcome or conquer.

D: So the soum darga really couldn’t do anything?

P: Well, there really isn’t anything that the administration can do.

D: Other than this, has anything else happened?

P: No, there isn’t anything else.

D: So did you argue with this man at all?

P: When I was mad, I was just mad. When I was okay, then I went to talk to him. In the end I just quit saying things. Now when I say something I will just say it once.

D: How many times did you go talk to them?

P: They were close to my campsite of course, so I went in many times.

D: 5-10 times?

P: 10 or more times.

D: In that persons opinion why did they have the right to stay here?

P: Well, in their territory there was no grass. He really had little choice. If we expel him where will he go, and if we do not expel him where will we go? It is like this. But, this is just *one* household’s uvuljuu. *Not* the uvuljuu of many households. So if I am here, of course no one is

allowed to settle here. If I go north to the river I will ‘give’ this uvuljuu of course. For example, if I go north of the Kherlen river to the shand. But in those situations this harmonizing is a private problem.

In this last section of the discussion Purev describes two important things. Firstly, in his attempts to xuux he made sure that he did not do so when he was mad or angry, so that that situation would not escalate into violence or a situation that would comprise his ability to obtain justice. Lastly, he effectively makes the case for the other household. He recognizes the problem of drought in Galshar and the households need to be in Uguumur. Yet, he is quite clear when he says the uvuljuu is his and his only. And if he wanted to let him stay on his uvuljuu then they can privately arrange it outside of the local administration and the complicated space of patron-politics.

### **The War to Come**

These disputes are, possibly, a prelude to bigger challenges on the horizon. Moreover, we cannot view contemporary land relations in rural Mongolia without considering the broader contexts in which ‘land’ is understood and appropriated. Multiple property regimes operate in Mongolia and the rationales and logics of these various assemblages both influence and challenge each other. Nowhere is this more clear than in herder opinions concerning the privatization of pastureland and campsites in rural regions. Herders themselves participate in a variety of land exchanges outside of the herding economy. Some own farmland while many own xashaa or private residential plots in the soum or provincial center and even apartments or xashaa in Ulaanbaatar. As the above description makes clear even in the rural pastureland land relations are not devoid of individual and exclusive rights, a sense of alienability, and valuative means of exchange. Yet, at the same time current configurations, as ambiguous, overlapping, and multiple mix of proprietary relations, are generally favored over more overt private land relations as exist in *‘fermiin mal aj axui’* or farm-based animal husbandry as herders say.

During the negdel period, the socialist party apparatchiks often displayed a quiet disdain for rural herding livelihoods. In socialist dogma, nomadic pastoralism was perceived to be a remnant of a feudal past and an obstacle to the evolution of state communism (Shirendev 1963). Underneath socialist economic plans were implicit strategies for the settlement of the herding population; not as a means to spread property relationships to the ‘void’ of the commons as capitalist states do, but rather to instigate farm and ranch based agricultural systems on par with the socialist collectives of the USSR and other more ‘developed’ socialist states. With the collapse of the socialist party apparatus in 1991, such sentiments have not, in fact, waned despite a romantic sentimentality that freely draws on images of rural life in naïve and somewhat incongruous support of a ferociously neo-liberal economic paradigm.



On the one hand, the commons, the material foundation of this perceived ‘freedom’, is seen, in ways mechanically similar to socialist narratives, as a backward system retarding the emergence of modern, efficient, and rational property regimes. On the other hand, the commons is the reservoir of laziness and poverty. The commons is seen in this sense as a free resource capitalized on by inefficient producers of unimportant commodities which in turn prevents more productive, modern resource use activities like mining. Although the UIX retained state ownership of pasturelands in 1992 when formulating the new constitution, in 2002 they took bold steps to undermine such rationales. Urban land was opened to private ownership claims for Mongolian citizens and spring and winter campsites were opened to possession. As stated above, the impetus for the 2002 Land Law was rooted in reactions to the zuds of 1999-2002. In a déjà vu moment, following the series of zud that have occurred across the country in the last 3 years and especially the most recent disaster in 2009-2010, draft laws for the privatization of campsites and even pastureland have been circulating in the halls of parliament.

Rumors of complete land privatization in rural regions (*oron nutag*) are a constant source of angst, confusion, and frustration in rural Uguumur. Obviously, the massive upheaval such measures would cause make privatization a source of forceful emotions. Below I look at data collected from discussions with herders about the possibility of privatization. Not all are against it, while some are violently opposed. Yet, these discussions are important as they reveal the ways in which herders think about land and their relationship to it.

### **Debating the Future**

In my discussion with herders, I found that most households, even if they were not supportive of campsite leasing, were in support of less ambiguous and secure rights to resources including access to resources in the context of disaster. However, when I broached the discussion of privatization herders differed not just between pro and con camps, but in the minute details of what privatization might mean. For example, some herders were for campsite privatization but not for pasture privatization. Some were for hayfield privatization but neither campsite nor pasture. Some only wanted title to reserve pastures. Others argued that everything needed to be privatized and fenced. There were nearly as many ideas as there were herders. This is not say that there were not patterns in herders’ thinking. Clearly some were resistant while others were less so.

A number of herders made the point that such opinions were ‘*xuvi xunii asuudal*’ a private person’s problem. When I would ask why there was disagreement or what they thought about one another’s opinion they would often refer to this as a private persons’ problem. The idea of a *xuvi xun* or private person was clearly important in the way herders talked about a variety of

things including private property or *xuviin umch*. This development points to two important theoretical points. Firstly, if the ideas of the ‘private person’, both in terms of citizenship and personhood, and ‘private things’, i.e. property, are so prominent, part of the logic of private property has clearly been established. The idea of private land is, in other words, ‘thinkable’. Secondly, the deference to others to have their own opinions explained also points to a reluctance to disagree with their local comrades, a sentiment borne of community, and the complexities of thinking ‘privately’. Whether herders will come to contest for private, formalized claims to pasture or whether they will fight form continued common grazing land will depend on more than just what herders’ think. Yet, it is clear that herders themselves envision multiple possible pathways for reform and it is in the grey area where most hearts lie.

Exploring these sentiments are also critical because such land reforms are continually a topic of discussion in the halls of power. Following the 1999-2002 and more recently with the 2010 zud disasters, the topic of land privatization becomes increasingly heated. These futures matter to herder livelihoods. Moreover, exploring herder opinions also allows us the more deeply comprehend the various ways that herders think about land. These undercurrents serve as important lens on the cultural politics of land, the very dynamics of power that underlie exchange practices and disputes, as I have discussed.

Yet, the process of land privatization has already begun. The possession leases are clearly a step in that direction. As I have shown though, many people do not have access to possession leases. Consequently, as I explore more deeply in the next chapter, the leasing process has simultaneously endowed some with ‘property’ and dispossessed others of common rights, particularly in times of stress. The continued appropriation of campsite land and ‘strengthening’ of private claims have important implications for resource access and vulnerability to hazards. In the following passage a herder highlights why this is case:

If they do not privatize pasture but then privatize uvuljuu and xavarjaa, there is no difference!  
How can I find good pasture for my animals if I can’t settle!

Here the herder is arguing that campsites are in essence the access point for pasture. In other words, delimiting pasture through contracts is materially similar to the privatization of campsites because through control of campsites one can control pasture. Different people would benefit from this and herders understand this and argue accordingly. Amongst Uguumur herders there are nascent divisions along wealth and age lines. All sampled herders were asked their opinions regarding the prospect of privatization both of campsites and pasture and whether they agreed with it. In follow up interviews with half of the sample population, discussions of privatization formed a large portion of the time in which we spoke. It was clear from the survey and interviews

that young herders and poor herders are more open to the potential of campsite and pasture privatization for a variety of reasons described below. But herders make a variety of important arguments and distinctions which must be situated within current configurations of rights and claims including possession leases. Below I look at herders own arguments for or against such measures.

### **Privatization: Pro**

Although there are a number of pro-privatization herders in Uguumur it is young herders who make the most clear and unabashed case for privatization<sup>141</sup>. In numerous meetings the problem of the youth was constantly iterated as a central concern in today's rural Mongolia. The youth, officials and senior herders argued, do not respect tradition and cause all kinds of problems. Many of the young herders in the sample had no herding experience in the negdel period or prior to the negdel. Consequently, they have come of age in a time, during the post-socialist era, when institutions have been their weakest. Moreover, as will be explored more fully in the next chapter, what institutions there are, position the young in the least advantageous social group in their eyes. Therefore it is no surprise to find strong support for privatization amongst them. In one encounter I asked a pro-privatization herder and his wife why so many people are against privatization. They argued that older people do not understand what private land means and do not understand how it will work. The implication was that the ways of the elders, i.e. tradition and custom, are outmoded and private land would bring the rural pastoral economy into the modern world. Yet, as a number of examples I show below argue, customary property regimes and 'modern' ones are not mutually incompatible.

Pro-privatization herders made other arguments as well. In the following interview passage a young Durvud herder argues that privatization would help resolve the growing instances of dispute and conflict.

D: What do they need to do [in reference to conflict resolution]?

E: They need to privatize the pasture. We need to be able to completely take it. Around winter campsite.

D: So do you think it is okay if people buy and sell campsites? Or maybe rent them?

E: It's okay, of course it's okay.

D: In your opinion if the government does this, privatize campsites and pasture, will these problems with outside ails and whatnot end?

E: Yes it will, herders will not come in from outside.

Another young herder furthers the logic of this argument:

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<sup>141</sup> Lesorogol's (2003) work demonstrates that this is the case amongst pastoralists in Kenya as well.

B2: If they can't privatize pasture, there is no necessity to privatize campsites. Now, we go and settle on whatever campsite we like. They do not inform us exactly what the size of an uvuljuu is. What does it matter if you have a possession contract or not, there is no difference. If you just have an uvuljuu, it doesn't matter, some other households animals can just come in, of course. So then I am eating their 'uvuljuu'. So you go far and take your uvuljuu's buuts but you cannot take the pasture! Now, let's say there is a saravch, okay ... So, just over there [pointing] a household comes and settles, I have no right to expel them with just a contract.

D: So, you are saying that they should just completely privatize pasture? Campsites do not matter?

B2: Yes. Now let's say this is your land [drawing design on rug] and from here to here is the pasture. Northward this is your land and southward this is your land. Dividing up land like this, animals will not be able to enter the pasture. This we need. Beside this, if there is just the uvuljuu and xavarjaa contract, this is not needed.

While the herders above argued for full-scale pasture and campsite privatization, others argued for the privatization of campsites. In this case they draw on customary private claims and idea of individual rights bound up in leasing. In the next passage an older herder makes strong case for a neo-classical understanding of private property reminiscent of 'tragedy of the commons' discourses while also drawing on older, 'custodial' property frames (Sneath 2001).

J: Well I think they need to privatize. Something that is mine should be mine.

D: What about others who disagree?

J: Those who don't think so are carelessly destroying the territory. The difference is that they will cause us to suffer a loss. Those who say not to privatize believe [land and pasture] is common but this is not so. If a person said they wanted to privately own their own property, they mean they want to use something for a long time, and use it with detailed care and keep it clean, cleaning up the trash, keeping it and protecting it.

More explicitly, a young herder argues that "a person's uvuljuu and xavarjaa need to be a person's uvuljuu and xavarjaa." Below a senior herder simultaneously makes the case against pasture privatization and for campsite privatization founded specifically on customary rights of 'ezen':

D: What do you think about privatization?

G: Well we move and settle where the grass is good so if they limit us with borders it will be very difficult.

D: Some people say we should?

G: Yes, they say they want to protect from desertification. If campsites have ezen, then we can protect pasture. If they privatize pasture though there will be no end to nasty arguments. So if they privatize uvuljuu and xavarjaa, okay but not pasture.

D: Why are campsites okay to privatize?

G: Well if the grass is bad we have to move to other pastures. If they privatize campsites though, then when we return livestock will not have trampled the pasture. We need this.

Lastly, others argued that since private transactions were already occurring, privatization would make little difference.

Concerning that [privatization], each individual person knows themselves. Now, private people arrange these things and exchange. For example, it happens that I need to stay here. If it is such, households can now arrange these things amongst themselves. Now if they privatize land, what difference will there be?

In one case a wealthy herder, Bilgee, argued that there is essentially a market already for land but that no one knows the prices. He argued that if the government were to privatize land and allow herders to legally rent and exchange those private rights they would be much more capable of assessing the cost of migration and land use. Moreover, he stated that bribes, gifts, and other payments simply complicate and obfuscate problems that herders could solve themselves if there were a market for campsites.

### **Privatization: Con**

Despite the presence of strong arguments for privatization, the vast majority of herders are largely against such policies even to the extent of mentioning violence against policy-makers who consider it. Those against privatization tend to utilize ecological arguments. “This [privatization] does not suit the conditions. There are many animals and pasture capacity is poor” as one herder stated. Others however make different arguments. Some argue that ‘*xeruul garna*’ (nasty things will happen) and that fights will break out. Others point out that the contract situation is ‘*zambraagui*’ or disorder and that privatization would not be much better. Others make arguments that focus on scarcity factors, pasture capacity, incongruity of rights, and the lack of social evolution. The most ardent opponents I found happened to be the wealthy. The bag governor offered one of the primary reasons why this is the case:

D: Some people say the government needs to privatize, but not a lot of the wealthy herders, why?

T: Yes, the wealthy are saying it like this. They’ve become very wealthy (with much property he says). These people (uls) can do this! But not all herders are wealthy. There are men with 50, 100, 200 head of livestock. They can’t rent or buy like this [the way the wealthy are currently accessing land]!

The rationales against privatization were situated generally within environmental logics that stressed the variability and stochasticity of year to year weather and forage conditions. In such conditions herders argued people must move. Privatization they argued would prevent them from being able to move as freely and moreover would drive up the cost of migration, generating both increased poverty and higher meat prices.

D: Do you think they should privatize?

S: If they do this, privatize, it will be very difficult. Let’s say they privatize, in the wide territory of our Mongol nation and ancestral lineage, the weather conditions and increasing aridity worsen,

pasture worsens, droughts in such conditions like Bayan-Ovoo soum, and then they privatize? For example, in one soum a drought happens, if in our opinion we need to organize and coordinate otor, what will be the appropriate size of the territory and who will decide? Now, if there is drought here, then you can use pasture in this territory. Yet if they privatize we cannot say this and there will be no movement, and without movement it will be harder for that other herder. But, not just for the herder will it be difficult, all over the Mongolian nation, the economy it will be difficult and dangerous.

In response to the premise that privatization will encourage herders to protect pasture, one participant responded, “how can we protect pasture if there is no rain? How can we protect pasture if there is a drought or *zud*”? Others also stressed the importance of environmental risk in maintaining pasture as state property:

D: Does the government need to privatize pasture?

X: No, (the government) does not need to privatize.

D: Why?

X: If on the privately owned land grass will not grow and drought and *zud* happen then what will? So my territorial homeland is deep and wide like my ancestral heritage.

D: Well how will you protect your *uvuljuu* and *xavarajaa*? Is this even important?

X: If grass does not grow then what will we protect? Now of course we are going through another person's *nutag*, right? I have to, but if they privatize we of course cannot go like this life. It will be very difficult.

Similarly, others argued that even if there was less variability and risk in local environmental conditions, the problem of pasture capacity:

Now for households with few animals of course [it make sense that] they can privately take pasture. The pasture capacity will suffice. However, if households with many animals privately take over pasture then many problems will of course occur. If the size of the pasture suddenly changes life will be very difficult. The number of animals they will need to send will become many. Someone with few animals, though, can have a *saravch* and when they use an area of 5 hectares that seems to have decent pasture, this is possible. Households with 200-300 animals will have to take a very big area of land. In doing this for the other households the availability will be very small and so it will be very difficult.

In addition to environmental concerns, herders also raised other important counters to the privatization argument. A number of respondents pointed out how privatization will drive up the cost of migration.

D: What about privatization? What do you think?

B2: It is not needed!

D: Why ... in your opinion?

B2: If they privatize how we will do things on enclosed land (*xaalttai gazar*). It will be difficult for livestock. If someone wants to go on *otor* how and what will to where if others have taken land through privatization! Now this condition will not come. We have to ourselves plant additional crops and grow forage of course. But if we cannot make things grow, then what?! These things are not possible. This here *tsaidam* steppe, this land will not be privatized.

Privatization will also generate scarcity some argue:

D: Well, what if they privatize pasture?

L: This is not okay. Our territorial lands are very small but there are many herds. If they privatize it then it will be difficult. It can't just be 'possessed'. Pasture capacity is getting worse. If they privatize this pasture capacity it will become a very difficult thing. It just isn't possible to possess this percent of Mongolian steppe pasture. All kinds of droughts, gold mining, plenty of ... 50 per cent will become un-useful [to herders]. If there is only 50 per cent then just several animals, buildings, etc if they privatize this land there will be no way for there to be any livestock!

Herders have strong reason to suspect that available pastureland will shrink and the problems of climate, weather, and forage will not be resolved.

Moreover, it will simply lead to more conflicts just in the way that possession contracts have caused more problems than they have resolved. This is positioned directly in contrast with the logics of policy-makers who argue that privatization will reduce conflict and increase production simultaneously. The bag governor argues the following:

Ts: Amongst the people, ax duu, fights will break out, nasty arguments will break out and there will be obviously more work for people to do. Plus, now drought and environment risks are many, and they need to look and see this! Usually, going without far-sighted vision, land property between herders will result in many difficult juniors! (*tuvugtui duu*)

S: There are two reasons. First, amongst the people, ax duu, there will be many fights, nasty arguments will happen, and work will happen. Secondly, now the risk of drought is growing. People need to see this. If you do not go with farsighted vision, then land relations between herders mostly very difficult.

Clearly, we also see that custom and 'tradition' inform herders views of privatization. In the quotes above, several herders invoke ancestry (*udam*) and lineage (*urga*) in arguing against the possibility of private rights. Moreover, they cite the effects of privatization on social relations and the principles of ax-duu.

Another rationale herders and officials pointed out was the Mongolia simply was not on that evolutionary stage to implement private property.

D: In your opinion what is the difference between the possession contracts and privatization?

Ts: Well, if we speak of the possession contract, an ail can obtain a contract for 5-10 years (sic). ... Lineal descendants, my children, and many generations are can be there. In doing that though if grass and plants do not grow there will not be pastoral husbandry in my country anymore. But this is possible in a country with settled farm operations. The period to enter that level has not yet come to my country.

In one interview I was able to discuss the problem with three herders. In this conversation they raised nearly every issue herders have raised against the prospect of privatization. Moreover, they also suspect government attempts to sedentarize herders.

D: Other herders say they want it though.

G: That is an individual's problem but I don't see how. You know drought and *zud* are happening frequently and the difficulties will grow. Such situations are visible now. Individual people have many ideas and thoughts, so what will!

D: Well if they government does it [privatize] then what?

G: Up until now there has not been a reason for this. The pasture has improved after the drought and *zud*. If we can plant all this forage, then in those conditions maybe it is possible.

D: What do you think about the contracts then? ...

U: If the output is good and it is nice we winter on the *uvuljuu* and summer on the *zuslan*. But if suddenly a natural disaster happens, then what! Now across the rural areas, across this *aimag* there is so much migration work. In my Mongolia animal husbandry is the key industry. My country is not a developed country like America, Japan, or Korea. If we do not have farsighted vision the work will only increase!

G: Ok, I think the possession contract law is correct. Having owned something, in my case, you want to protect and love what is yours. I see this. To possess something is not 'un-allowed'. But to privatize things, that is a worthless problem. But to allow one to possess should be okay. ...

BD: In my opinion the government by giving these contracts is trying to settle the people. They are trying to centralize (*tuvluurux*) people. ... In the rural countryside, if the government gives contracts, then from this *uvuljuu* and to that *xavarjaa* how many hectares will they plant? Now this is *Nasanbayar*'s, this is registered of course. There is the bag of course. Now these people will support land as property with their money? In this period the environmental condition is lost, desertification is happening. This is an ecological problem. There is just sandy desert in the 3 bags of the *soum*. But the government has not issued an order to solve this problem. Contracts have not solved this either. By now in my opinion 15 years later the government will allow people to possess not just land but water and wells. In 15 years though what amount of land and fields will be enough? They will confront the provision problems of water, wells, and pasture.

These three herders present a strong case against privatization. Moreover, these sentiments are often heatedly delivered with frustration and anger. One of the most common responses I heard to my questions about privatization was '*Dain bolno oo!*' or 'war will come'.

B3: War will come. I think truly war will come. If they privatize herders' land things will happen just like this past summer when they burned down the Revolutionary Party Headquarters. This will happen everywhere and worse. Plus, if they privatize, it will of course be hard for Mongolians who eat a lot of meat. If they give each person a certain size of land, will they come and make the grass grow? And if they do, then some can increase their herds, but what about people whose pasture is not enough? They will keep their animals in fences and what? How will they fatten? Freely 'settle on land to settle, eating on land to eat', this is better! Because of this there will be a real war!

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at the variety of claims herders make on resources, the various ways they exchange complex rights to use resources, and the ways they monitor, defend, and enforce those rights. Moreover, this chapter has sought to examine how certain rights become



legitimate and how this process intersects with shifting fields of authority and administration. By examining the complexity and multiplicity of claims and rights to resources and privileging the current state of ambiguity and uncertainty concerning both property and governance, I do not detract from the materiality of 'rights' in social practice. Although ambiguity, uncertainty, and hybridity are clearly part and parcel to the post-socialist social realities, I do not argue that all rights stand on equal footing nor are they accessible to all. Clearly, as the rest of this dissertation argues, access to material resources, particularly in times of stress, is forged in the material conditions of social existence. Some households have no transport animals, others cannot afford bribes, and many are excluded from cooperative groups. These and other numerous factors explored in chapters 6 thru 9, demonstrate that simply focusing on 'claims' and 'rights' (and their mutability or situated-ness) limits our ability to understand how vulnerability to hazards like the conditions that result in zud and livestock mortality are shaped.

## Chapter 6 Men like Mountains: Authority and Territory in Uguumur

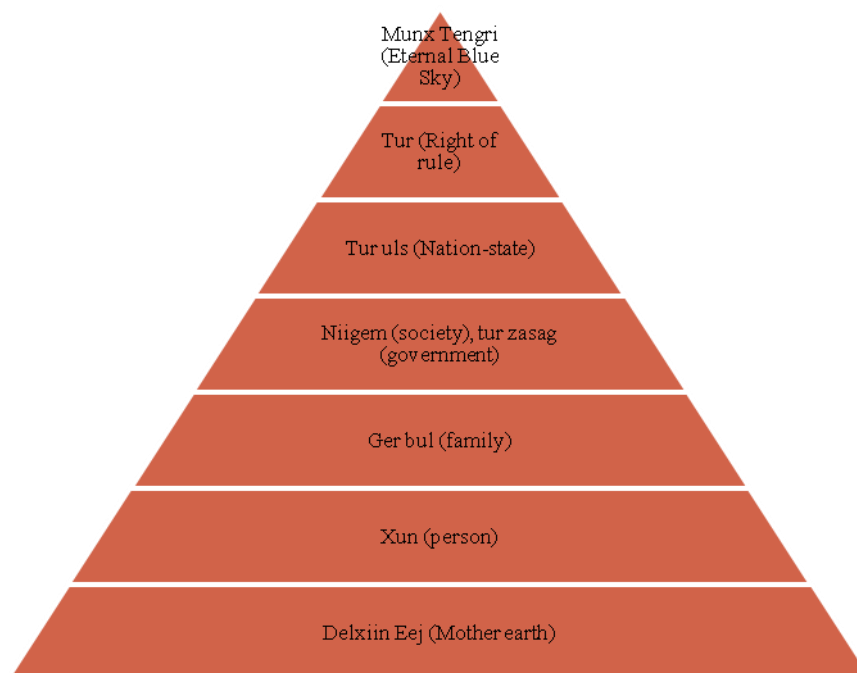
*If you separate and go alone by one valley it is very difficult.*

Herder's wife, Uguumur 2008

### Introduction

Humphrey and Xurelbaatar (2006) point out that specific hierarchies of rule and notions of sovereign power have a deep linguistic and social history in Mongolia. *Tur*, which simultaneously means power, rule, order, regime, and the state, refers to rightful sovereignty and moral legitimacy. Its linguistic roots tie the term into fundamental matters of being: *turux* or to be born and *turul* or kin. Just as one is born into kin, they are born under *tur* or 'sovereign rule'. These fundamental ideas of social order integrate with hierarchical political modes in Mongol cultural thought.

The authors propose the following hierarchical pyramid of Mongol concepts of 'rights of rule':



*Figure 6.1. Conceptual pyramid of the hierarchy of 'rule' (Derived from textual schema proposed by Xurelbaatar and Humphrey 2006)*

At the top of the pyramid we find *Munx Tengri* or the Eternal Blue Sky. Below we find *tur* or the right of rule.<sup>142</sup> These levels are abstract essences of the natural order of the world. *Tur uls* or the nation state connects these abstract essences to the nation which in turn assumes a collective right to rule in human affairs. *Niigem*, *tur zasag*, and *ger bul* are the material human forms of rule which are subject to the levels above and in turn have authoritative rights over those below.

The dynamic between each of these levels, one could say, is ruled by a master-slave relationship or *ezen bool niigem* or more loosely, an ax-duu relationship (Sneath 2006a and b). Masters or *ezen* are protectors and also legitimate the rule of those below. I argue that what connects these various levels are the notions of *yas* (lineage), *urga* (descent line), and *udam* (ancestry or heritage) because one is born under natural sovereign power through these ancestral lines. Moreover, just as I describe below, these connections and the various hierarchical levels are also objects of worship which are legitimated through ritual offerings. At the center of these rituals are mountains which, as metaphors of lineal descent, form the fundamental ‘natural’ connection between men and power. In contemporary Uguumur, I argue that these notions of power and right-to-rule have found new expression in rural patronage networks.

Prior to my entrance to the field-site in Uguumur I lived in Ulaanbaatar with a family in the outer districts of the capital for 3 months in order to improve my language skills. While watching the news one night, my host and I became involved in a discussion of Mongolian ideas about marriage and divorce particularly what makes a ‘good’ husband and a ‘good’ wife in the Mongolian context. During the discussion she said repeatedly that a man “*uul shig numurtei baix yustoi*” or ‘must provide shelter like a mountain’. This comparison of men, particularly ‘good’ or ‘strong’ men, to mountains, an important pastoral resource and the center of spiritual belief and ritual practice, is more common in rural regions like Uguumur. During fieldwork I heard people describe certain men as *uul shig xun* or men like mountains.<sup>143</sup> Mongolians at times also refer to these ‘men like mountains’ as *tom xun* or big men, but they are not mutually congruent terms. A *tom xun* (big man) is someone of import who is famous, wealthy, or politically powerful and may not necessarily be a ‘man like a mountain’.<sup>144</sup> In contrast, a ‘man like a mountain’, always a *tom xun*, is someone who is ‘charitable’ or *buyantai* and who seems to effortlessly command respect, exude a personal force that draws people to him, and simultaneously provide some kind of benefit

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<sup>142</sup> *Tur* is also shorthand for the state.

<sup>143</sup> There are a number of ways people describe these ‘patrons’.

<sup>144</sup> For example, most people, even my closest friends referred to me as a *tom xun* because I was a doctoral student and therefore must be important. However, I was not an *uul shig xun* because I did not command respect and I did not ‘provide shelter’; in other words, I was not like a mountain and I had no potential to be a patron.

like security to others. Men like mountains are men with followings; they are, in sociological terms, patrons, and their followers, clients. In rural Mongolia, such patronage can be found in a variety of social settings: lamas and their faithful, wrestlers and their fans, and even some politicians and their constituents exemplify this kind of social connection.

This chapter will analyze a certain set of patrons in Uguumur who have become a primary focal point for rural resource politics – *ax nar* or senior men. Over the course of the fieldwork it became increasingly clear that in the social and political spaces vacated by the retreating state, emergent territorial kin groups and mobile collectivities who are informally referred to as *ulsuud* (confederations) or *buleg* (group or gang) have organized around these patrons or ‘men like mountains’.<sup>145</sup> Relying on political models and idioms of hierarchy and privilege rooted in re-imagined historical configurations, gender politics, political party dynamics, kin and household organization, spiritual hierarchies and sacred landscapes that are reinforced through ritual and everyday life, these collectivities of herders have coalesced as a means to protect large swaths of pastureland (*belcheer xamgaalax*) from other local households and deter settlement of *gahnii ail* or ‘foreign’ households.

These new modes of organizing intersect with development initiatives in Uguumur that attempt to further sediment decentralization policies by tapping into ‘reserves of social capital’ and promoting the creation of herder cooperative groups to fill the administrative space and resource management capacity capitulated by the state.<sup>146</sup> The rationale behind such projects has directly emanated from the promotion of community-based resource management narratives that call for increased democracy, equality, voice, empowerment and representation. These projects, coupled with the enactment of the 2002 Land Law, by issuing possession contracts to wells and requiring acquisition of campsite possession contracts by cooperative members, have furthered the privatization of power carried out since 1992 by reinforcing the territorial nature of these collectivities, furthering social divisions, empowering local hierarchies and encouraging new modes of thinking about locality, belonging, and property. These collectivities have also intersected with local democratic politics, as elders and wealthy herders vie for political power in

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<sup>145</sup> The argument is not that kinship is a natural alternative to the state but that when the state removes itself from certain relationships, those who depended on its functions *use* other modes of social interaction to satisfy needs and reduce uncertainty. In this sense, herders here are *using* kinship as either a means to cope with the conspicuous absence of the state or to benefit from it.

<sup>146</sup> These groups have done this with the aid of the state and because many of these patrons have also served as elected officials it is often difficult to determine the difference between state and non-state. Like Sneath (2008) I prefer rather to see the state as a social relation rather than as a distinct entity. This also negates discussion of kin modes of organizing, etc as being non-state – clearly in this case they are often indistinguishable.

rural electoral politics. These regimes of hierarchy and authority, a kind of indirect rule, represent a privatized power that in turn subsidizes the state's absence.

## **Decentralization, Community-based Resource Management, and Empowerment**

Decentralization, according to Agrawal and Ribot (1999), “refer(s) to (the) formal transfer of power to actors and institutions at lower levels within a political administrative and territorial hierarchy” by devolving rights and responsibilities including administrative duties, tasks, and goals. Decentralization and community-based approaches to natural resource management problems emerged in the 1980s as a backlash against statist approaches to development and democratization. Lack of representation by rural peoples, questions of voice and justice, and other critiques from southern intellectuals, indigenous groups and environmental activists initiated what Neil Smith (1992) calls a politics of scale in which critics sought to draw on the power of community to combat the double juggernaut of capital and the state. As Chambers (1992) argued:

... the emergent paradigm for human living on and with the earth brings together decentralization, democracy and diversity. What is local and what is different, is valued. In this paradigm the trends towards centralization, authoritarianism, and homogenization are reversed. Reductionism, linear thinking, and standard solutions give way to an inclusive holism, open systems thinking and diverse options and actions”

In academic circles, theories of collective action (Olson 1971), common property (Ostrom 1991), and social capital (Putnam 1993) arose as serious counters to neo-classical models of economic development and provided evidentiary fodder for community and other non-state development initiatives. Most critically, decentralization and community-based non-state initiatives, as ‘development models’, found favor with emerging neo-liberal governance agendas that sought a reduced role for state government and state welfare through the promulgation of structural adjustment reforms (Agrawal 2003; Mosse 2006).<sup>147</sup>

The pre-eminence of decentralization as a tool of neo-liberal governance has emerged in the context of pro-democratic, people-centered, bottom-up development initiatives that praise the

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<sup>147</sup> Decentralization is not a new tool of governance. As Mamdani's (1995) work shows so well, indirect regimes of rule during the British colonial period in Africa and elsewhere are a strong precedent to a number of scholars' assumption that decentralization or the ‘use’ of the local is somehow new or specifically ‘neo-liberal’. Mongolia's experience even during the Qing period could be seen as a kind of imperial decentralization. Decentralized authorities have long been used by central powers to subsidize their administrative absences while retaining ultimate authority. The rationales behind contemporary forms of decentralization are extremely different, however. I do not suggest the emperor Qianlong was pro-democracy. Nevertheless, the on-the-ground effects which result in patronage networks as described in this chapter are not historically novel.

qualities of ‘local communities’ including their inherent democratic attributes, and ultimately, as common property narratives so singularly pointed out, their importance as vehicles for equity, justice, and sustainability (Brosius et al 2006). In combination with community based resource management approaches to conservation and development, decentralization is presupposed to have important environmental benefits as:

local communities have a greater interest in the sustainable use of resources than does the state or distant corporate managers; that local communities are more cognizant of the intricacies of local ecological processes and practices; and that they are more able to effectively manage those resources through local or ‘traditional forms of access (Brosius 2006).

Proponents of decentralization argue that “centralized governance is prone to corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies, resulting cost padding, service diversion, limited access to resources, and high prices” (Bardhan and Moorkhorjee 2006). Although decentralization inherently creates a loss of economies of scale in service provision, decentralized administrations can bring about greater equity and efficiency in service provision, it is argued (World Bank 2001). Moreover, decentralization encourages greater accountability of administrators to their constituents and increases the responsiveness of service providers to their constituents’ needs and preferences (Sundberg 2006). Proponents argue this is accomplished through participatory democracy which exposes local leaders and administrators to the ballot box. By decentralizing administrative and fiscal powers to the local level, such policies *empower* local populations, *engender* more appropriate, targeted services, and ultimately foster better governance.

Critics argue that in decentralization policy frameworks there are a number of assumptions about community and the proverbial ‘local’ that are dangerously naive.<sup>148</sup> Engrained in these terms are, as Purcell and Brown (2005: 282) argue, “a number of assumptions that conflate localization with democratization, even though localization can just as easily lead to tyranny and oppression.” A number of other authors cite the perverse outcomes of decentralization policies that have led to a greater concentration of power and control in fewer hands (Gray 2006). Francis and James (2003) point out how in Uganda decentralization policies supported local patron-based politics thereby increasing the power of local leaders. As they argue, “introducing decentralization into a political environment characterized by clientage risks strengthening ties of patronage and further entrenching local elites” (327). The material

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<sup>148</sup> I want to stress that I do not believe CBNRM approaches or even decentralization are always inappropriate. In regards to CBNRM approaches I argue that they cannot be implemented in a top-down fashion. That seems somewhat obvious, but as we will see in this chapter, that most certainly was the case in Uguumur. In regards to decentralization, I argue that the distribution of power must be balanced in a way as to encourage continued or improved equity effects. It is often assumed that by simply devolving authority to the local level, the problem is solved.

importance of this has been clearly demonstrated by Nelson and Finan's (2009) work on patronage and vulnerability to drought in Brazil. Moreover, McCarthy (2004) has also demonstrated how decentralization can lead to increased corporate influence as local leaders align themselves with multi-national interests at the expense of their local constituents who are unable, as is often the case, to inflict the power of the vote on such actions.

In other cases, as Wittman and Giesler (2005) show in a Honduran case, decentralization can in fact lead to state expansion as rights and authority were devolved to those who were allied with the state. In a more well-known case, Ferguson (1994) shows how decentralization has produced what he calls the 'etatization' effect or the expansion of state power through local infrastructural development projects which ease the intervention of state power while promoting increased economic development under the guise of 'community-based development' and 'decentralization'. Clearly, as we see the local effects of such programs, it appears there is a logical disconnect between theory and practice.

At the heart of these problems is a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of community (Cohen 1999; Creed 2006). As Murphree (2001) argues, communities are obviously unequal and rather than valorize them we should understand that they are made up of institutions and researchers should direct their energies towards those nodes of social life. Yet, in many cases, some of the primary institutions at the heart of community social life are commons, institutions which are often conflated for communities even in common property theory. Common property theory has been extremely influential in both decentralization discourse and actual, on-the-ground policies and practices (Johnson 2004). CPT's positioning of communities and common resource management institutions as homogenous, stable, equitable, and exclusive reinforces the romantic notions of the 'community' discourse valorize (see Gibson-Graham 2006 and Escobar 2008 for a post-structuralist revival of romantic, pastoral 'communities' and the 'commons').<sup>149</sup> The failure of many decentralization policies to produce any of its stated goals such as equity, efficiency, accountability, responsiveness, empowerment, and greater popular participation along with failures in community-based resource management has led to a whole host of critiques (Cleaver 2000; Gray 2006).

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<sup>149</sup> Anthropology has been highly complicit in helping form this narrative. Many anthropological works provided rational choice theorists, including both political scientists and economists, with empirical data upon which to test their theories. Moreover, the importance of the 'community-level' scale in anthropological analyses, particularly amongst ecologically-oriented anthropologists, reinforced many of these presumptions about community attributes. Strains of economic anthropology continue to reinforce these narratives (see Gudeman 2001 and 2008).

Scholars suggest that these policies fail because common property theories overestimate the variable power and ability of institutions to enforce stable boundaries of resource user groups, enforce the rules of use through effective sanctions, and exclude external agents from using resources, particularly in conditions of growing economic inequality and increasing market integration (Ainslie 1999; Li 2001; McCay 2001; Turner 1999a). More importantly, it is because, as Agrawal (2005) has argued, common property theories have neglected the individual actors that make up these institutions. In particular they ignore the heterogeneity of social positions along class, gender, age and ethnic lines that these actors occupy and the variable interests and affinities according to which actors strategize. Additionally, as Peters (1987, 1994) has argued, these theorists neglect the social embeddedness of these actors in other institutions and social relationships and the overlapping rights and obligations that they balance. In the following section I look at how what I call the cooperative movement, and more specifically the cooperative group projects implemented in Bayankhutag, evolved out of these social science discourses and fused with urban Mongolian narratives about the *xuduu* or countryside in Mongolia.

### **Collectivizing the Decollectivized: The Cooperative Movement and IFAD's Rural Poverty Reduction Project**

The International Food and Agriculture's Rural Poverty Reduction Program has emerged in the context of vast development activity in Mongolia. Mongolia currently receives \$94 US in aid per capita, and was, at one point, the fifth highest recipient in the world. There are a number of reasons why Mongolia has proved to be a highly attractive investment for development agencies, multilaterals, and a range of non-governmentals. The decentralized administrative structure, the desire for development and aid, and the relative peace and security of the post-socialist period provide fertile ground for development organizations desperate to demonstrate the effectiveness of particular approaches or 'proof of concept'. Rural development initiatives have found fertile ground because Mongolia is unique in that its rural population is almost solely dependent on the mobile livestock economy for its subsistence and consumption needs, and its retention of pastureland as a veritable commons also provides an laboratory for emergent social science.

### **Decentralization, Development, and Herder Cooperatives**

The emergence of herder cooperatives as a development pathway in Mongolia seems wholly odd in a country where for thirty some-odd years herders were organized and employed by socialist collectives. Although herders recall the *negdel* period as being a golden age of



material success, they look on cooperative organization with reluctance knowing the political dynamics upon which ‘cooperation’ often depends. Herders I interviewed complained about the laziness of others, the lack of support at times from fellow comrades, and the high degree of strict (*aimaar changa*) control and authority concentrated amongst administrators.

In 1991-1992, after 70 years of socialist rule, the institutional backbone of rural society provided by agricultural collectives disappeared in shock therapy reforms. In administrative terms, these reforms materialized a vision of local governance in rural pastoral regions based on decentralized, weak state models of resource distribution and management promoted heavily by neo-liberal lending institutions on which the Mongolian government depended following the withdrawal of Soviet aid. Proponents, including most prominently the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, argued that by decentralizing administrative and fiscal powers to the local level, such policies would *empower* local populations, *engender* more appropriate, targeted services, and ultimately foster better governance.

Yet, the withdrawal of the central state left rural administrative organs as near defunct institutional shells. More importantly, as numerous researchers have pointed out, the formal institutional vacuum created in the wake of decollectivization left pastoral households exposed to a greater degree of environmental and climatic risk (Swift 1995; Templer et al 1993). Some even lauded the benefits of greater exposure to risk. Faced with these pressures, researchers presumed many herders and households would fall ‘back’ on a variety of so-called ‘customary’ pre-socialist forms of ‘cooperation’ as risk mitigation and coping strategies.

However, it increasingly became clear that many households were either excluded from cooperation or were not cooperating in such a way as to capture economies of scale lost in decollectivization. Moreover, moral economies were not functioning in a way that shielded households from massive herd losses in the context of disaster. The atomization of cooperation and moral economies within communities were shown most clearly in the 1999-2002 winter storms. In a 2 year period nearly 10 million animals perished forcing a mass migration of over 100,000 households out of the pastoral economy and into the ger ghettos of Ulaanbaatar. Clearly, the benefits of cooperation and moral economies of mutual aid were not accessible to all. Yet, this fact was generally ignored by development practitioners.

The result of these disasters in political terms was a national argument about how to address the problems afflicting rural society. Much of this discussion centered on pastoral resource management, particularly pasture rights. Some argued the disasters were the result of overgrazing while others argued that herders did not have secure access to reserve pasture. In a compromise approach between those who argued for increased flexibility and those who argued

for full privatization, the Parliament passed major land reform laws first in 1994 and then subsequently in 1998 and 2002. The law allowed herders to obtain possession contracts for winter and spring campsites, and where cooperatives do exist, local governors could contract out reserve pastures and wells. Possession contracts are issued for 60 year periods, are transferable only through inheritance and could be renewed only once for an additional 40 years by each household.

Concurrent with these legal reforms were dramatic shifts amongst development institutions away from macro-economic policies to local-scale rural development projects focused largely on poverty reduction. By the late 1990s a number of lending and aid agencies began promoting herder cooperative groups as a promising development pathway for fostering sustainable livelihood practices, reducing poverty, and administering pasture management. These initiatives found support from both left and right in the political spectrum. On the left, cooperatives were seen as a means to support common property systems, empower communities, and reinvigorate moral economies of mutual aid. On the right, cooperatives were seen as an extension of decentralization reforms that encouraged the promotion of rural civil society and self-governance. These ideas articulated within urban Mongolia notions of the cooperative nature of rural pastoral life to produce a major shift in rural development policy. Interestingly, little impetus for these policies or even cooperatives in general came from rural herders themselves. As Dr. Gantulga, State Secretary of MoFALI, stated

We lack comprehensive pasture and other natural resource management system, which leads to increased land degradation. Deregulated and common use of pasture contributes to degradation even more. This seriously hinders development of livestock sector in our country. Therefore, in order to improve pasture management and possession we need to support herders to join their efforts in cooperative management of pastureland. ([www.undp.mn](http://www.undp.mn)).

Since the mid 1990s a number of projects have been instituted in various regions of Mongolia under the premise of community-based resource management principles and collective action concepts; for example, the World Bank's Sustainable Livelihood Program, UNICEF's Social Basic Complex Service, UNDP's Sustainable Grassland Management Project, Sustainable Land Management for Combating Desertification, and Altai Sayan Project, Mercy Corps, World Wildlife Fund, JICA's Integrated Crop and Livestock Sector Development Project, Khustai National Park Initiative (a project funded by the Dutch government), IFAD's Rural Poverty Alleviation Project, Swiss Development Agency's Green Gold Program, World Vision's Herder Livelihood Development Program and others.

In many of these rural resource management projects herders are involved in managing and protecting specific resources. For example, in the Altai Sayan project and the World Wildlife

Fund projects, herders cooperate to protect and manage hunting resources and endangered species. In other projects, herders have been encouraged to establish cooperatives to administer forest management and use. Only in a few of the projects have goals been directly geared towards livestock sector development and pasture management. On the whole, however, these projects are significantly larger financially. In the WB's SLP program and IFAD's RPR program, the projects have sought to create herder groups, voluntarily established organizations that cooperate to manage wells, pasture use, hay production, or other kinds of pastoral resource management. In UNDP's projects, World Visions' HLDP, JICA, and SDA's Green Gold program pasture user groups and pasture user associations have been established along pre-existing territorial populations at the bag and soum level. These pasture user groups in theory have taken over many of the local bag functions or, at minimum, coincide with them. They organize seasonal pasture use, hay production, otor reserves, and well management and use. These programs have met with a record of a few success and many failures. Program evaluations have highlighted a number of project problems including equity, sustainability, and even legal issues (Binzwanger-Mkhidze 2010). Consequently, many of these groups no longer exist, having become 'dormant' when funds dried up. Herder group projects, similarly, have an equally spotty record with at times similar problems and at other times different kinds of problems. Such failures, however, have diminished the 'proof of concept'.

The cooperative movement, largely a result of donor desire and the virtual absence of initiative from herders themselves, has emerged as a top-down, catch-all solution to a number of problems plaguing the Mongolian countryside. Firstly, these programs have emerged out of environmental degradation and global warming narratives that simultaneously attribute desertification to out-of-control herd growth, increasing goat herds, herder abuse, and to warming trends. Moreover, cooperatives are seen as an institutional pathway to provide herders with the 'adaptive capacity' to deal with various climate change scenarios. Secondly, herder cooperatives, both pasture use groups and herder groups, are seen as a means to reduce poverty by building up social capital and encouraging the equitable distribution of the benefits of resource use. Thirdly, in the wake of the zud disasters of 1999-2002, proponents argue cooperatives can help alleviate vulnerability to disaster risk by increasing economies of scale and sharing the means to manage, mitigate, and cope with risk. And lastly, the cooperatives have been positioned as a means to deal with the widespread institutional failure in rural regions and the lack of budgetary and administrative capacity to effectively manage natural resources. In essence, cooperatives would further cement and strengthen decentralization measures while allowing herders to rely on

traditional, rural culture. This ‘capacity-building’ effort was, of course, filtered through the language of empowerment and democratic civil society.

Different development institutions have positioned these programs in different ways. The SDA Green and Gold program is clearly targeted towards pasture management and conservation. Many of the smaller projects such as WV’s and JICA’s are aimed at poverty alleviation and food security. IFAD’s RPR program and the WB’s SLP herder groups, however, are do-it-all approaches. Regardless, all of the projects have at their core similar understandings not only of the problems afflicting rural society but also the means to address those problems. Although such a paradigm of cooperative development counters major themes in management science, it is none the less emergent from that very paradigm. Program design has hinged largely on ideas of adaptive management, community-based natural resource management, commons theory, and new institutional economics. As long as they get the institutions and incentives right, cooperatives will be successful.

Herding society has largely been portrayed as egalitarian and any inequality that there is has been brushed aside as limited and nascent. The question as to why herders were not cooperating already was not asked, it seems. I argue that this is largely due to the literature and knowledge that was available on rural Mongolia and the narratives this work created about rural society. Although some warned of the tendency toward inequality in Mongolia’s history (Sneath 1993 and 1999), scores of researchers painted similar pictures of rural herders relying on customary forms of cooperation and traditional principles we might call the ‘moral economy of the steppe’ (Bold 1997; Bruun and Odgaard 1996; Fernandez-Gimenez 1999; Finke 1995; Goldstein and Beall 1994; Humphrey and Sneath 1999; Templer et al 1993; Mearns 1993). Clearly, much of this research was conducted in the years immediately following decollectivization and understandably, since significant socio-economic inequality had little time in which to emerge, colors their findings. Yet, rather than questioning what custom and tradition or even cooperation meant, most research presumed that, or at least left unquestioned whether, rural society matched ideas about community, rurality, and poverty presented not only in work on Mongolia but also in commons theory more broadly. These assumptions are at the core of many of the problems the cooperative programs have run into (see Usux and Binswanger 2010 and Upton 2009 for problems not discussed here). As chapter 4 has demonstrated, cooperation is not apolitical and not prone to inequality. In fact, a number of works have been demonstrating how inequality may in fact be critical to some kinds of cooperation (Baland et al 2007).

I argue that some of these programs have failed to achieve project goals largely because of a lack of understanding of social inequality in rural society and the deep-seeded cultural

assumption that rural society was apolitical. Moreover, deep appreciation for the cultural aspects of herding livelihoods, including inter-household cooperation, masked the various categories of difference between individual actors including gender, age, and ethnicity. Inequality and difference attributed to these social positions were largely assumed to be either divorce from social practices that concerned the pastoral economy or simply not critical to understanding cooperation. In my experience such notions of rural society also marked urban Mongolia ideas of the '*xuduu*' or countryside. These assumptions, made clear by the fact that they were largely not addressed and over-glossed by these urban ideas, have prevented cooperative development from becoming a viable alternative pathway for reducing poverty and promoting sustainable livelihoods.

Project personnel that I spoke to now recognized that local herder groups in Bayankhutag and elsewhere are exclusionary and highly unequal and that this in turn has been a prime reason for the failure of the program to achieve its original goals. After experience in other soums where cooperatives confronted lack of desire from herding citizens, IFAD's Khentii PIU, recognized these problems, and decided to encourage local committees to stimulate the matching of rich and poor households and enlisting the support of elders because the program otherwise would simply be unable to attain its primary goals. In effect they turned what was a problem to the advantage of the program.

Yet, this has only legitimized a problem that was already occurring. Implementation staff and local committees fully understand the outcomes of the program in social terms – that in groups under their leadership, senior males have become the primary benefactors of the rural poverty reduction program. They are the only ones with enough social capital to forge the kinds of cooperative ties to produce the needed outcomes of project. Poor households do not have the social networks, the time, the trust, or the connections to organize themselves in a way that the program would feel comfortable bestowing such assets as wells and other benefits like tractors.<sup>150</sup> In contrast, local project implementers and committee members saw the role of *axlagch* or senior male as being central to the success of a herder group. What is only becoming clear now, and as I describe here, is that such developments have profound implications for the distribution of resource access.

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<sup>150</sup> The poor are also often subject to the very 'structures of domination' that the program now supports.

## Project Background<sup>151</sup>

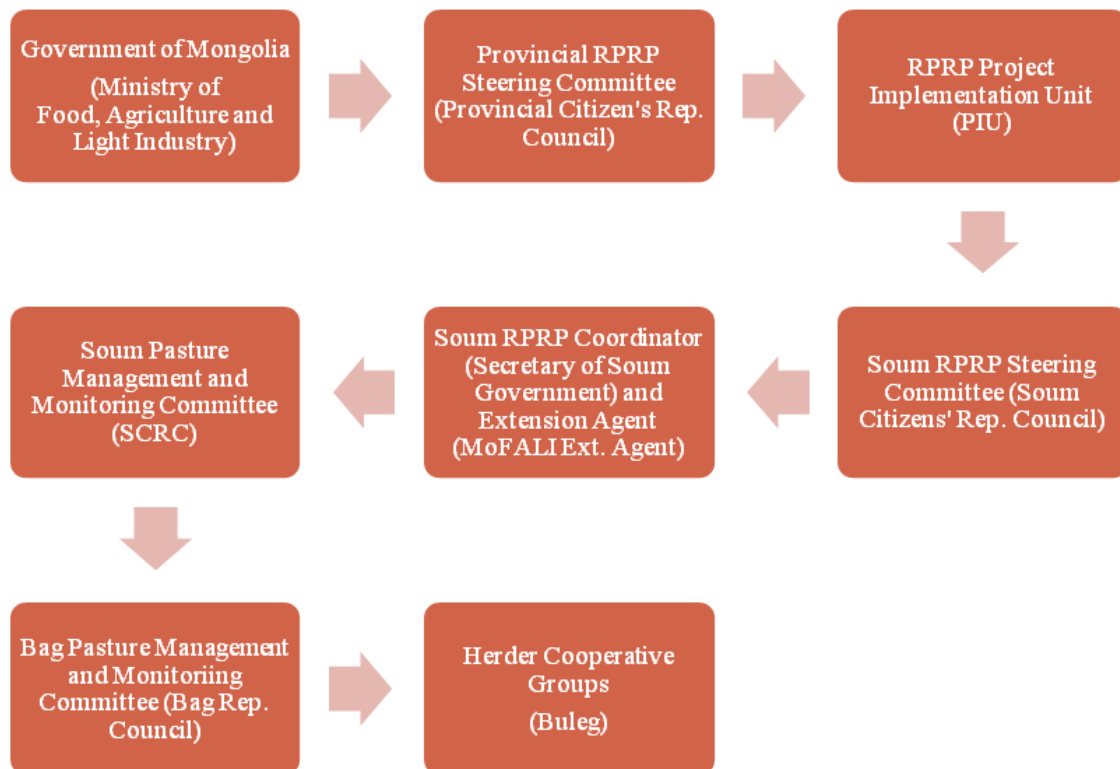
IFAD's Rural Poverty Reduction Project (RPRP) began in 2003 and grew out of the increasing focus on the establishment of cooperative herders' groups as a rural development pathway and the broad livelihood support programs exemplified by the World Bank's (WB) Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) amongst other initiatives. The IFAD program, financed by a 20 million dollar loan to the Mongolia government, began operation in 16 soums spread throughout 4 aimags (Bulgan, Selenge, Xuvsgul, and Xentii) and annually has added 4 soums per aimag. The overall goal of the program is: "to achieve sustainable and equitable poverty eradication for vulnerable rural households living in an environment with increasingly degraded natural resources" ([www.ifad.mn](http://www.ifad.mn)). The program has four major components: (1) 'Livestock production and natural resource management' which supports herding livelihoods and pastoral resource management, (2) 'Social development' under which education and health initiatives are conducted, (3) 'Rural financial services', and (4) 'Economic support' that encourages non-pastoral livelihood activities.

The program design and budget is approved by steering committees in the National Parliament, financed through the Ministry of Finance (MoF), and are operated at the provincial and county levels in conjunction with the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry (MoFALI) (see Figure 6.2 for organizational chart). The provincial government implements RPRP at its level through a steering committee that organizes the Project Implementation Unit including the staff. The steering committee is made up of members of the Provincial Citizens' Representative Council who supervise and monitor project activities including coordinating with other aid and development projects and link RPRP activities with provincial and local budgets. The PIU facilitates project implementation through logistical support, coordination, and organizational activities. The soum governor and council make up the soum RPRP steering committee which implements program activities at the soum level through a project coordinator and PIU extension agent. The steering committee is charged with developing an annual work plan and budget for project activities in conjunction with beneficiaries including herder cooperative groups. The steering committee is also responsible for selection of project beneficiaries.

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<sup>151</sup> See the project website for project documents ([www.ifad.mn](http://www.ifad.mn)). Some of what is presented here comes from documents not on the website, but that were collected at the PIU offices in Undurxaan and at the program coordinators office in Bayankhutag soum center. I cite them here. In other cases, I have filled in gaps with data gathered from interviews with project administrators in the province project implement unit and with the soum project coordinators in Bayankhutag, Bayan-Ovoo, and Bayan-Adarga soums.

Each of the four major components of the program has additional sub-components. Herders' cooperative groups (Malchdiin buleg) are assimilated under the Pasture Management (Belcheeriin Menejment) sub-component of 'Livestock production and Natural resource management' (Mal aj axui uildverlel ba Baigaliin Nuutsiin Menejment). The other sub-components include 'livestock production support' (animal veterinary service, breed improvement, and agricultural extension support) and a disaster relief fund. The herder cooperative group initiative is integrated with the 3 other foci in the Pasture Management division: (1) Pasture Management Monitoring Committee (PMMC) (Belcheerin menejmentiin xyanaltiin xoroo), (2) pastoral water resource improvement, and (3) winter hay and feed preparation.



*Figure 6.2. Official administrative organization of IFAD's RPR herder group cooperatives.  
(Compiled by author from [www.ifad.mn](http://www.ifad.mn) and interviews with administration officials)*

The PMMC is made up of the respective local administrations and the *Irgediin Tuluulugchdiin Xural* or Citizens Representative Council some of whom are cooperative group leaders (*bulgiin axlagch*). According to RPRP program documents, the PMMC's will:

- maintain traditional levels of decision-making, encourage discussion of problems encountered,
- improve pasture management, coordinate herd size and composition, produce resource maps of

soums and bags, to listen to various voices, encourage herder participation, regularly organize herders' meetings, protect herders' interest, and fight against illegal activities and other activities detrimental to the environment in order to provide sustainable pasture use conditions. ([www.ifad.mn](http://www.ifad.mn); author's translation)

Despite such broad and ambiguous duties and a lack of operationalization, the PIU director I interviewed stated that the primary goals of these committees are to produce soum-level pasture management plans in conjunction with the ITX, map the soum's natural resources, disseminate information concerning pasture management and possible pasture-related problems, and approve prospective cooperative groups' pasture management plans. There are also in some large soums, bag level PMMC that serve as an additional level of project administration focusing largely on monitoring issues and dispute resolution.

The other two project foci, water resource improvement and winter hay and feed preparation are financed and supported by the provincial PIU but are administered at the soum level by the PMMCs, the Soum Project Coordinator, and Extension Agent. These projects are carried out for the benefit of specific herder cooperative groups according to the steering committee's voting process.

Prospective herder cooperative groups are required to submit pasture management and work plans to the PMMC and then to the soum steering committee with the signatures of all potential members. The PMMC evaluates and approves the pasture management components of submitted plans and then puts the submission up for approval by the steering committee. In their submission, the group must elaborate their internal rules for establishing cooperative goals, the structure of the group, means of balancing wealth and distributing benefits of cooperative activity, annual meeting schedule and structure for voting on amendments to plans and rules and on voting for the group's leader or *axlagch*. Once these plans are approved by the soum steering committee the group is registered by the PIU with the soum and provincial government as an NGO.

The RPRP literature states that the goals of the Pasture Management program are geared towards "the alleviation of poverty while at the same reducing the detrimental effects of poor management of pastoral environments" (RPRP pamphlet and [www.ifad.mn](http://www.ifad.mn)). During the seminar that I attended the provincial PIU director re-iterated these sentiments saying that the Pasture Management Program's goals were: (1) to raise herders' standard of living, (2) to promote a just, sustainable society, and (3) to protect nature and promote sustainable development. The programs seek to do this by empowering (*chadavxjuulax*) herders and strengthening (*bexjuulex*) rural



livelihoods primarily through cooperative groups (*buleg* or *nuxurlul*) ([www.ifad.mn](http://www.ifad.mn)).<sup>152</sup>

According to the project literature:

Herders cooperatives groups were founded with the goal of incorporating herders in the directional leadership of the project, encouraging poor households to participate in these operations, foster the diversification of herders' income sources, combining labor to increase cooperative incomes, and ultimately to overcome disasters and difficulties faced by herders. ([www.ifad.mn](http://www.ifad.mn): author's translation)

The program, particularly in its English language literature, is couched in the language of poverty reduction and environmental degradation discourses.<sup>153</sup>

In concrete terms the program's poverty reduction goals were to foster the formation of cooperatives in order to overcome constraints on rural livelihoods. According to the portraits of rural society painted in project literature and discussed at seminars, meetings, and in informal discussions, herders, who are largely considered to be poor, have limited capabilities for increasing economies of scale, managing risk, and protecting natural resources. The primary goal of the cooperative program was, at best, to encourage poor households with their untapped reserves of social capital to cooperate together or, at least, to match poor households with wealthier ones in order to foster greater productive capacity and increase household incomes by lowering the high costs of atomized economic activities. Consequently, the project required groups to have at least two poor households and one wealthy *myangat*. By combining labor cooperatively herders could more easily increase economies of scale, access markets, bargain higher prices, and seek other opportunities for income generation such as small-scale vegetable farming. In risk management terms, cooperation would enable herders to more effectively organize migrations, particularly *otor*, increase summer and fall hay production, and broaden the range of herd management techniques. Moreover, income diversification would lessen household exposure to pastoral risk, access to better loans and financial services through cooperative groups would help smooth consumption and give households a means to weather downturns, and increased production would raise the saving rate and provide a means to buffer households against loss.

Although the project outlined the necessity of material assistance to aid herders in such endeavors such as through seed provision, encouraging banks to set up cooperative accounts and herder loans, tractor provision, and other material equipment and technologies, the project's

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<sup>152</sup> In Khentii herders refer to cooperative groups and even unofficial kin groups as *buleg* although in other areas of the country they are referred to as *nuxurlul* or *xorshoo*.

<sup>153</sup> The English language literature is often very abstract while the Mongolian language literature is more detailed with lists of actual successes including cost and beneficiaries.

primary role in the formation of herder cooperative groups would be largely institutional. By creating organizational frameworks through the PMMCs and Steering Committees and in using existing legal guidelines delineated in the 2002 Land Law and other administrative codes, the project would empower herders through the cooperatives' access to institutional benefits.

The core of the programs institutional activities in regards to herder groups would be centered on *ezemshuulex* and *umchluulex*. *Ezemshuulex* refers to the term *ezen* or 'master' and the verb *ezemshix* or 'to possess/ have mastery over'. *Ezemshuulex* in this sense means to make possess. *Umchluulux* has a similar meaning but refers to actual ownership rather than possession. To own something in this context means literally to have private, exclusive, disposable rights with virtually few limits on the extent of those rights. In contrast, as discussed regarding the land reforms, to possess something does not imply ownership but rather limited private, exclusive rights based on some kind of contractual agreement with limited means for disposal. The program has required that herder groups obtain possession contracts for a minimum number of winter and spring campsite and in conjunction with registering as a herder group each cooperative is provided possession contracts for renovated or, in some cases, new motorized wells.

The projects goal in this regard was to facilitate the legal codes that allowed herders to obtain possession contracts for winter and spring campsites, wells, and more recently, the project has been pushing *pasture* possession contracts for herder group (IFAD RPR Provincial Meetings August 2008). By encouraging households to obtain possession contracts, the program would thereby foster the conditions for both improving herder livelihoods while simultaneously reducing the threat of environmental degradation.<sup>154</sup> Much of the institutional rationales regarding possession leasing laws have been couched in desertification and environmental degradation narratives that are familiar to any Mongol citizen.<sup>155</sup> For example, the purpose of well provision

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<sup>154</sup> Much of the logic and rationale I outline here is included in project documents and various pamphlets provided by the Center for Policy Research at a provincial RPRP conference in summer of 2008 (Center for Policy Research 2008). In particular see the influential policy document "What should be done?" (Enkhamgalan 2009).

<sup>155</sup> The idea that the Mongolian steppe is becoming widely degraded is common knowledge amongst many of my urban friends and associates. Frequently, stories in newspaper and on the television news present stories about goat over-population and massive degradation. In one case, the reporter state that 95% of Mongolia was heavily degraded and in ten years would be a desert. Many of these reports are founded on NGO reports from institutions that depend greatly on financial support from abroad and other institutions such as UN Environmental Program that are eager to support local initiatives. Local officials in Bayankhutag, a soum often targeted as being a prime case of overgrazing and degradation, argued that such claims are ridiculous. The soum governor stated that every year there is a drought, Bayankhutag is 'degraded and overgrazed' and the next year when the rains come, suddenly no one cares what is going on in Bayankhutag. Such processes are similar to what Fairhead and Leach (2003) call the development vortex.

was to encourage herders to utilize more distant pastures and reduce the threat of localized degradation around settlements where of course the poor households who were to benefit from this program were often forced to settle. Following familiar arguments, project staff and local committee members at the two meetings I sat in on, continually reiterated that secure access to resources enables the poor to benefit more from those resources, increase production, and better manage risk. Moreover, institutionalizing property rights incentivizes individuals to properly care and invest in the natural resources they use, a custodial ethic that also has ‘customary’ elements as I described in chapter 4.

### **Rural Poverty Reduction in Xentii and Uguumur**

The RPR program began in Xentii in 2003 along with the 3 other aimags: Bulgan, Xuvsgul and Selenge in the northwest. Bayankhutag soum where the research site Uguumur is located began program operations in 2006. In the 6 years since the program began in Xentii aimag, 19 soums have benefitted from the program. The successes are clearly apparent. Bayankhutag for instance has a brand new hospital, with ten beds and 2 doctors, school improvements, and a new cultural center.

The Pasture Management division of the program has helped establish 330 herder cooperatives groups in 19 soums. Of those 330 only 122 are currently operating but 60 per cent of the PMMCs that have been formed are still continuing administrative operations. Data on the number of campsite possession contracts obtained by members of herder cooperatives in all 19 soums is unavailable, but the majority of members in the six official cooperative groups in Uguumur have done so. Moreover, the program has renovated 397 wells with new motorized pump systems and concrete well houses with locks; the majority of these wells have been contracted to individual herder cooperative groups. An additional 153 hand wells (*gariin xudag*) have been dug according to the project director even though herders did not know of the existence of these hand wells.<sup>156</sup> Provincial project documents state that these wells service nearly 2 million head of stock and nearly 9000 households, many of which are not cooperative households. Moreover, approximately 2.5 million hectares of under-utilized pasture has now been put into use by program beneficiaries.

In addition, the program has organized a number of meetings for cooperative groups to share experiences and to engage with PIU staff and the provincial steering committee to offer

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<sup>156</sup> This may be because herders dug *shand* and not *gariin xudag*, but I did not ask whether this was the case. Reminiscent of socialist competitions of the negdel period, herders in Bayanxutag participated in a 2007 competition organized by RPRP against herders from other soums to dig the most wells.

feedback on the program priorities and operations.<sup>157</sup> Local extension staff have provided demonstrations of proper cropping methods for potato, carrot, and cabbage production through the Center for Policy Research. In each bag, one herder group selected by the soum steering committee has received a tractor for hay cutting and additional equipment for plowing cooperative vegetable gardens. In other soums, some groups have also been provided with greenhouses and storage units to support crop production. The program coordinator analyzed the effect of the program in this way:

D: Do you think the project is reducing poverty?

Soum Program Coordinator: On one side the project is meant to reduce poverty on the other side it is meant to help herders deal with natural change and global warming. Herds and herd income has decreased for most households. From this project's support, a household with 200-300 head of livestock can finally exit poverty and 'cross the ovoo'. Because of environmental risk, drought, and zud, the expense and additional needs of herders are increasing and animals will be lost. By doing this project, poverty is decreasing

Despite the program coordinators circuitous rationalization of the projects success (*buurinxiilux*) and the published successes of the program there are criticisms from those within RPR and in rural administrations. Many of these criticisms relate to how the project operates and whether or not cooperatives are an appropriate pathway for achieving poverty reduction and sustainable development. Herders and local administrators alike complained that the project had serious problems in reaching the poorest of the poor and questioned the equitable distribution of program benefits. Although I heard these criticisms in other soums I visited as well, I became significantly more familiar with the way the Pasture Management division of RPRP unfolded in Bayanxutag and more specifically in Uguumur.

### **Herder Cooperatives in Uguumur**

In November shortly before returning to the United States, my field assistant and I were driving around the provincial capital, Undurxaan, visiting with households that had contributed to the research in order to say goodbye and wish them well. While driving through the center of town the bag governor of Uguumur, who has a secondary ger in the capital, saw our car and flagged us down asking for a ride to the provincial government building, a normal request amongst friends, family, and acquaintances. We of course obliged. On the way we stopped off at the Xaan Bank to gather some documents on herder loans the bank was providing to us. While the bag governor and I sat in the car we began chatting about local development projects and he asked me about RPRP. I said, trying to remain ambiguous and apolitical, that I thought there were

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<sup>157</sup> The bag governor stated that soum project coordinators typically only invite cooperative *axlagch* who are pro-project.

good things about the program such as building a new hospital in Bayanxutag soum center and other aspects that were problematic (*asuudaltai*). He proceeded to launch into a diatribe about the pasture management project being a complete lie (*shal xudlaa*). He argued that the rural poverty reduction project consisted completely of wealthy people (*bugd ni bayan xun*). He asked how the project could *yaduural buruulax* or ‘reduce poverty’ when *yaduural baixgui* or ‘there was no poverty’ (amongst group members). It was not that poverty was absent in Uguumur but that the program beneficiaries, the herd cooperative groups, consisted largely of wealthy households. The *axlagch* or senior leaders of the herder cooperatives were some of the wealthiest herders in the bag. Moreover, the members of the cooperatives were largely kin and the hired herders of senior *axlagch*, some of whom are not even citizens of the bag or soum. The bag governor went so far as to claim that this was like corruption or *avilga shig*.

Herders had their own complaints as well. Non-cooperative herders complained that the project was simply a means for the wealthy to help the wealthy. The project steering committee in Uguumur is made up of members of the soum Citizens’ Representative Council (ITX), some of whom are wealthy herders from Uguumur. Moreover, in Bayankhutag the steering committee had simply appointed themselves as the Pasture Management and Monitoring committee. In other words, the steering committee members selected themselves, other council members, or well-connected *myangat* to be program beneficiaries. For example, herders complained when the cooperative group headed by the second wealthiest herder in Uguumur was provided a tractor for hay-cutting and vegetable farming. Many questioned, ‘how could the project be reducing poverty if it is giving tractors to *myangat malchin*?’

Additionally, individual groups were given possession contracts over wells. These groups were supposed to regulate, operate, and maintain the wells. This included taking small set fees from other herders for the use and maintenance of the well and putting these payments into the cooperative account at the soum bank branch. Most groups have not even opened accounts. Here one herder complains about this problem:

Bd: Ok, say there is one well. And Nasanbayar has possession. Ok. And let’s say Uusu doesn’t have a well and me Batdalai I do not have a well. But that well was dug by the project. And of course since the project dug the well, Galkhavga has not spent any money on it. But then he tries to take money from us! Ok here this money is yours, but whose account do you put this money in?! Who knows where this goes? That seems wrong to me. These projects, the wells, they come from the state! And for example, our Nasanbayar and Molom these two argue over the well. But Molom took money from Nasanbayar let’s say and he gave to Molom. Not one tugrug should be spent on this! Project money it comes from the government. That is an very ugly difference. Is this a Bayan xudag [playing on the soums name Bayankhutag]? So this man took money and animals from this man. So this person who gave money will water his animals. This project has come from the state though. And there are all these projects and they build all these wells and they tell no one!

They and the administration must tell all of the citizens that they have given wells and where they are!

Clearly, there are some serious issues related to program benefits. The unequal distribution of these resources fosters a more general sense of corruption and inequality in rural society. The increasing divisiveness around these issues has had the opposite effect of increasing social capital and drawing on the benefits of 'community'.

The problems with the program, however, go beyond perceived issues of corruption and nepotism. Rather, the primary concerns of non-cooperative herders and other observers is the clear and trenchant forms of territoriality that the program reinforces through well possession contracts and the requirement that all cooperative group members obtain winter and spring campsite possession contracts. Previous studies of pastoral society in Mongolia largely have stressed the egalitarian nature of rural society and the tendency towards equitable social relations. The widespread poverty and relatively open access all herders took advantage of in the years proceeding privatization painted a picture that does not adhere to conditions in Uguumur, although they may be more true elsewhere.

In contrast, data collected during the research period show that the RPR program was established in a context where control over land was already unequally distributed relative to class and kin and hierarchized along age and gender lines. Kin groups centering around the power and authority afforded to elder male kinsmen mobilized both to protect pasture against the settlement of households from other soums conducting otor in Uguumur and to increase available pasture at the expense of other households from smaller or less powerful kin groups in Uguumur. These kin groups by registering as cooperative buleg have used the RPR program to cement their control over wells and territory in concrete ways. In so doing, the project has empowered and strengthened the political authority of senior men in particular by providing a medium through which to translate their informal power and authority into something more formal by securing state political power (via campsite and well possession leases) while at the same time retaining their positions as nodes of private power. In order to understand more fully how the RPR program and in particular the herder cooperatives have reinforced territorial practices of kin groups and the modes of hierarchy and privilege that undergird, we must turn our attention to the pervasive presence of material social inequality in rural Mongolian social life and the discourses and ideologies that support it. In the next section we will look at these men like mountains and the political models rooted in rural social practices and beliefs that legitimate their social positions of authority.

## **‘Indirect Rule’: Power, Authority, and Territory in Rural Mongolia**

In the Spring of 2008 I moved to a new campsite with a new host household. I had originally arranged to spend my first three months in the field with this household but they had sent their livestock to another soum on otor and consequently, as the household head, Batdalai, argued, it would be somewhat pointless for me to observe pastoral life without livestock. He suggested that I live with his niece and her husband in the eastern part of the soum during the winter and then once the cashmere was combed I could then stay with him in the far west. In March, my host family arranged to send me to his camp. Before driving off to Batdalai’s, the conversation turned to Batdalai himself. My host mother’s younger sister, Altannavch, said she did not want to visit and I asked why. She said that she was scared of Jajaa – *bi tuunees aij baina*. I asked why she was afraid of him and she said that because he was the *xamgiin tom ax* or the eldest male relative amongst her kin. I had become familiar with the respect and deference accorded to men and particularly older men during the course of my work. Eldest males eat first, sit in the north part of the ger, and others avoid using their names opting for names like Jajaa or Namaa. Yet, her reluctance to even visit with her uncle, whom she called Jajaa, was something new. I asked her older sister, my host mother, and her older brother, who were sitting in the ger while I packed, if they too were afraid of Batdalai and they said they were because he is so *aimaar changa* or really strict. They said that he is like a father (*aav shig*). I asked if they must do what he tells them to do (*Ta nar Batdalai axiinxaa xelsneer xiix yustoi yum uu?*) and they said not necessarily but they could not remember ever not doing what he said. Rather, they feel compelled to *ugend orox* (lit. ‘enter his word’) or ‘do as he says’.

In this section I look at rural Mongolian sacred landscapes, mountain worship rituals, and practices centering around principles of patrilineal descent and connect them with patriarchal modes of authority and privilege that undergird critical territorial practices. The spiritual landscapes and sacred geographies I examine here are critical in that they naturalize senior male authority. Senior men are aptly placed in rural society to fully take advantage of such hegemonic conceptions of spatial power. Not all are capable of this. Yet, as I will show, those who have built up great herds have utilized the new social spaces created by the retreat of the state and these pervasive and salient cultural logics of authority and privilege to engage with and invest in patron-client relations. In turn these patrons, or men-like-mountains, have widened their territorial control and broadened their access to critical resources.

### **The Power of Men and Mountains: Modes of Hierarchy and Privilege**

With the collapse of the socialist state and party apparatus, other modes of social organization were fore-grounded as a response to vast social and economic change. As a wealth

of literature has made clear and according to research participants in Uguumur, herders in rural Mongolia responded to these circumstances by falling back on familiar social forms such as the household or kin group. However, unlike other research, which has largely ignored the political implications of such changes, this research argues that the emergence of households and particularly kin groups as significant forms of rural social organization has politically asymmetric effects. For example, the growing economic importance of the household as the primary unit of production for rural livelihoods in the post-socialist period, coupled with the central focus on herding labor and the loss of non-pastoral income generating activities for women, has increased the significance of unequal intra-household configurations that amplify male privilege and dominance. Furthermore, as kin groups have become increasingly important, the unequal distribution of authority and privilege between men and women and senior and junior within the kin group has heightened the opportunity for elder males to benefit and become *uul shig*.

In order to understand how men can become like mountains, we must understand the cultural modalities that undergird and legitimate their positions of authority within households and kin groups. I argue that what Humphrey (1996) calls ‘the invariant repetition of the center’ in rural Mongolian cultural practices including the centrality of mountains in ritual worship, the spatial distribution of privilege and respect within the ger, and the centrality of elder men in lineage beliefs and practices, all reinforce and naturalize masculine and aged-based modes of hierarchical privilege and authority amongst kin. I do this understanding as Moore argues that ‘cultural practices bear tangible political effects: they forge communities, reproduce inequalities, and vindicate exclusions’ (2006: 2). In particular, I argue that these practices and beliefs, by intersecting with socio-ecologies through the concept of *nutag*, contribute to the territorialization of patriarchal authority and to encouraging resistance via alternative sources of power.

The goal here is not to recreate what Hodgson (2000) calls the myth of pastoral patriarchy, but rather to understand the ways in which elder men utilize culturally recognizable modalities through which they and others express and legitimate their positions of authority and privilege. At the same time, I do not find it worthwhile to avoid or ignore inquiry into both the symbolic and the very real, material foundations and effects of patriarchal practices. Many of these avenues for the pursuit of consent overlap in other arenas of rural social life and cannot be delineated as solely ‘male-focused’ in the sense of men only. Women’s access to political power in the public sphere is in many cases not all that different than men. Women hold political office as bag governors and positions of authority; even though there is a real and apparent dearth of women serving in high positions such as provincial governor and as members of parliament. Without unnecessarily limiting the power and agency of women and youth, there are arenas in



which largely unquestioned practices significantly limit, conceptually and materially, the extent of women and young males access to authority and privilege that simultaneously benefit elder males.

These are most evident in rural landscape ideologies and ritual practices where gender difference is a critical, fundamental frame of reference. Yet, such gender ideologies and gendered practices cannot be understood unto themselves. The delineation between masculine and other modes of power are powerful only in the ways they intersect with class, age, and other social framings in material ways. Here I look at how landscape ideologies and practices underwrite and legitimate patriarchal modalities and territorial authority.

### **Power and Landscape in Mongolia**<sup>158</sup>

Caroline Humphreys argues that rural Mongolian landscapes are largely exemplified by two competing visions: (1) chiefly landscapes and (2) shamanist landscapes. During the course of my fieldwork in discussions with herders and in my daily observation of rural social life, it became abundantly clear that in Uguumur, ideas very similar to Humphrey's 'chiefly landscape' remain a dominant conceptual force in how herders perceive, talk about, and interact with the natural landscape around them. For herders, the spiritual geography of a landscape is comprised of continuously interacting forces and powers that shape the destinies (*zaya*) of herders and their herds. Herders interact with these forces, adapting to their wills in daily practice and attempting to shape outcomes through ritual exchange. These landscapes, however, have important material effects as herders interact with them even as the changing material conditions enhance the saliency of geographic configurations of power. In other words, the practical effects of these enacted landscapes organize social action in such a way as to imprint spiritual inequalities on the social world just as the inequalities produced in the social world reinvigorate the need for and use of highly unequal spiritual geographies for political legitimation. It is no wonder that some of the greatest proponents of mountain worship are wealthy men; because it is in this way, men may become like mountains. These ritual geographies naturalize hierarchy, privilege, and authority. Paternalistic and patriarchal authority is rooted in these spatial beliefs and symbolic geographies.

In Mongolian spiritual geographies, features of the landscape are differentiated in two primary ways: (1) through gender and (2) through *chadal* or a kind of mystical power, force, and

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<sup>158</sup> This section relies heavily on the work of Caroline Humphrey (1996), David Sneath (1999) and Morton Pederson (2004) amongst others. Much of what they describe in their work was reflected in my field experience.

effectiveness (also ability).<sup>159</sup> The primary cosmological division in the world is between heaven (tenger) and earth (etugen or otgon). Heaven is an animating male force and the earth is a life shaping and life sustaining female one. However, these gendered distinctions apply to earthly landscapes as well. Male aspects of the landscape are represented largely by geological features such as mountains (*uul*), hills (*tolgod*), and rock out-croppings (*xad*). Female aspects of the landscape are represented in contrast by watery features such as lakes (*nuur*), rivers (*gol*), and streams (*nariin gol*). These gendered landscapes equate roughly to distinctions Mongolians make in relation to traits passed through reproduction to children. Men are represented as bones (*yas*) and women are represented by blood (*tsus*) and flesh. A child's bones, brain and sinews come from their father and the flesh and blood come from their mother. In this sense, mountains represent the bones of the earth, while rivers and lakes the blood. An old Mongolian legend relays the tale of a man and women who fell in love and when the local *noyon* or lord demanded the women's hand in marriage, the two decided to disguise themselves in the landscape: the man as a mountain and the women as a lake. The mountain is the great Altan-Ovoo in east Sukhbaatar aimag, one of the most important mountains in Mongolian ritual geography, and the lake is the Dariganga where flocks of swans and geese migrate every going to and from Siberia.

Mongolians utilize these gendered metaphors in naming features of the landscape. Using anthropomorphized descriptions, mountains in effect are literally described using words that relate to skeletal or structural features of the human body. For example, a mountain pass is referred to as *am* or mouth, mountain summits are *oroï* or crowns, *toxoi* refer to a series of hills in the shape of an elbow, and *suij* refers to the thighbone.<sup>160</sup> Water features are not named in such a way and are not anthropomorphized. Rather, rivers, lakes, springs, and streams descend from mountains and are dependent on them – they are in effect appendages in a way. As Humphreys (1996) points out, in 'chiefly landscapes' watery features, like women's blood, are polluting; consequently, female landscape features are largely avoided but also respected.<sup>161</sup> Male features

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<sup>159</sup> They are also divided at times by a sense of age. For instance mountains are considered 'old'. In many cases mountains are described as being 'old men'. Hills in turn, may be considered young. Yet, I did not find this distinction pervasive enough to consider discussing it here. Moreover, age is not important relatively in landscapes as gender or 'power' are; rather, mountains are seen as being the result of time-dependent processes much in the way 'lineages' are seen. Consequently, the age-qualities of individual mountains are synonymous with the age-qualities of individual lines of descent.

<sup>160</sup> Many of these names appear in Uguumur. See Pegg (2001) for a more complete listing of descriptive terms.

<sup>161</sup> As Humphrey (1996) makes clear there are other competing landscapes in Mongolia. In Shamanist landscapes, female features of the land are favored such as caves and springs. Female and male are seen as complements as opposed to chiefly landscapes where male is clearly dominant over the female, a result she argues of the emergence of centralized nomadic power, the importance of patriline is transferring that

such as mountains, however, are quite the opposite, as they bestow *buyan khishig* or good fortune upon those who worship and engage in ritual exchange with it.

The gendered nature of the landscape in rural Mongolia is connected to the kinds of spirits and powers that inhabited those features. Each aspect of the landscaped is controlled or governed by these various spirits and deities. In this sacred ecology, it is the spirits and other mystical forces which *baigali zoxiruulax* or control nature (literally ‘state of being’) (Sneath 2001). Deities, good spirits, evil spirits, old dragons, goblins, and other forces inhabited and ‘possessed’ mountains, springs, rocks, lakes, and other attributes of the landscape envisaged as powerful (Suxbaatar 2001). In features of the landscape associated with female attributes unmovable evil female spirits ruled and were to be avoided, especially by men. Male features such as mountains or hills, though, were ruled by other spirits referred to as *gazriin ezed* or ‘land masters’. Mountains and their spirits are anthropomorphized and even given titles such as *khan* (king), *noyon* (lord), *khairkhan* (beloved), *gun* (count), *van* (duke), and *bogd* (holy). Some are even called *etseg* (father) or *xuu* (son) or *baga ax* (little older brother or senior), *dund ax* (middle older brother or senior), and *buural ax* (eldest older brother or senior). In the past local people often avoided stating the name of a local mountain deity in the same way *duu* are forbidden from mentioning the names of *ax*, a practice called *avgailax*. Some deities and spirits are ferocious, others are despotic (*ezerxeg*). Some mountains are even alcoholics. Physical landscape features give clues as to what kind of entity inhabits a mountain.

Deities were appointed, inspired by the landscape of the local area and its natural formation. A request to write a ritual sutra of Mount Songinokhairkhan was made by a scholarly lama of Ix Xuree for Luvsanperenley, a lama invited from Tibet. The invited lama examined the mountain and perceived it to look like the image of a great military leader. This is why its deity is a blue old man with crossed molars who rides a blue bull and likes alcohol. (Suxbaatar 2001: 31)

In some cases the interaction between physical attributes and spiritual force contribute to the formation of its character. As Suxbaatar (2001: 34) notes:

In the territory of Delgerkhan soum Tuv aimag, lives a deity depicted as a strong man with a black horse, black del, black beard, and black eyebrows, The deity blows away heavy snow in the mountain, This land almost never suffers from blizzards. Indeed the mountain’s shape is such that it does not retain the snow.

In rural Mongolia, natural, social, and cultural worlds, like Cruikshank’s (2005) description of Tlingit and Athapaskan world views, are not disaggregated but unified. In this sense mountains, like humans and other forces in the environment are actors in their own right, engaged in a

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power, and the importation of Buddhism with its focus on hierarchical organization both in the material world and the immaterial.

broader ecology.<sup>162</sup> Although, when one visits the deep Mongolian countryside, the landscape appears vast and empty; yet, for many it is full of interacting, colluding, and competing forces that not only underlie ecological processes and events but are part and parcel to (if not causal of) them. Mountains themselves, in the way that Cruikshank (2005) describes how glaciers listen, are animate, that is endowed with life, and are capable of enlivening or acting on other actors. Similar to Athapaskan and Tlingit languages, in Mongolian, inanimate objects are capable of acting on others. The infixes –uul- and –lg- mean ‘to make’ or ‘to cause to’ when inserted in verbs. Mountains are described in such ways. Consequently, humans are also capable of interacting with mountains and spirits in various ways. In fact, humans are compelled to engage these forces because of the vast powers they have over their fates. As Suxbaatar (2001: 34) notes:

An old story tells that Tugs-Ochir, father of the Sain Noyon Xaan, Namnansuren, once pacified the spirit of current Mt. Shar Sheeg located between Khaikhandulam and Nariinteel soums of Uvurkhangai. His wrestler Munkhjargal died on the mountain where he lived when he was out looking for a lost sheep in a snow storm. The lord was very angry and had the Shar Sheeg beat with the sole of a shoe one hundred times saying sadly “what a ferocious mountain that cannot save a single young boy, shielding him in front of itself, and covering him at the back!” Since the Shar Teeg was pacified it was named as Shaakhain Teeg. But pacifying the spirit by force rather than placating them is quite rare.

These deities, which have access to the ultimate power of heaven (*tenger*), have power over the land and the ecological process and events occurring within its territorial control. These various ezen (masters or possessors), had, and for some still have, magical abilities to contract rain, fend off snows, or bring ruin upon herds. For example, goblins are able to ‘collect the clouds and bring rain’. Other spirits, such as dragons, often brought ruin upon locals. But these forces could be appeased through ritual exchange (Sneath 1999). As Pegg (2001) points out:

In pre-communist Mongolia, the need to negotiate with nature was fueled by the belief that it was inhabited by truculent master-spirits that actively affected people’s everyday lives. The force or power of nature (*baigaliin xuch*) and the spirits or gods that both inhabited and comprised it, had to be placated ... (100).

Although contemporary herders in Uguumur do not necessarily believe in actual spiritual entities such as *luu savdag* or dragon spirits that inhabit mountains, the places where they once lived now have an innate power, force, or spirit (in its other sense) of their own. In other words, it is the mountain itself that is ‘giving’ (*genen*), ‘charitable’ (*buyantai*), or ‘wealthy’ (*bayan*) rather than the spirit that inhabits it. It is for this reason that Uguumur is so named. *Uguumur* means ‘giving’ in Mongolian, a descriptive term for charitable entities. One of the central mountains of worship in the 3<sup>rd</sup> bag is Uguumur Uul. One herder explained to me that the great Bayan Mountains or

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<sup>162</sup> See also David G. Anderson’s (2002) work on ‘sentient ecologies’.

Ix Bayan Uul in Uguumur can *bayajuulax* or enrich. In fact, the mountains is especially grateful to strangers, the primary reason why that herder emigrated to the soum from Batnorov in the north.

Yet, features of the landscape are not equal in the political economy of the spirit world as male aspects of the landscape are clearly privileged over female ones and male features are ranked according to their relative *chadal* (i.e. ability, effectiveness, or power).

They (abilities) emerge by the exercise of different forms of agency which are socially constituted in basically asymmetrical ways. Entities in nature have their own ‘majesty’ or effectiveness which does not derive from human spirits but is simply there. (Humphries 1996: 136)

For example, mountains are more *chadaltai* than hills, rock-outcroppings, tall trees or mounds as they have greater control over the energies and forces in nature such as the onset of rains, snow, the speed of winds, and the growth of grass. Consequently, beyond the sky (*tenger*) which is the ultimate force, mountains are the central element in nature (*baigal*) upon which all other forces and energies depend including humans. But even amongst mountains there are strict hierarchies. For example, in central Xentii the most important mountain is Undur Khaan<sup>163</sup> mountain or the High King, a *duu* or little brother to the larger Khan Khentii range in the north, who has a number of renowned servant, protector mountains most of which are in Uguumur. Ix Bayan Uul is called the High King’s deputy (*shadar*). Bayan-Erxtii *uul* is the High King’s knight or warrior. Xeree Xuxul, my host families’ *shutdeg uul*, is the High King’s lama because it looks like a lama holding a bell and thunder-bolt. As Suxbaatar (2001) notes, “it is highly respected and worshipped by the locals due to its being the birthplaces of the seven highest ranking master lamads of the last emperor of Mongolian, the Bogd Khan.” Aldar Uul in the southern part of the Uguumur is the High King’s Buddha. In the past, mountains were designated by class or occupation.

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<sup>163</sup> Undurxaan mountain is a very powerful mountain and occupies a central importance in the eastern steppe. In the pre-socialist imperial period, the mountain, like its human political counterparts, contested even the political centrality of the great capital of Ix xuree. As Suxbaatar (2001) retells: Once upon a time, the Undur Xaan mountain had no forest cover, only a bare surface. The deity of Undur Xaan mountain had been obsessed with how to encourage forestation. Consequently, the deity made a final decision and had trees stolen from the Bogd khan, under the cover of night, while its guardian deity Dunjingarav was asleep. When the Bogd Khan Mountains deity woke up and realized that its trees had been stolen he immediately set forth to where modern day Nalaix town is situated, where he battled with the Undur Xaan mountain deity. During the fight Undur Xaan mountain deity lost one hundred trees and the battleground was named after those one hundred tree, Zuun Mod. The trees which the deity managed to escape with became the basis for the Undur Xaan mountain’s forest.

Clearly, not all mountains are equal. Although Humphrey is correct in saying that “entities in nature have their own ... effectiveness (*chadal*) which does not derive from human spirits but is simply there”, I argue that within categories of features such as mountains, relative levels of power (*chadal*) wax and wane dependent on the amount of *buyan khishig* individual mountains can provide and the relative ability of those mountains to effectively control their surroundings. Moreover, some mountains have different abilities. *Avgai khad* (servant/wife rock) is known for curing illness while other features are known for benefitting fertility, courage, and wealth. These differences can be seen in mountain worship rituals.

### ***Uul shutex*: Mountain Worship**

During the summer of 2007, my assistant and I traveled the countryside searching for sampled households in order to collect livelihood survey data. On the survey was a question concerning religious beliefs. Most herders responded that they were followers of Buddhism (*shar shashin* or yellow religion) or for some, they subscribed to shamanist beliefs and practices (*buugiin shashin*). A few herders were atheists. However, in one interview, the respondent said she practiced *uul shutedeg shashin* or ‘mountain worship religion’. I asked her whether she also practice *shar shashin* and she replied that she did not, she simply worshipped her *Bayan Xairxan* or ‘lovely wealthy mountain’. Mongolian cultural artifacts such as songs, poetry, theatre, and painting are replete with references to and portrayals of mountains (Pegg 2001). This was the case even during socialism; although, references to the ‘power’ of mountains were removed. All households, even those who consider themselves atheists, to some extent believe in the power of mountains and participate in ritual worship. In fact all of those who subscribe to Buddhism understand very little about Buddhist philosophy and could more aptly be described in sociological terms as practitioners of folk religion. At the center of this Mongolian folk spirituality is mountain worship.

Mountains are worshipped in a number of ways, the primary ways of which are *ovoo taxix yus* (ritual ovoo offerings) and *taxil urgux yus* (ritual to raise an offering) Both of these rituals are aimed at accessing the power inherent in mountains to bestow *buyan khishig* or good fortune and minimize the forces of nature that can bring ruin to herds by appeasing and placating the spirits desires.<sup>164</sup> Mountain worship protects herders against drought, *zud*, and other kinds of disaster. While herders must provide offerings to the mountain and its spirit they must also refrain from certain behaviors. Consequently, in addition to the ovoo rites are forbidden acts such the prohibitions against urinating on a mountain, disposal of trash on it, digging a hole in its soil, and

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<sup>164</sup> This is why, for example, one gives alcohol to an alcoholic spirit. Some mountains prefer horses, some sheep, and others cows, camels, or goats. Some mountains prefer money.

the removal of rocks from its surface.<sup>165</sup> Many of these prohibitions are part of the habitus of everyday living and, as negative actions which do not require effort to enact, generally do not percolate to the conscious surface. Ritual acts, however, as positive action that must be enacted, do enter into daily conscious as they must be planned and acted out in certain ways.

*Taxil urgux yus* is an everyday household ritual whereby women in the early morning offer up the *deej* or first of the mornings milk to their *xairxan* or ‘lovely’ mountain and/or the four cardinal directions. This is similar to practices within the home whereby men – the *geriin ezen* or master of the home - receives the *deej* at meal time. At other significant liminal moments such as with journeys and rites of passage women will make such oblations to their *xairxan* or ‘lovely’ or, for example, in the direction someone is travelling. When people move out of their *nutag* they often raise offerings in the direction of their homeland where their *shutdeg uul* reigns.

Ovoo rituals comprise of individual worship practices and community or group based worship practices. Ovoo are stone cairns on mountain peaks that are built over time through ritual worship where stones and other offerings such as vodka, cheese, money, and prayer flags (*xii mori*) are added to the ovoo. In the past, various spirits and entities lived in the ovoo. By inhabiting the ovoo there was a mutual exchange between the spirits and local people as people built up the spirits home, demonstrating the spirits power and the people’s loyalty and faith, while the spirit bestowed *buyan khishig*. These practices literally build and reinforce the spiritual authorities that infused rural institutions with power.<sup>166</sup> In individual ovoo worship a traveler or local who is passing by circumambulates the ovoo three times, a practice called *dallaga*, and gives a *taxil* or offering to the mountain. This kind of worship is not scheduled but rather occurs in the course of particular moments such as journeys, trips to the market, or any process of movement across the land; consequently, the central object of worship could be any mountain or hill. In some cases, roadside ovoo are simply cairns and nothing else. All mountains have at least to some degree small ovoo. Some consist of just a few large stones, while others are massive reaching a few meters in height.

In community-based ovoo worship rituals, patrons, typically local elders schedule ritual events at significant points in the annual cycle. Ovoo worship rituals are organized at minimum twice every year amongst households in Uguumur. During the research period, my host households attended 3 different ovoo worship rituals. Two of these rituals were conducted at their

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<sup>165</sup> A particularly egregious offence would be to take rocks from the ovoo itself.

<sup>166</sup> Local soum administrations arrange community ovoo rituals. In these acts, soum governors often assume the role as *ax* and *pater familias*. The community ovoo ritual was cancelled in Bayankhutag since few households had returned to their home territories.

*nutgiin xairxan* or their local mountain of worship – Xeree Xuxul Xairxan – during *tsagaan sar* (lunar new year) and then again at the start of summer when worshippers beckon the mountain spirit for rain. Some of the family members, because they have secondary gers in the provincial capital, also attended ceremonies at the Undurxaan Uul, the capital’s namesake. In the past, they have worshipped Ix Bayan Uul near the soum center, at Altan Ovoo in Sukhbaatar aimag, and at Bogd Xaan Uul in Ulaanbaatar. In recent years, the president, as pater familia exemplar, has patronized the Altan Ovoo and Burkhan Khaldun in Khentii, Chinggis Khan’s personal mountain protector.<sup>167</sup>

Ovoo ceremonies are organized by elder male patrons. Women and men of non-Mongol descent are not allowed to perform or attend the ceremonies since women are polluting and foreigners have no connection with the land. Their presence could anger rather than appease the mountain. Men who are not from the local nutag, however, can attend given that they are either settling in the territory, have some claim to the territory such as through birthright or descent, or feel that the mountain is in some way drawing them in or beneficial to their needs and goals. Each individual performs a *dallaga* (circumambulation) and offers a significant presentation of money, alcohol, and/or other goods to the mountain ovoo. Individuals participate according to status with elders going first. The elders or sometimes local administrators, retain a local lama to read a sutra praising the mountain (*nom unshuulax*). Some of the wealthier attendees may even gift animals to mountain and its spirits. Some mountains prefer cattle like Undurkhaan and others like Bayan Uul prefer horses. Devotees tied blue scarves or khadag around the animals necks, sometimes with a bell attached. These animals cannot be slaughtered or stolen as they belong to the mountain.

Mountain worship rituals symbolize herders’ loyalty, respect and deference for authorities embodied in the mountain similar to that of a client to their patron. As herders say: “*Ovoonii ix ni tanid, olznii ix ni nadad*” or “to you this ovoo, to me fortune” thereby symbolically enacting the reciprocal obligations inherent in patronage. This is critically important to understanding how the relations between mountains and worshippers is not only similar to that between patrons and clients, but how these ritual practices serve as cultural means for legitimated senior, male power. The ovoo ritual itself fundamentally connects male authority with those in the land.

What was being enacted was the beckoning of the energies of nature to the advantage of the male group, a kind of recharging of the batteries of virility in which gender matters more than any other principle of group organization. (Pegg 2001)

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<sup>167</sup> These practices stem from a long historical tradition of mountain worship. However, contemporary worshippers see mountain worship as beginning with Chinggis Khan whose relationship with Burxan Khaldun not only saved his life but also helped give birth to the modern Mongol nation.



It is not surprising then that the power of the mountain, *chadal*, is also an important feature of men, particularly those who are *uul shig* or like mountains.

### **Patriline in Practice**

When a horse is particularly fast and durable, herders typically refrain from gelding it and instead keep the steed as a stallion and may even put him out to stud. In particular, local herders are keen to maintain purebred stud lines. They often know the line of a single horse several generations back, the breeding, and the place of origin. Its speed, intelligence, and durability, its *ash* or demeanor, are all associated with its *udam* or heritage. This ‘heritage’ is passed down the male line. In a similar fashion, *chadal* to some degree is assumed to pass in humans along the male line. Most modern Mongols trace their descent to Chinggis Khaan, whether they are directly related or not. During the Olympic games in 2008 when Mongolian won its first gold medal, I heard over and over again that Mongolians are *chadaltai* and how this power is in their genes. In one case, I gently debated with a friend about whether two gold medals after over 40 years of Mongolian involvement in the Olympics games could be evidence of *chadal*. He argued that Mongolians are descendants of the powerful Chinggis Khan and that although they are a small nation, they are particularly powerful. Such sentiments are heard in urban areas as well, with the rise of the Mongolian nationalist and fascist movements like the Blue Mongol Party. Such sentiments have parallels here as well. Patrilineal ideologies and practices are fundamental to understanding senior male power and contemporary territorial practices including mountain worship rituals. In order to understand we must look again at Mongolian patrilineal descent ideologies and ritual kin practices.

Descent among Mongol ethnic groups is traced through the patriline. As Sneath (2006) makes clear it is not well known how Mongols traced descent prior to the emergence of clan-based confederations in the 10-11<sup>th</sup> centuries. With the emergence of Chinggis Khaan and the aristocratic institutionalization of the Altan Urag, the golden line of the Borjigid clan, patrilineal principles became increasingly important in order to determine inheritance rights in the feudal system. Powers of authority within families and monarchies passed from fathers to sons by lineal primogeniture and as Vreeland points out “successive lineal descendants of a jassag had priority over members of collateral lines descended from a given jassag’s brothers” (1957: 71). Sneath (2006) argues that patrilineal descent operated as a technology of governance in the monarchic system rather than a pan-social form of organization. Rather, as most household do now, lowly client and junior or *duu* households gave greatest deference to the most senior ax in their

patriline. In everyday practical terms herders tended to trace kin relations, as opposed to descent, in an ambilineal fashion with a strong tendency towards the patriline.

Yet, Mongolians often speak of descent in unilineal principles or the *yas* or bone. *Yas* is also synonymous with *urag* or 'line of descent'. *Urag* is closely associated with the pre-imperial clan system and with the feudal aristocracy of pre-socialist Mongolia. The most famous *urag* would be the Altan Urga. With the demise of the clan system and the emergence of the feudal system whereby patrilineal principles were subsumed as technologies of governance, *urag* has lost much of its meaning. *Udam*, however, has not. *Udam* refers in a biological sense to the traits inherited from parents and specifically from fathers. *Udam*, heritage or descent, is passed down through the *yas*, literally the bone, or patriline. Many critical practices in rural society have long been organized through the *yas*. Inheritance rights followed patrilineal principles and so did obligations of feudal loyalty. Sons of serfs were tied just as their father was to their father's feudal overlord or noyon.

The importance of the *yas*, much like the mountain in the landscape also referred to as the *yas*, is made real through everyday practices, some ritual and some benignly quotidian. As I have already mentioned in some detail inheritance of both livestock and campsites is ideological 'best' when done through the patriline. We can also see this in horse gifting and branding practices. The gifting of horses between men reinforces the importance of *udam* and *yas* because horses, like men, are believed to get their qualities (*zan chanar*), their very natures that is, from the enlivening animating force of their stallion fathers. Moreover, every household has a *tamga* or brand that is associated with their descent. *Tamga* are kept in the *xoimor* of the ger and are wrapped in ritually significant blue *xadag* or scarves. Only when it is time to brand the horses do they unwrap the brand. Anyone who is not a male lineal relative, even curious anthropologists, are not allowed to hold or touch the brand. Like their stallions, fathers bequeath the *tamga* to their sons. In Mongolia, only horses are branded. Consequently, when men gift horses to each other they are ritualistically signifying respect and acknowledgment of their masculinity.

There are numerous other arenas in which patrilineal descent is invoked. In herder's households at the front of the ger, called the *xoimor*, herders place images of *burxan* or gods along with pictures of their fathers. As we can see in the picture below (Figure 6.3), my host family has placed offerings of money, vodka, cheese, and lit candles in honor of their father who passed away some years before. His image remains in the honored seat at the head (*tolgoi*) of the ger. Other objects such as awards, commendations, and family photos are also placed here.



Figure 6.3. Altar in the *xoimor* of the ger (Photo taken by author).

In one of the most surprising practices I encountered and observed while living in Uguumur was a little studied practice of penis kissing. During my time in Ulaanbaatar, I witnessed an uncle kissing the penis of a newborn nephew. Shocked I asked my host mother later in the evening when we had returned to the apartment why he had done so. At the time I could not fully comprehend the meaning of what she was telling me. Many months later, while in the countryside and after gaining considerably better grasp of Mongolian, I watched one of my host fathers kiss his grandsons penis repeatedly. I later asked one of the women why he had done this. She said that is was to *xundeldeg* or to respect. In effect she pointed out, the child was his lineal descendant, a lower generation of the *yas*. She said that children must respect and do as fathers and grandfathers say but the young are also going to continue the *yas* for the future and carry on the *udam*. In essence the penis, the organ which enlivens and animates, also transfers the *udam*. Kissing it is a sign of respect. In many ways, mountain worship is no different. The mountain which represents the earth's *yas* or patriline, must be respected. The *yas*, the penis, the *udam*, *urga*, mountain, the center of the ger, and the senior male are all symbolic of the invariant center. It is through these practices that male power is legitimated and reproduced. They enact patriarchal modes of power and fuse human and natural worlds into a unified ecology.

### **Spaces of Male Authority**

The exclusive, local nature of such male-focused rituals infuses rural landscapes with male power and authority. Yet, the principle of *ax-duu* is also ritually critical. As mountains are *ax* of other features in the land so are elder humans to their juniors. The dual nexus of age and gender are most apparent in spatial ideology and practices. Here, I examine the connection between patrilineal, senior, male-centered ideals and spatial practices in the home and in local

pastoral territories or *nutag*. In each of these cases, the ger and the *nutag*, I invoke Humphrey's (1996) idea of the invariant center in Mongolian ritual and spatial practice.

In the home (see Figure 6.4) it is the hearth, the home of men's fire, that gives life to the ger and around which daily life is organized just as descent ideologies and a range of social practices are organized around the male line and the passage of *udam* or heritage from *deedees* or the ancestors and senior males. Although the ger symbolizes gender in equal ways such as the division of the male and female halves and the central support posts which represent the marriage of two *yas*, the head of the ger called the *xoimor* is reserved, as I have mentioned for the most senior males and for honored guests and *burxan* images. Moreover, the central hearth and the *toono* (hole at the top of the ger) through which the exhaust passes upward toward the sky is representative of male line. Moreover, when a household moves their ger they place a stone at the center of the ger imprint to mark where this central line was situated so that other households do not settle over the sacred connection between the earth and the sky through the male line. To do so is a major insult. These spatial ideologies and practices are central to everyday life.

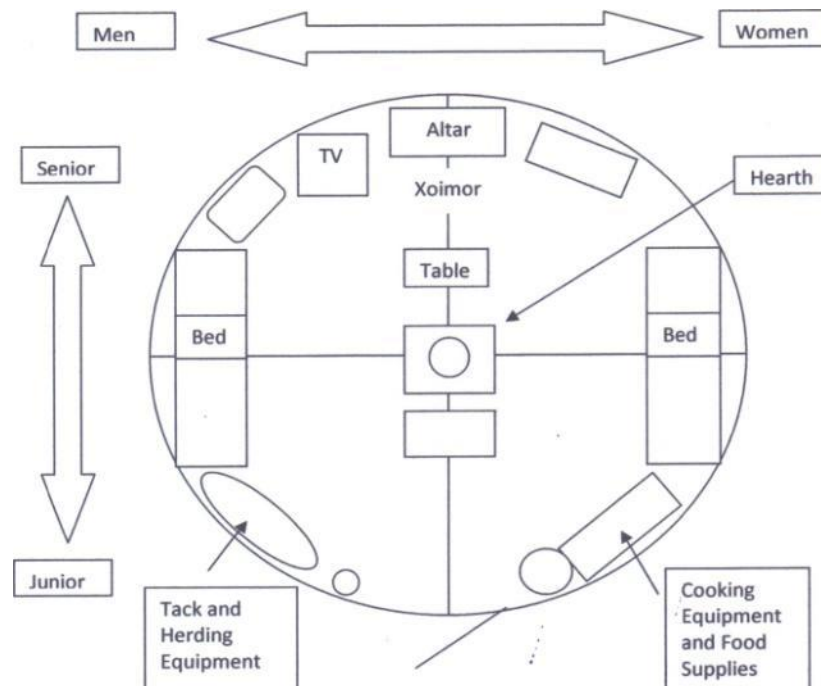


Figure 6.4. Spatial configuration of the ger. (Compiled from observations and fieldnotes by author)

Many of these principles can be seen in socio-spatial configurations known as *nutag*. *Nutag* refers to a community's homeland or territory. As I described in chapter 5 the term has multiple meanings at different scales. At each of these levels, nation, region, province, soum, bag, and locality, there are central ritual mountains around which homelands are defined. For example,

at the national level, Mongolians raise offerings to the Bogd Khaan and Burxan Xaldun. Those who live in the west look to Altan Ovoo and those in the west look to Otgontenger. Yet, *nutag* refers not to land per se but a relationship between the people, the *nutgiinxan*, and the territory. The central features of each of these *nutag* are mountains and the central features of the communities who make up the *nutgiinxan* (people of a *nutag*) are elder men and mountain worship. The term is ontologically socio-ecological. In Uguumur, though, when one refers to a named place in the landscape, herders associate that location with a particular kin group and more often than not, the head of that kin group. These groups are described as *neg nutgiinxan* or people of one *nutag*.<sup>168</sup>

Consequently, social ties to *nutag* are also rooted in kinship and ideas about descent. Mountains are the bones or *yas* of the earth and patrilineal descent groups both of which are intimately tied through the concept of *nutag* and both are simultaneously invoked in mountain worship rituals and various territorial practices I describe below. Clearly, such ideologies and practices map patrilineal descent ideologies and fundamental beliefs concerning senior male authority onto the landscape, legitimating kin dynamics such as *ax-duu* that disproportionately favor men and particularly senior men.

### **Men Like Mountains: Axlach**

Effective male power, like that of mountains, is an innate personal force that is pre-given. Yet, like mountains, this *chadal* is not equally distributed amongst men both in quantity and quality. Some men have different kinds of *chadal* and others have little *chadal*. *Chadal* is evident in a number of ways. Symbolically *chadal* is evident in the build-up of various forms of cultural capital. Economically, it is evident in the build-up herds. Socially, it is evident in the wide social networks of clients. Clearly, in sociological terms, men can build up and increase their *chadal*. But in rural conceptions, this *chadal* is innate and aggregated cultural capital, livestock, or clients are simply the material effect of this inner force. Each person has a *zaya* or fate and *chadal* is a reflection of this inner, largely unchangeable quality. Despite this belief, it was clear that wealthy senior men actively attempt to reflect their personal power to others in various ways. They also attempt to build up power over others for various material reasons. I would argue that in contrast to the immutable qualities of *chadal*, other more fluid, alterable conceptions of *chadal* are also at play. Rather than examine the cultural dynamics of ‘causality’, in this section I look at the

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<sup>168</sup> There has been much debate in the literature concerning the nature of ‘*neg nutgiinxan*’. I argue that the term is only descriptive in nature and does not act as a proper noun nor does it represent a coherent institution. Literally it refers to the people of one *nutag*, which could have meanings at the various scales *nutag* is employed. In this sense Mongolians as a nationality could be described as *neg nutgiinxan*.

contemporary political economy of chadal in Uguumur including the way wealth and consumption intersect with class processes to produce rural patrons. Moreover, I look at the ways patrons build prestige through awards and use their social positions of authority to their own ends including in local politics.

Wealthy herders, including senior elders, who have built up large herds, a sign of good-standing with natural forces and innate inner force, invest heavily in horse-racing, wrestling tournaments, acquiring awards, traditional Mongolian clothing, festivities, gifting, outward signs of wealth such as Toyota SUVs, and running in local elections. By investing in horse-racing and wrestling tournaments and sponsoring naadam festivities they bring a kind of *buyan khishig* or good fortune to their community. In early spring of 2008, the local sports union organized a national-level wrestling tournament in honor of a local Uguumur *myangat* and Ulsiin Sain Malchin (national best herder). National politicians and other celebrities came to the wrestling tournament in honor of the herder who himself was a former provincial wrestling champion. Wrestlers from around the country even from Zavkhan and Uvs in the far west, Umnugovi in the south, and Dornod in the east, came to wrestle. They gave him a number of awards of appreciation, silver bowls, and belts. Investing in traditional attire and gifting supports a conservative cultural stance that reinforces their ‘traditional’ source of power. Yet at the same time modern, outward signs of wealth such as cars manifest their livestock wealth in ways symbolic to other herders. With such transport they also demonstrate the lack of restriction on their movements, reinforcing their independence and freedom from material constraints.

The awards that herders contend for are a primary means for building important prestige. All of the coop and kin group leaders have won significant numbers of awards such as Hero of Labor, National Best Herder, Provincial Best Herder, and *myangat malchin*. To receive these awards herders must *maljuulax* or restock other households – they must in effect demonstrate they are effective patrons through generosity and beneficence. All of these practices are outward expression of a man’s inner force or power and integral aspects of their personal natures. When these men are able to convert this capital into power over others or use to attract others they are literally referred to like mountains as *chadaltai*.<sup>169</sup> To command in such a context typically does not require excessive coercion, discipline, or threat, although this does occur, but rather like a mountain such men almost effortlessly attract client followers. He must be able to encourage others to *ugend orox* or follow his words. In many ways, such power is barely visible.

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<sup>169</sup> Not all wealthy herders, nor are all senior men *chadaltai*. The inability to convert such wealth into real, material power over others negates one’s position as a political *ax*, though one maintains some of the social niceties of being older than others.

But male control is evident in numerous visible ways. As I have described in chapter 4, senior men are more beneficially positioned to call on the labor of others and organized labor for their own ends including collective migration as I describe later. Collective migration always is an effect of the central figure of senior men. Seniors have other kinds of power over others. They control access to livestock both for their children, dependents, clients, and potential stockless employees. Those who wish to gain inheritance, wages, or shares have to go through these senior herders. These forms of material control provide senior men with a base of control beyond that of their homes. All of the men I describe below are *axlagch* or senior leaders in their *buleg* or *uls*. They are elders with their group or confederation. When the group or confederation undertakes an activity they are referred to as being *neg door* or ‘under one’. That ‘one’ is their *axlagch*. It is the senior male who can *setgel sanaa niilex* or ‘unite minds and thoughts’. Having this power they can then *gar niilex* or ‘unite hands’. But seniors do not just use the dynamics of *ax-duu* and control over labor and livestock to reinforce their positions.

As Humphrey (1996) makes clear in her masterful *Shaman and Elders*, amongst Mongols, seniors are respected for their knowledge, experience, and skill. Although her work concerns Daur Mongols in northeastern China, this is no less true in contemporary Uguumur. Seniors are seen as an important source of practical information and analysis. Senior men with whom I was most acquainted, had encyclopedic knowledge of forage, livestock, weather, and other pertinent information. Moreover, in the eyes of others senior men were also seen as the most capable of processing this information. Although others might know some basic principles in herding, basic forages, and weather pattern, they have not built up the reservoir of local knowledge that seniors have produced through their many years of encountering the forces in nature.

D: Some people have formed these groups. These Gantuya and Lkhavgadorj, their groups work together. And some of these groups are kin groups. People also respect the eldest male, why? Why are the senior man’s words important?

S: This is very important. Our Mongolian people have come from and follow our elders and ancestors. We revere knowledge and experience. Elders have great life experience. They can read the skies and read the signs in nature. What is that there? To the north what is that? What is happening in nature, in the skies? They see the signs. Will a storm come? Will rain or winds come? Do we move? They say move, so we move. Beside this, they have lived many, many years and have many years of work experience. The youth, in this way, must see that this certainly is better than without it. If a man tries to go by his own wisdom, his own brain, his own mind, reading the signs he will have separated himself from this. We must raise life upward, though. We must follow tradition and respect the labor of experienced men who have worked many years.

D: So their juniors do as they say? [*ugend orox* = ‘enter his word’]

S: Well yes of course! You must harmonize your own life! If you harmonize your own life, my life will also harmonize. If you harmonize you life, you can realize much success.

The ‘informal’ power of senior males, however, is not prevented from seeping into formal arenas. In recent years, many of the senior men have attempted to convert their social power into formal political power through local administrative elections and party politics. All of the senior men I met during my research were deeply involved in party politics, some of them being officials in the soum party leadership. During the summer of 2008 a number of herders were running for office in the ITX. A number had already been sitting as officeholders since 2004 and a few since 2002. In the 1990s these positions were almost always held by soum center residents including teachers, technical staff, veterinarians, and other administrators. Several of the cooperative *axlagch* listed below were sitting on the council during my time. Others had sons or wives on the council.

It is no surprise that Uguumur, which has more *myangat* than the other two bags combined, is the most politically active. The first and second bags did not even have enough candidates to fill the spots reserved for them on the council. In the 2008 rural Soum ITX elections in Uguumur, four cooperative *axlagch* (and several other *myangat*) ran for office as candidates. Three Uguumur *axlagch* were already on the council; two of whom lost their seats (they had served 2 terms) and the other did not run again. Another 3 candidates were members of cooperative *buleg*. Two others were wives of wealthy herdsman. None of the *axlagch* made it into office. Five of the ten however were either members of *buleg* or were related to *axlagch*. The other five were citizens residing in the soum center. Voters select 3 candidates for nomination to ITX. The ten highest vote-getters will sit on the council. In this system, however, the difference between winners and losers is very small. The vote tallies ranged from a high of 68 votes to a low of 30. With nineteen candidates there were small distinctions within that range. The difference between the bottom five highest vote getters and the highest vote-getting unsuccessful candidates was a range of only 8 votes. Interestingly, though, the losses incurred by *axlagch* may be a result not of garnering enough votes from their own ‘people’ but rather the lack of votes from other groups and the competitive nature of rural politics.

Shortly before the election while I was sitting in the ger with the women of my host households as they discussed their voting strategies. They would vote for members of the *buleg* including their eldest senior’s son and one other candidate from their cooperative group. They were also going to vote for one of the female candidates, but they differed on which one they would select. I asked them why they did not vote for *axlagch* from neighboring kin groups and



they giggled, saying why would they do that. They used disparaging remarks about how they were untrustworthy (*shuudarga bish*), overweight (*buduun*), and opportunistic. Of course they did not disparage or use these terms for their own elders. Most still had a public respect for such men and would not sully their name outside their own private ger. Yet, this affront to the respectability of other axlagch seemed pervasive in other households as well. People were always willing to discuss how oppressive other axlagch were with their juniors but never their own. In electoral terms, if such voting strategies are equally pervasive, the axlagch are in fact undermined as candidates and can to a degree explain why their juniors were successful and they were not. Other seniors and juniors would rather see another's juniors on the ITX rather than axlagch himself.

Rural ITX elections are not the only way in which senior men stay politically active. Some are ardent supporters of political parties and assist the parties in the Provincial and national elections in November of 2008. Axlagch donate to political parties, rallies, and other fora, assist in organizing festivities, pose in photos with candidates, engage in faux performative interviews for radio and newspaper stories, and allow electioneers to use their name in advertisements and in household visits. When I was in the countryside in October shortly before the National and provincial elections electioneers from the MPRP and DP would drive around to individual gers handing out pamphlets and delivering the party line.<sup>170</sup> Many of the electioneers were volunteers from Ulaanbaatar or from Undurkhaan. They were often very young, typically still in college and some even in high school, not even of voting age. The pay however was very attractive. During my visits with households, several times I ran into the same electioneers who would give the same pitch and they would invariably mention the support of several local myangat. When the names were not of the household's own kin they would giggle and simply say '*za, za*'. They told me later that is '*xamaagui*' (does not matter) whether another kin group's axlagch supported that candidate or not<sup>171</sup>. Clearly, there are limits to the power of senior men, especially in private spaces; but their power in the public sphere is significant and real.

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<sup>170</sup> In 2008 the parties were offering every individual a cash payment if they were elected. The DP offered voters 1 million MNT and the MPRP countered with an offer of 1.5 million MNT. Electioneers would hand out during their visits fake cash and would tell herders to hold on to the bills because if the MPRP or DP were elected, they would need them to collect. Fascinatingly, I saw herders and even my host household collect these bills and even trade items for them. They kept the fake bills with their own stash of cash in the ger.

<sup>171</sup> Voting behaviors, political sentiment, and party affiliation seemed to be associated with kin group membership. Kin groups were often known to support the MRPR or the DP. This was supported by survey data. Only in a few cases did I find iconoclasts who 'bucked' the kin group's allegiance. Yet, I did not collect enough data on local voting behaviors to explore this here.

Although I would not refer to all wealthy herders as patrons and not all patrons as wealthy herders, it would be difficult, even just visually, to not distinguish herders of high social standing. They often occupy large five or even specially made six-walled gers and usually have multiple gers.<sup>172</sup> Their campsites include a central ger for relaxing and kitchen ger for cooking. Some even have a third ger for equipment or even for a hired herder. In the central ger some have large, flat-screen televisions, numerous high-quality wool rugs, couches, chairs, high-quality bureaus and cupboards. One ger I visited had a lazy-boy, glass coffee tables, flat-screen television, and an entertainment system. Most have also four season campsites. On their customary sites, some have outhouses, storage sheds, fencing, and shelters. All of them have secondary gers or apartments in Undurkhaan and others even have apartments in Ulaanbaatar. Some rent these apartments out at a profit. Many of them have cars and trucks. One of my host households drove a Toyota Camry. A popular vehicle of choice is a Toyota Landcruiser. These herders also wear numerous medals, silver belts, high-quality del, and hats. But I would not confuse such adornments with being *uul shig*. Although such symbolic elements signify wealth and *chadal*, they do not in themselves constitute actual mountain-like qualities.

Here I briefly look at two patrons one might refer to as men-like-mountains. As I described in chapter 4, a number of wealthy herders in Uguumur have furthered solidified their social positions by investing networks and clients through practices such as *maljuulax*. I argue that it is only when one can convert privilege and prestige to control over people and consequently, over territory that one in effect ‘functions’ like a mountain. For these men, their dominance over territory is more firm than any other senior male in the bag because the patron-client relationships they have established are particularly strong. Additionally, I look at an example of a herder who, although a senior male, is not like a mountain and has little hope to be so. Lastly, I look at what happens when the mountain crumbles; senior males cannot always occupy such high positions. A herding livelihood becomes increasingly difficult the older one gets and as one’s children get older, the livestock and the torch of authority must pass to another generation. Here I look at an example of a senior male who has lost a considerable amount of his authority.

### ***Batdalai***

I have already introduced Batdalai in chapters 4 and 5 to a great extent. In chapter 4 I made the case that Batdalai’s position as *ax* amongst his kin *buleg*, and even their ability to cooperate as a *buleg*, was built on the *numur* like authority of his senior position. His authority

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<sup>172</sup> A wall of a ger is one lattice frame.

and position over the group has a territorial effect as well. His presence and association with the regions known as Xaya and Tuxum prevent outside households from settling in their home territory. Moreover, when they conduct collective migration, his name, unlike his juniors, carries weight beyond the group. His position in the group is widely known. For example, when I was attempting to locate my host household in the east of Bayankhutag during the fall of 2008, I stopped at a local ger and asked whether anyone from the 3<sup>rd</sup> bag was camping in the vicinity. He replied that “*Batdalai baatariin bulgees neg xeseg bi*” or ‘one section of Batdalai hero’s gang is here’, pointing across the valley. I asked if he had spoken to Batdalai and did he know if my host household was still there. He replied that he did not. His young teenage son had talked with a herder from the group and they understood that the group was Batdalai’s. His reference to Batdalai as a ‘hero’ reflects both Batdalai’s prestigious title and the weight it carries locally.

Batdalai has not only been able to use his position within the kin group to his advantage, but also by building up herds and controlling territory through them, he has converted his kin-based position into patronage allowing a greater range of territory. He actively seeks out new herders whom he hopes will become clients over time. As I described in chapter 4, Batdalai actively seeks out hired herders from other soums. He vets them through a stringent process of contract bargaining. Over time they will gain herds and eventually become independent. Through the employment process they increasingly become indebted to Batdalai in other non-economic ways. Two of his hired herders have remained as clients even though they no longer work as his hired herders. They still ally with Batdalai moving with him and coordinating activities even though they are not related by kinship. Batdalai continues to present gifts of livestock and discuss herd management, pasture use, and migration decisions with them.

Batdalai also retains his position of respect, authority and privilege amongst his kin. He coordinates migrations, takes on nephews as apprentices, and presenting gifts for important lifecycle events like marriage. His broad circle of support amongst both kin and non-kin clients demonstrates his ability convert various forms of capital into political weight.

### ***Lkhavgadorj***

Lkhavgadorj is another myangat (and former negdel secretary) who is gradually building up his buleg. His group is situated for the most part in the far west of the soum near the border with Bayanmunx soum in a region called Eregunii burgas (bank of willows) along the Kherlen river. Prior to forming his official cooperative group, one of the first ones, he had staked out this region with his two younger brothers, his son, a son-in-law, and his hired herders. When he formed the cooperative group he enlisted another ax who had already given most of his animals to his sons as xuvi. In 2008, he was considering retiring. His sons however, both of whom have

significant herds, continue to cooperate with Lkhavgadorj as members of the group. In addition to these members, Lkhavgadorj has also recruited an unemployed man in the soum center to raise the group's vegetable fields. When they formed the group in early 2006 they immediately registered for campsite possession contracts. Most of them obtained the permitted 4 campsites and few obtained 2 leases. Moreover, Lkhavgadorj also registered additional campsites in his daughters name, who at the time was the only female registered under the leasing program in the soum. They have obtained so many contracts that one non-affiliated herder who settled in the far west in the past argued he could no longer settle there because Lkhavgadorj has all the possession contracts and his herds are too big. The group collectively cuts hay in good years (7 tons in 2006) and conducts otor migrations during bad ones. At the center of the group-based activity is Lkhavgadorj.

Lkhavgadorj is wealthy even outside of his herding work. He owns a meat-trading company and use to own a factory where he attempted to make gloves. He is an *Aimgiin Sain Malchin* (provincial best herder) and attends most of the *Malchdiin Zubluguu Chuulgan*. He has run and continues to run for local political office although he has lost by small margins each time. He is extremely generous as he gave a huge xuvi to his son, his little brother, and son-in-law, all of whom are now members in his group and act as clients. Moreover, he is the largest donor to the Bayankhutag soum naadam and even donated to the Bayan-Adarga naadam while he was on otor there. Horse-racing is his primary hobby and attends horse races across the country. As I describe in chapter 9, when he conducts otor he offers gifts of livestock to campsite ezen in exchange for the right to settle on their campsites. Because of these various practices and his position as *xamgiin tom ax* both with his kin group and cooperative buleg, Lkhavgadorj could be described as being *uul shig*.

### ***Enkhjargal***

Unlike these men, there are, of course, many other men who are not like mountains and have no capacity for generosity or charity even if they are good-hearted or *suu shig* (like milk). Men who are juniors, have few to no kin, or are poor are incapable of becoming patrons and therefore will not attain a level social power like that of other senior ax. They cannot exact their will over that of others. They simply have no means to do so. My first host, Enkhjargal, was poor and although he was the oldest male in his patriline his male kin were no longer herding and the few female kin had married other poor herders. His only connection to other Uguumur herders, even though he was born there, grew up there, and spent 20 years herding there for the negdel, was through his marriage. His wife is Batdalai's niece. This connection, which makes him distant in many ways from Batdalai's line, also puts him in an inferior position because there are a

number of ax in this group older than him. If he had been able to attain wealth in herds he could have, like Batdalai and Lkhavgadorj, converted that herd capital into a wider network through hiring and nurturing client herders. But, as he is on the margins of his social group, he has not had access to resources in the same way as his elder kinsmen. Consequently, he is unable to do very much socially with his small herds.

### ***Chuluun***

Yet, there are unconnected herders who have built up wealth in herds, although their wealth in people is limited. What is more visible is what happens when an elder or patrons' *chadal* wanes. During my time I had met a number of elders who seemingly were no longer patrons though they once were. Some of these men once coordinated and controlled a large labor pool. Two of these men once had groups consisting of hired herders and sons. Yet as their children married and livestock were distributed, their own stock holdings fell and the need for hired herders and clients became less important. For example, Chuluun, the elder kinsman in one of the cooperative groups, in the last year divested most of his stock to his children. In the spring when he sought to organize cashmere combing, many households including some of his own sons did not bother to come. This angered Chuluun and his other sons, but as one of them explained, his father could not command such obedience because he no longer had the ability or power to do so (*chadaxgui*). In the last 2 years his sons had been trying to organize a herder cooperative for the IFAD RPR program, but could not convince their father to join. One of the reasons was that he would not be the axlagch. His two youngest sons had initiated the group and had decided to have one of their elder brother's act as the axlagch. Their father no longer had a large herd and was for the most part permanently settled in the southeastern part of the soum. In my interview with him, he was reluctant to speak about cooperatives. He clearly disapproved of them.

D: Why do you not prefer working in a cooperative?

S: Arranging things with others is difficult. There is no one who can unite hands (*gar niilex*) anymore.

D: You normally work with your children, your sons? In your opinion is this better?

S: Yes, it is much better and more profitable this way. It is better to work with your children and your relatives.

I asked him if he was a member of the cooperative and he said 'no, he was not'. When I asked one of his sons, he laughed and said that his father was officially a member of the cooperative but he was being *zuruud* (or stubborn) because he did not agree with the cooperative. The problem, primarily, was that the cooperative usurped his position as ax. Without the material means to produce consent to his authority, Chuluun was limited in counteracting the cooperative move. In the section below I discuss not only the territorial implications of kin group organization and the

way cooperative groups reproduce such hierarchies, but also how the cooperative groups, can serve as a means to legitimate alternative forms of organizing based on cooperation practices amongst youth.

### **The New Territoriality: Pastoral Power and the Spatial Politics of Resource Control**

Data I collected during the research period show that the RPR cooperative program in Uguumur was established in a context of pervasive inequality. If we recall the data on the distribution of livestock amongst herding households in Uguumur we see that the distribution of livestock is not equitable nor is the resulting household income from animal husbandry. It should be no surprise that this wealth is both the result of differences in authority, power, and privilege and a prime factor in reproducing those very differences. And it should be no surprise that this inequality has fundamentally shaped the direction of the cooperative program in ways that were not intended.

Rather than the apolitical, egalitarian cooperatives envisioned by the state and development institutions, cooperatives have become a site for the reproduction and entrenchment of the very inequalities and geographies of exclusion that mark rural Mongolia. In particular, the program has become a venue through which wealthy senior herders have solidified not only their grasp over junior kin and client households but also over territories. There are material reasons why senior males have engaged this program to a large degree or at least are considering forming cooperative groups. I examine these rationales here. Moreover, I demonstrate how these groups attempt to control territory through various spatial practices.

#### **Cooperative Groups**

Listed here are 8 cooperative and kin-based groups in Uguumur. Six of these groups are official cooperatives registered as herder groups with the RPR program administrator in Bayankhutag soum center and the provincial PIU in the Undurkhaan. Each of these 6 groups has been afforded a well contract and a number of the households in each group have attained campsite possession contracts. Two of the groups are trying to lobby for hay and pastureland contracts from the soum program committee. The program officer told me however they are reluctant to do so because they are uncertain about how this is framed in the 'land law'. They have officially submitted questions to both MoFALI and MoNE. At the time of research they had yet to receive a response.

The official groups average between 5 and 10 members. For the two unofficial groups I have listed, one is a very small collection of households and the other is the largest buleg in the

bag. But these two groups have not registered with the soum steering committee and so remain as informal kin buleg. Batdalai's group is tightly integrated and cooperate effectively as a buelg and have little need at this point to enter the program. However, Batdalai himself has discussed the idea of cooperative with others in order to further cement their hold on Xaya and Tuxum. Official and unofficial alike, all but one of these groups are made of kin and hired herders. In the one group that is not, the group is made up of a collection of friends, the primary actors of which are mutual brothers-in-law through sister exchange.

Currently, a little under half the households in the district are members to some degree in these groups. This means another half of the district population do not have access to such kin-based territorial groups and the cooperative program. Without such benefits, acquiring possession contracts to campsites is made significantly more difficult and contracting wells and reserve pasture becomes impossible because current law only allows contracts with co-ops.

Yet, there are a number of wealthy herders who have not joined such groups. When I spoke with these herders they explain that they were resistant to the groups for a number of reasons although they thought that for some these groups would be beneficial. I discuss these issues in further detail below. A number of these wealthy herders are also related to coop axlagch but have simply opted not to join. They still draw benefits from kin connections but without having to become official members. I found a number of cases where they joined cooperative groups on collective otor migrations.

Table 6.1. Uguumur-based herder group cooperatives or malchnii buleg. Numbered axlagch were not part of the sample. (Compiled from interviews)

Axlagch (Leader)	Herd Size of leader	Buleg Name	Type	Buleg Members	Status
1	2,969	Dashilbe	Official	Kin and hired herders	Active
Altangerel	1,832	Tsantii	Official	Kin and hired herders	Active
Lkhavgadorj	2,609	Bayan	Official	Kin and hired herders	Active
4	1,891	Uguumur	Official	Kin and hired herders	Active
5	1,801	None	Official	Kin, non-kin, and one hired herder	Active
Chuluun	1,531	None	Official	Kin and one hired herder	Organizational problems
Batdalai	2,139	None	Unofficial, considering	Kin and former hired herders	Active
Ochirbat	1,441	None	Unofficial	Kin	Dissipating

### Group Formation

In late 2005, the bag governor announced at a district herder meeting that the IFAD RPR program would be starting in Uguumur. Representatives from the provincial PIU office were in attendance and provided the herders with a short lecture and a *gariin avlaga* or handbook about the project and herder cooperative groups in general. The bag governor encouraged households to join the program and form groups. According to the program officer in Bayankhutag, they informed the herders that cooperatives would share labor, protect pasture, take over well operation and maintenance, and thereby help reduce poverty and stem the effects of global warming. Moreover, they were supposed to create a single bank account from which the group would pay for various activities, etc. They targeted specifically kin groups, requesting elders to organize their kin into buleg.

D: Who had the idea of forming this group?

BD: Well the bag governor put this requirement on us. He said you all with your ax duu and relatives together form groups and then we will build a well from the budget for you.

D: Who is in this group?

BD: My eldest brother, his son, his herders, and my other duu.



The program officer told me that kin groups were best because they were of *neg tolgoi* or one head, referring both to the unity of the group and the senior male. Others he said were also invited. They tried to encourage those who were *neg nutgiinxan* or people of one homeland to also join and form groups, but that this would be hardest because many of these households were not wealthy and not related by kin ties. But he argued, if they could organize, they would *neg yavax* or go as one. One non-cooperative axlagch, also saw the benefit of this:

D: Are you a cooperative household?

M: I have not entered a buleg but I do work with my other households. Together we have contracted out our nutag. But cooperatives are useful. Work power is very good, by doing it all together, it is very good. They understand each other well and are able to unite in a confederation.

D: If you wanted to do this, how would you?

M: We must talk to each other and make sure we are of one mind and that we will do all work together. Then we can become that kind of confederation, group. It is very useful, profitable.

There were a number of material incentives to forming cooperative groups. The program offered to *sergeex* (literally revive) or repair broken wells or improve hand wells with state of the art equipment and transfer operating rights to the cooperative groups. As herders understood it, they would essentially be given wells. Moreover, the program required that group members register their customary campsites and obtain possession contracts. The program would facilitate this by allowing the group to submit contract forms as a group when they sent their group *tuluvluguu* or plan to the soum steering committee. Moreover, the groups would become an important pathway for local development projects in the soum including vegetable farming and hay-cutting. One of the groups would even be provided a tractor for large-scale farming. As was evident during my time in the field, herders were always asking about development projects and whether I knew anyone they could contact to be involved. Most perceived local development projects as being a source of easy income. Understanding the nepotism and somewhat exclusive nature of project participation, herders were anxious to be involved. The cooperative program, however, was somewhat different. Although it provided important opportunities it also required a lot on the part of herders.

In interviews though, herders, especially the senior axlagch elaborated on the rationales for group formation. In clear language, they organized these groups in order to cement their control over wells and territory. Their stated goals were to *belcheer xamgaalax* or protect pasture against incursion from other households into their territory. Accordingly, many of their possession contracts are located at the edges of their territory in highly competitive resource zones. Campsite and pasture access is becoming increasingly competitive in the soum as herd

sizes grow and localized overgrazing around campsites becomes a problem, herd-owners have to seek out new areas and campsites.

D: What did you think about forming this group?

E: Well, we have been planning our work. But really since nature has become like this where land and water are becoming scarce. We formed this group to improve our livelihoods.

Moreover, they need to increase their control over their own campsites and pastures and prevent trespassing and grazing by non-local households out of season.

D: Your group tries to protect pasture, right? How do you protect pasture?

Bd: We attempt to protect our customary territory ourselves.

D: What do you protect the pasture from?

Bd: We protect the pasture from other local households, outside households, households on otor, whatever kind of household!

There are a number of ways that households try to do this and the cooperative program supports these measures in several ways. First among these are the well contracts. By controlling water sources, buleg can control who settles near the well. Groups are given contractual rights to maintain and service the well. Part of this right is to collect fees for well-use. These fees are technically supposed to be set by the project committees and ITX at the soum level, but as I have state there right now is no committee and no pasture management plan which would include these set fees. Consequently, many groups charge arbitrarily set fees for well access and households either refuse to pay it or are forced to pay it. Despite this legally dubious strategy, it is effective. Many households I talked to refused to pay fees for public wells and public water. But their ability to counter these practices is limited. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, there is no *nemer*. Secondly, the cooperative program attempts to ensure that all cooperative households have possession contracts for campsites. By obtaining possession contracts, buleg have formal power to restrict access to these sites. Without a viable campsite other households would be discouraged from settling there. If the program facilitates the contracting of hayfields and reserve pastures, this will only hardened cooperative control over territories. Thirdly, and more importantly, the cooperative program increases the organizational capacity of the group *neg door* (under one). It does this because the senior male household has an authoritative role in positioning household encampments. Moreover, it facilitates the group's *xuux* practices. I discuss this in detail below.

Although axlagch attempt to protect pasture, not everyone agrees that they can protect pasture. A number of other senior, wealthy herders argued that these strategies may be detrimental to long term herd growth. Here the bag darga, himself a herders, argues the case:

D: If there are a lot of households (*neg door*) its difficult right?

Ts: Yes, of course. Going like this the land, the grass, the water will disappear. They will trample it and degrade it and will become bald.

D: These groups say they can protect pasture and so they form these groups. In your opinion can they protect pasture?

Ts: No they cannot. They are many animals. For example, if 10 ail under one, Altangerel has 7 or 8 under him they will eat up all the grass by going as one. Outside ail might not enter but local households can. For example, do you remember *taniliin nuur*? He can't expel.

D: Yes, but this is the biggest reason for forming groups.

Ts: They will protect pasture, yes, but no grass is growing! And people will still come and settled. We told them to form these groups to work together. This is what they told us, they will labor together. But still if they settled in one nutag to do work together they will eat up everything. But they must protect the pasture. They just don't understand that anyone can come to their nutag and settle.

Yet, I argue that the bag governor underestimates herder rationales. Although there are problems with pasture protection strategies, I contend that on the whole they are largely successful. Moreover, he misinterprets what herders mean by protect pasture. He understands this to mean that herders are intent on 'conserving' pasture for the purposes of preventing overgrazing or combating desertification. From the perspective of cooperative groups, however, protecting pasture refers only indirectly to these problems. Rather, the groups, and primarily the axlagch are concerned about protecting pasture for their own benefit and excluding competitive use. Axlagch and large herd-owners understand fully the implications of excessive grazing. Other large herd-owners also practice these very strategies; though, they do not have the cooperative program, well contracts, and multiple possession contracts to reinforce those strategies. Herders' strategies, as I explain in chapter 7, are to access as wide a range of resources as possible. By securing a large territory with campsite contracts, well contracts, and through territorial practices axlagch can prevent others from grazing their customary pastures while they themselves use pasture elsewhere through otor, stock placement, and various other strategies.

In effect this territorial strategy has in most cases become the only reason behind cooperative groups. As group members and non group members point out, the program has failed to reduce poverty or improve environmental conditions in any way.

D: What are the good sides and the bad sides?

E: Well, really what is bad? We really have not been a group for very long. We have done otor together, some of us, which you know. But we do not really cooperate on work though. The households that went together are wealthy. Some were left behind in the nutag. You know when we do not have many animals we do not move. We planned to cut hay and plant vegetables but we have not done that.

D: How did you decide which households could join?

E: They discuss this with my *axlagch*, Altangerel. They discussed this and coordinated it. We did not select some households that we thought about. Of course he selects them like this.

D: Do you have group rules?

E: We talked about it but we have not done anything.

D: Do you have an account?

E: We talked about how we would, but not yet I don't think.

Only one group cooperates on labor tasks, only two groups have established rules, and only one has opened a cooperative bank account. In all the groups save one the majority of members are kin or hired herders. Rather than boosting herders' social capital, the program has simply helped those with ample social capital to further increase their stocks. Moreover, most of the kin are in the middle category or above and the hired herders who are poor are still treated like hired herders and although they gain increased mobility and risk management capacity are still subject to precarious contractual terms. Although *axlagch* stated that their hired herders joined voluntarily, I have strong doubts that was, in fact, the case. Moreover, the groups were required to establish rules for restocking (*maljuulax*) poor households; however, most groups considered the hired herding contract as a form of restocking. Only in two cases did groups have established, agreed upon rules of restocking poor households. In one group, the poor household resided permanently in the soum center. He received one sheep a month, which was simply a subsistence payment from the group's *axlagch*. The poor household was charged with farming the groups' small vegetable fields. So far they have not sold any vegetables, but they have distributed throughout the cooperative group. This group though was the only group to have established a bank account. In 2007 they cut hay and sold it privately, saving the profits in a cooperative savings account at the soum bank. In a particularly egregious move, the RRP PIU in Unduxaan awarded a brand new tractor to this group despite the fact that the group's *axlagch* is the wealthiest man in the bag and 4 of its 9 members are *myangat*. In other cases, groups have no rules for assisting poor households.

The program also fails in a number of its own loftier goals including labor distribution, risk management, and conservation. In all of the groups save one, there is a general lack of labor cooperation as *buleg* members themselves admit. Moreover, the relationships that existed prior to group formation, predominantly of a contractual nature or father-son dynamic, have remained the sole form of labor exchange. In some cases, the economies of scales households were supposed to achieve to overcome exposure to various risks has not been equally accessible to all members. As I have described before, when households collectively migrate they often recruit a poor or junior

household to remain in the customary territory to monitor campsites and prevent trespassing. These households, as I will show in chapter 8, are exposed to herd loss when hazards emerge. Additionally, the conservation benefits, dubious as they were in the first place, seem to be largely absent. Groups have concentrated around leased wells and in territorial pastures as I will show below.

Clearly, the program in Uguumur is only 3 years young and, potentially, has time to achieve some of these goals. However, in other steppe regions of Khentii where the program has been in operation much longer, they too have met with limited success. I heard similar complaints at the Khentii Provincial RPR meetings in August of 2008. In northern soums, where livestock herding is generally done in settled areas (*suuriin mal aj axui*) or in more transhumant fashion, cooperatives have been successful to a degree, but they have been much more limited in scope. In other steppe soums in the east-central region and southern soums, herders, administrative officials, and program officers complained that wells were used to control territory and that only groups with wealthy households proved effective.

The program in Uguumur and Bayankhutag has also met with limited success on an administrative level. Despite the ‘capacity-building’ efforts of the project, there is no PMMC or BMMC, or any other institution outside of the ITX steering committee and project coordinator. The committee is made up of members on the soum ITX and the project has a single program officer who also happens to be the soum deputy governor. The soum administration has not filled any of its goals including developing a pasture management plan or even requiring detailed plans in any way from herder groups. In sum, they have simply facilitated the transfer of wells to groups, encouraged groups to apply for campsite possession leases, and channeled material benefits from the PIU down to individual groups.

For most though the primary failure has been the way the program has ‘inadvertently’ supported territorial exclusions and encouraged further community divisions. For some, they feel like territory is already being contracted out to groups, despite the reluctance of the soum steering committee to recommend pasture and hayfield contracts. Some who are vehemently anti-privatization lambasted the program for creating these territorial divisions. Yet, even for these, the territorial benefit however is paramount and other non-cooperative *axlagch* are beginning to recognize this. Moreover, a number of them recognized the treadmill effect: once one household or one group gets in, they must all try to get it. If they do not or are too late, others will beat them to the punch.

## Group Territories

In the work of Maiskii (1921) and Vreeland, (1957), the authors argue that herding households and *xot ail* act independently of one another in their migration and settlement decisions. Fernandez-Gimenez (1997) takes this observation a step further and argues:

Each household or camp takes into account the behavior of neighboring camps when making decisions. Indeed almost all decisions depend strongly on tacit or explicit cooperation and coordination with other households. When the majority of households abide by the norms of pasture use, the aggregate behavior of the community ideally contributes to efficient distribution of livestock in relation to resources.' (230).

In my observation and experience, this is a limited picture of how settlement patterns emerge. What Fernandez-Gimenez (1997) calls 'tacit or explicit cooperation and coordination' I found resulted largely from the material realities of competition rather cooperation or coordination. Only amongst 'recognizable' community members did I find tacit cooperation and only within kin groups and *buleg* did I find explicit cooperation and coordination. In many cases, particularly outside of kin groups and *buleg* where hierarchies of *ax-duu* reign, rather than 'strategic interdependence' I found competitive (and sometimes reluctant) acceptance of other household's pasture use practice. Keeping a distance from another household is not a chance to respect their use and broader social norms but rather is simply a way to minimize the grazing effect of their stock on one's own and ensures a greater orbit for one's own stock. As I described in chapter 5, this is clearly an important element in understanding migration and settlement patterns, rather than attributing it to some undercurrent moral economy. For example, wealthy households are unabashed about using their own herds to eat other households stock out of pasture and the various measures household use to *xuux* point to either more complicated social norms or that social norms are dramatically shifting. No clearer is this the case than in the territorial configurations of kin and cooperative groups.

Cooperative territorial practices build on practices already in effect amongst kin groups in Uguumur. In this section I look at the territorial implications of these strategies that I elaborated on in chapter 6. Additionally, I will look at where current cooperative and kin groups are located and the territories they attempt to control. Senior households disproportionately benefit from this arrangement since their large herds require extensive grazing tracts.

In order to effectively demonstrate how these territorial strategies are implemented on the ground, I use an example of my host households' kin group. The *axlagch* within this kin group is Batdalai who we have already met. As I describe in chapters 3 and 4, senior males have a degree of control over the settlement and location of kin households. In particular when they conduct *otor*, he not only recruits and organizes household movements he also coordinates settlement

patterns. As the *axlagch*, evidently, he situates himself in the most advantageous campsite. These configurations afford his livestock the largest grazing orbit, protect his stock from theft, and shield him from *taniliin nuur*, saturation, ‘pasture eating’, and *xuux* or expulsion. Moreover, they also give him the greatest benefit from their own *xuux* practices.

In the maps below I show how one group was configured at different times of the year in 2008. I drew these maps original in my field notes while I was living with my host households. The circles represent kin or client households and the circles with lines through them represent non-kin, non-client households. The *axlagch* is represented by the sun-like figure.

In the first map (Figure 6.5) I have drawn the settlement pattern around Batdalai’s spring campsite or *xavarjaa*. The area is called Tuxum and at one time was one of the bag’s *otor* reserves during socialism. The area around Tuxum and Xaya was the area in which Batdalai’s father herder prior to socialism. During the *negdel* period, Batdalai and his kin continued to occupy the region. However, at times there would be an influx of households in the fall when the *negdel* would send them to take advantage of the two large salt pans (marked on the map). To the south and west, the area is also surrounded by mountains blocking the wind which minimizes the effect of adverse weather conditions. It is also situated at low elevation allowing for rain water pooling and spring fog and dew build up. Around the salt pans is a vast quantity of *ders* as well, providing both protection from the wind and necessary forage in spring. Relative to other areas of the *soum*, this is one of the most ecological advantageous for raising livestock. The area to the north close to the river is called Xaya and also is a very ecologically beneficial region with good quality *maraa*, *ders*, and river access. It is also low lying despite the exposure to wind. Within their territorial *nutag* there are three wells. Two of the wells are operated and maintained as ‘private’ wells even though they are technically for public use. The well closest to Batdalai was accorded to him, informally, during privatization as I described in chapter 4. Although he does not technically own it, he regulates its use. The middle well is sparingly used as it is located to an area with generally poor forage (though it is used in the fall at times). The well to the east, just outside the range, is located in the middle of *ders*. It was built and maintained by Purevjav, a friend of the *buleg*. Because he does not move, he acts as a kind of *uldsen ail* for the group and allows Batdalai’s kin to use the well.

In the map we see that Batdalai has the most beneficial campsite in Tuxum. He is protected from non-kin households by the mountains and swath of extremely poor pasture to the west (*govi*) and his kin households to the north and east. He can easily drive his animals back and forth to the river or throughout the small valley. He also has access to the central road. Moreover, households at the edge of the territory are typically younger. In the far east, just north of the

Purev's well, are the youngest members of the group. It is these households who experience conflict, theft, and attempt to *xuux* other households. Those closer to Batdalai, typically older *ax*, did not report encountering these problems. Although there are poor local households that do camp close to him, the only other *myangat* who settled in Tuxum in the past has since left (see here to the left of the key). He now camps west of the mountains in region Burgas.

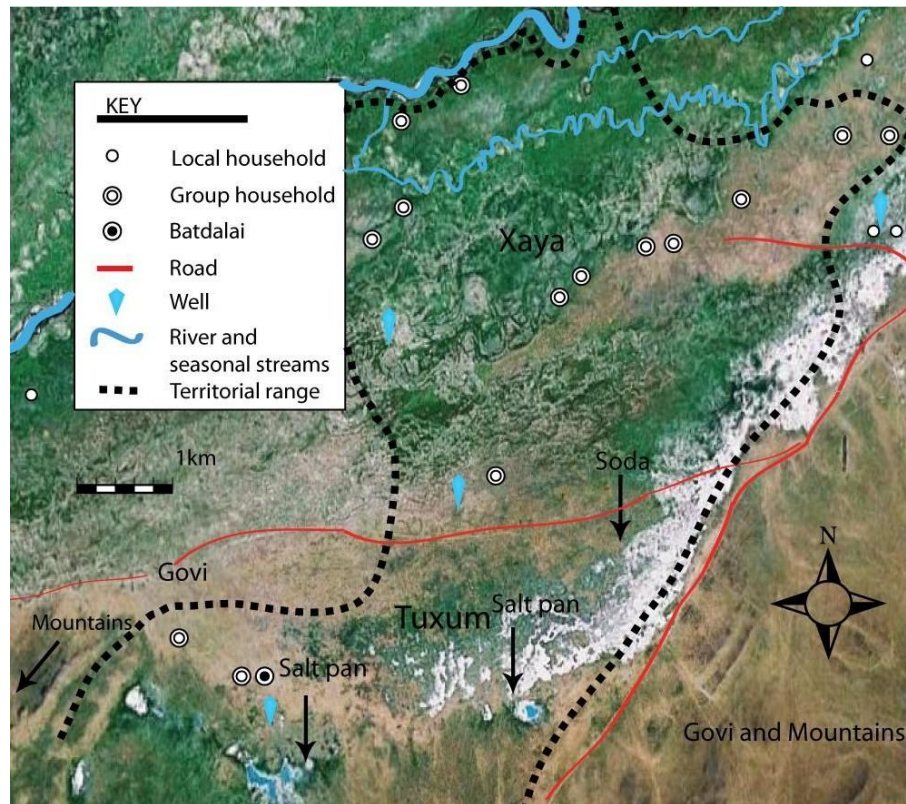


Figure 6.5. Territorial configuration of Batdalai's buleg in Xaya and Tuxum beginning in March 2008 (Base satellite photo from Google Earth and settlement pattern compiled from observation and fieldnotes).

These patterns, however, are not just a function of household fissioning and settlement development over time. When the group leaves on *otor* collectively to other non-customary regions, the pattern is replicated. In this case there is a more explicit organization of household settlement and Batdalai is integral in shaping it. Below (Figure 6.6) we see the *otor* settlement pattern in August when the group moved en masse to the eastern side of Bayankhutag, roughly 80 kilometers away near the Kherlen river in the first bag. When households go on *otor* they must contend with both local households and other non-local *otor* households. In the map we can see how the group has occupied the northern reaches of a long running valley with Batdalai directly in the middle of the group. There is no well in the valley and the southern reaches have no access to *xujir* or *maraa* preventing the settlement of other households. However as the valley opens up



to the floodplain on the western and eastern sides of the settlement there are other households. In this case, these are other Uguumur households returning from *otor* in the north. However they arrived after Batdalai's group and had to locate themselves in a less advantageous position. From here Batdalai can easily graze his herds up and down the valley with little threat from other these or other households. However, in just a few weeks the lack of *xujir* and *maraa* even in the northern reaches near the river proved to be too much and so the group organized another move just east of the great Bayan Khuree mountain about 20 kilometers away.

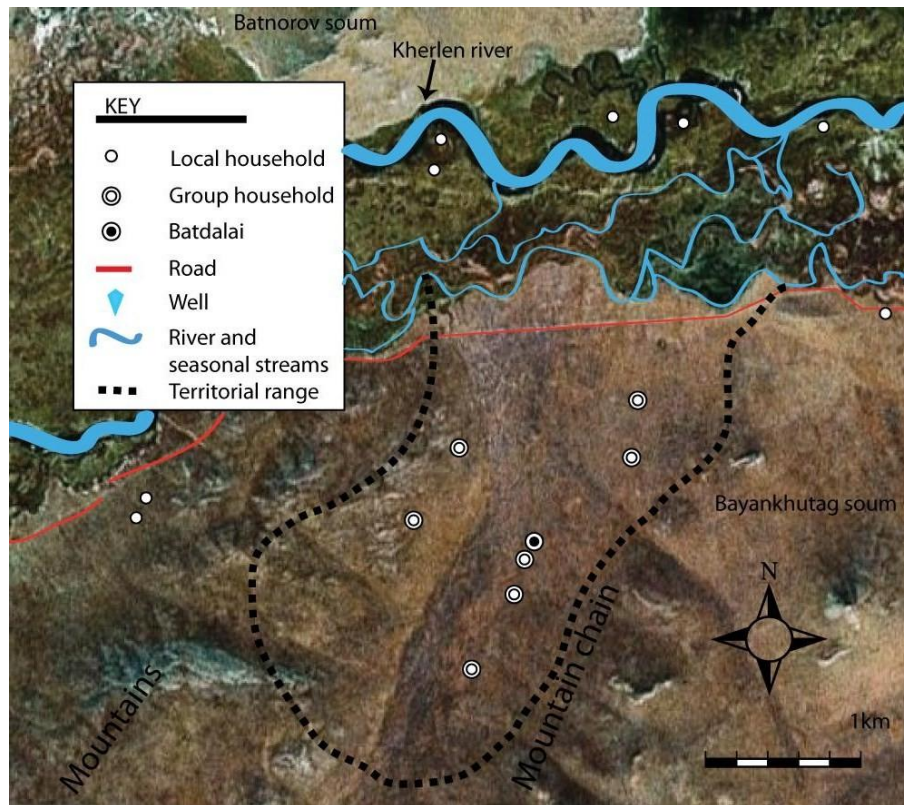
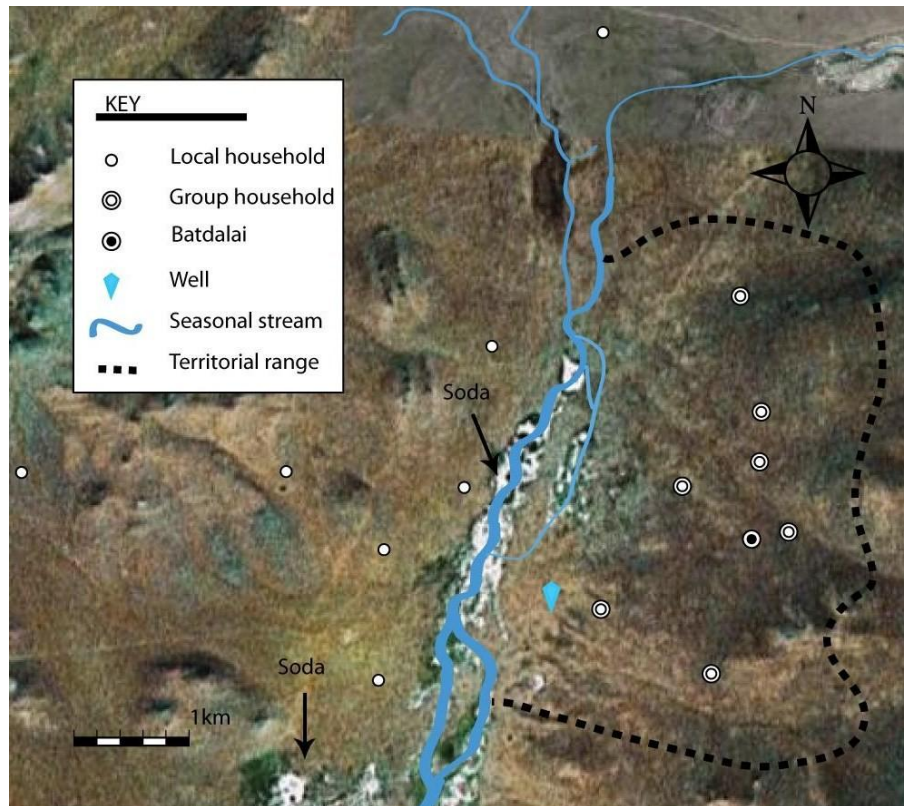


Figure 6.6. Territorial settlement of Batdalai's buleg on the northeastern border with Batnorov soum in later summer and early fall of 2008. (Base satellite photo from Google Earth and settlement pattern compiled from observation and fieldnotes)

Here again we see a very similar settlement pattern, adapted as it is to the local terrain. Batdalai (and his son's household) has situated himself in a shallow valley between two small mountains. Four of the junior households have also occupied the three small valleys to the north. They are all protected on the east by a long ridge running north and south. On the far side of the ridge to the east is Tumentsogt soum in Sukhbaatar aimag. The small valleys open to a wide plain running at the center of which is a stream. Near the stream is a well. Batdalai's group has effectively occupied the east side of the stream. Since it is fall and the stream is too deep for sheep and goats, herders would be reluctant to cross it with their stock, shielding Batdalai's group

from problems like herd mixing and competitive grazing. On the other side of the stream are a series of local households none of which had herds comparable to Batdalai or his group. However, if any problems do occur, it will not be Batdalai who encounters them. Near the opening of the small valley, on the north and the south, he has placed two of his client households. If there are encounters at the well or a theft occurs, then it is more than likely juniors who will contend with it.



*Figure 6.7. Territorial configuration of Batdalai's buleg during late summer and early fall of 2008 near the eastern border of Bayankhutag soum and Sukhbaatar province. (Base satellite photo from Google Earth and settlement pattern compiled from observation and fieldnotes)*

Other groups also practice these territorial strategies. In home territories these practices create a deep connection between resident groups and the land. We can see in the map of Uguumur (Figure 6.8) the territorial location of the kin and cooperative groups. This map is a compilation of data from possession contract data, campsite data, interview data, and ground observation. These customary regions are strongly associated with these groups in everyday language. The place names associated with these locales are in many ways synonymous with particular kin groups. When someone refers to the region of Xaya, other herders understand that Batdalai's buleg resides there. Moreover, these landscapes are marked by *shuutdeg uul*. Kin groups often worship the mountain in their home territory even though this does not prevent them

from worshipping whatever mountain they chose. For example, a group that resides in Uguumur valley worships Uguumur mountain and those who migrate around the great Bayan-Erxtii worship that mountain. Consequently, each of these spaces, including the mountains, is associated with kin groups and their senior males.

Understanding this, I also gathered more ‘hard’ data such as possession contract location and customary campsites, both of which often correlated with these home territories. Additionally, in each of these regions these groups control one or more wells, limiting the access of other households. I do not however wish to present the map as some kind of hardened totality. None of these groups has total, exclusive control of the territories. At the edges there is a great deal of overlap and individual households not connected to a kin group can easily settle, as in *taniliin nuur*, in these territories escaping either detection or the care of the local group. However, whole groups, i.e other buleg, are generally prevented from entering the territory of another group en masse. We must understand however, that territory here is centripetal and not bounded; although, herders engage in various kinds of boundary work. It is control of the center that is important. This is synonymous with the control of campsites. Pasture can only be accessed via central nodes such as campsites in current political configurations. Consequently, in the map, it is groups who have a single contiguous territory that have the strongest control in their respective territories. Yet, I would not detract from the strength of other groups whose control is less atomized.

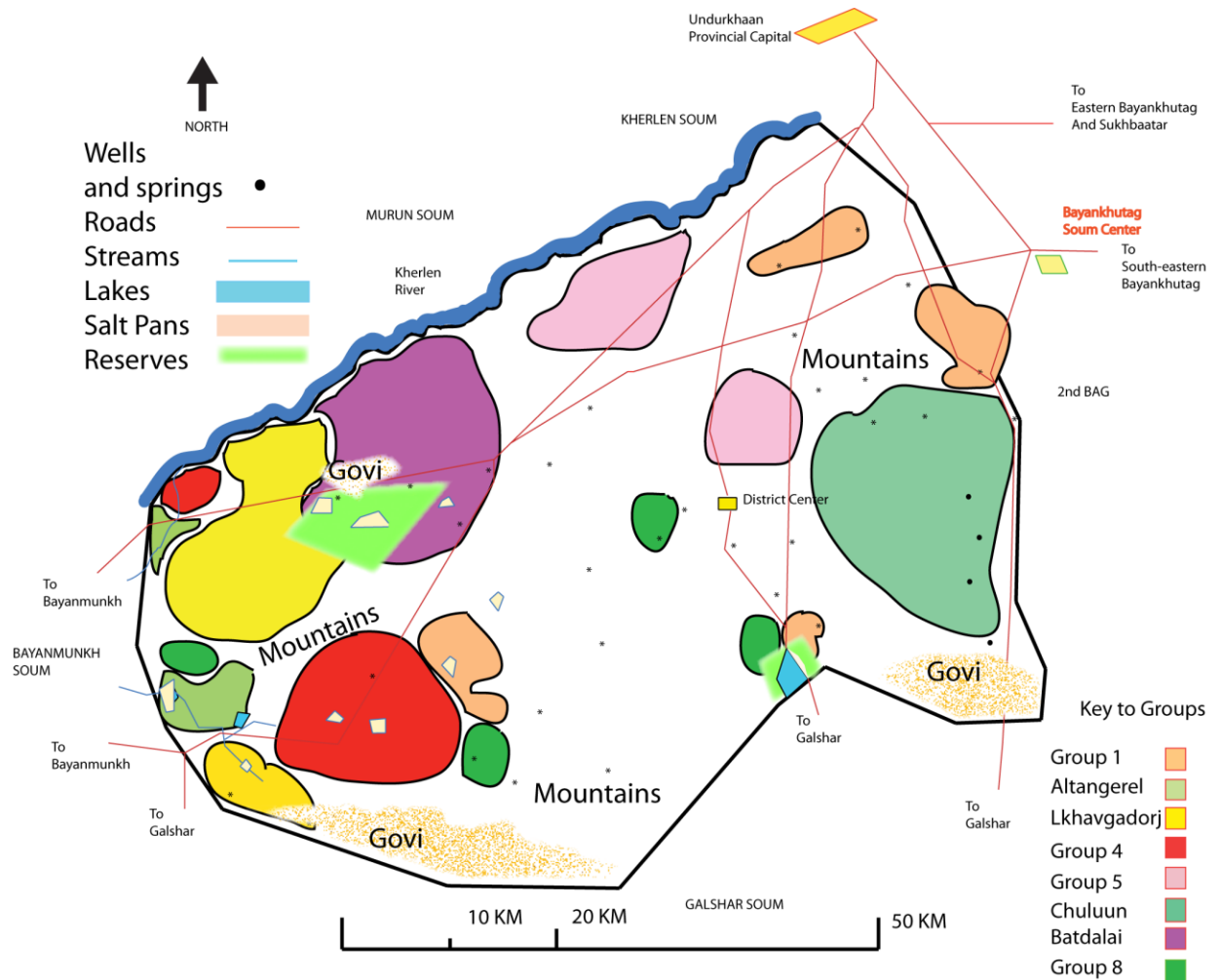


Figure 6.8. Territorial groupings of Uguumur buleg and important pastoral resources.  
(Compiled from campsite and pasturing data collected in surveys, interviews, and fieldnotes)

### Producing Spatial Power

The IFAD RPR project's goal to *ezemshuulex* (contracting for possession) and *umchluulux* (contracting for ownership) has certainly been successful. Moreover, their attempt *chadavxjuulax* (empower) and *bexjuulex* (strengthen) rural society has also proved largely successful. Literally, the project as it has been appropriated by rural actors like senior male patrons has increased the power of certain ezen, the root of the word *ezemshuulex* which literally means 'to make masters'. Moreover, the project has also literally empowered the powerful. Again, *chadal* is also the root of *chadavxjuulax*. In many ways the state has reproduced territorial forms of spatial power rooted in kin group dynamics and landscape practices by fusing those very practices to formally sanctioned, state registered 'gangs'. Consequently, the territorial practices of kin groups on the commons have now become officially state-sanctioned. Yet, the subsidization

of state absence via herder groups has not only reproduced the spatial power, it has fundamentally altered rural politics.

This has also come at an expense to others. By demarcating and limiting the space in which others can carry out livelihood activities, whether they necessarily aimed to do so or not, the state has in effect, whether for good or bad, dispossessed a large portion of rural society of their 'common' entitlements directly to campsites and wells and indirectly to vast areas of pastureland. State sanctioning of exclusionary practices, informal boundary work, and territorial dominance introduces a new regime of neo-liberal rural governance by contracting out what was technically state authority to *buleg* and *uls* under the guise of tradition and custom. This privatization of power or at least contracting of power by reframing rights and privilege and devolving authority over them to local *buleg* in turn challenges citizenship regimes.

### **Alternative Spaces**

Cooperatives, however, have not only supported the reproduction of rural modes of power. Rather the projects, as 'apolitical empowerment' in support of 'acultural custom', were open to local strategies and local political negotiation. The framework and material benefits of the program were appropriated by local kin group and *axlagch* in some ways without the intentionality of project administrators or designers. Their ignorance, ambiguity, or indifference to local power rendered the project susceptible to these strategies and tactics some of which have operated on the margins of senior male power. For example, the project has also been used to counteract the very forms of senior male power and authority that I have argued the program has in effect reproduced. As I put forth in chapter 4, there are emergent 'other' modes for organizing and cooperating that subvert patriarchal powers through alternative sources of power and logic. Two of the groups discussed here represent this kind of end-run move around patriarchal domination.

In Chuluun's group, this strategy is emergent in the sense that is not complete, the cooperative has not fully severed its ties to patriarchal political frameworks. In fact, it has benefitted in a large degree from such frameworks. The group is made up of the sons of a senior male in the *soum*. Although he is an official member, he has refused to participate and rejects the usefulness of the cooperative project. For him the project represents an alternative to his authority. His two youngest sons initiated the formation of the group and selected their eldest brother as *axlagch*. Although this reinforces in some ways *ax-duu* principles, the countering of their father's dominance is an affront to his personal position in this social framework as their father has yet to retire from a herding life and remains active. However, these developments may force him closer to exiting a pastoral life and retiring. Although this kind of overthrow and

mutiny is inevitable, the cooperative program provided a viable means to do so before the father himself chose to relinquish his authority as the primary and central ax. Yet, just as they have chosen their eldest brother as *axlagch*, they also continue the same territorial practices and ax-duu principles.

Unlike Chuluun's buleg, Boldbaatar's buleg is completely contrary to the formation make-up of the other groups. The prime initiative came from two young, recently married herders who are married to each other's sisters. They organized a buleg around former school friends and cousins of similar ages. Moreover, there were no myangat amongst them. One of the requirements of the program was the inclusion of a wealthy myangat. Consequently, they asked a local myangat who is not related and has few connections in the soum, although he is a friend of the father of one of the founders, to join the group and act as an *axlagch*. He agreed. This arrangement is closer to what the RPR envisioned when the program was designed and implemented. Yet, even though the buleg model can also be an important alternative pathway for youth and marginal groups, this group has not been very successful at cooperating, especially during periods when the households go on *otor*. When they are in the customary *nutag*, they do assist each other in various ways. Yet, the fissioning of the group during *otor* represents the weakness of the group when it comes to one of the most important tasks cooperative buleg undertake. Nevertheless, the youthful and solely egalitarian make-up of the cooperative is radically different from the other groups.

## **Conclusion**

Contrary to cooperative development models and impressions of equity and egalitarianism in social science narratives of community and 'common' property, the IFAD's Rural Poverty Reduction Program 'herder cooperative project' has empowered not the livelihoods of the poorest members of pastoral society but rather the political authority of senior elders as patrons. The projects have accomplished this by formalizing the territorial relationship between kin groups and landed resources. Campsite leasing contracts and well lease have further entrenched and formalized the control over vital, formerly common, resources. Moreover, by formally legitimating the exclusive nature of kin group dynamics and the hierarchies of power and privilege underlying those dynamics, the project has reproduced the very forms of social exclusion that prompted the creation of herder groups in the first place.

In terms of governance, this kind of appropriation, a sort of primitive accumulation, has shifted the rural political economy of Uguumur in a direction in which poor, socially unconnected households are increasingly vulnerable. It has also shifted the political economy of administrative power and authority over the land. Within contemporary regimes of rule, cooperatives and other

territorially based social groups, however loosely configured, have emerged to assume authorities and rights-to-rule through the fusion of kin-based authorities with state-based ones. This connection to the state through contracts and legal codes formally legitimates their power as territorial patrons. In an institutional environment already marked by ambiguity, uncertainty, and insecurity, these new hybrid landscapes of authority have emerged in a context dominated from above by neo-liberal governmentalities where decentralization and devolution become policies of strategic absence.

This is not the only social space in which we find shifting modes of authority. In the next chapters I look at how herders make migration decisions and how those decisions are impacted by these emerging forms of governance. In particular, I aim to show how vulnerability to disaster-based herd loss is intimately intertwined with law and administrative governance.



## Chapter 7 Mobile Practices and Decision-Making in Uguumur

*“In the negdel we rarely did otor, only to fatten livestock, now we have become like migratory birds (nuudliin shuvuu). We cannot rest, there is no comfort anymore”*

Herder from Uguumur, Summer 2008

### Introduction

Despite the wealth of research on the evident ecological rationale of pastoral mobility, some scholars have questioned the way in which this research myopically under-theorizes and naturalizes both mobility and the commons (Gertel 2007). These critiques go beyond opening pastoral mobility to a ‘spectrum’ of ecological possibilities (Johnson 1969) or ‘continuums’ (Spencer 1997). As Agrawal (1999:7) argues concerning pastoral mobility: “the normalization of mobility in the face of ‘natural’ risks may be misleading” because “mobility, far from being a simple, natural, and easily justified strategy to address fluctuations in biomass production” is rather “layered and tremendously complex in its origins and execution.” McCabe (2004) states: “the way (mobility) plays out on the ground is far more messy and complicated than can be captured within this type of [ecological] framework” as “all movements are balancing acts, influenced by ecological, social, and political factors” (237). Little et al (2001) point out that, even in times of environmental stress, mobility is largely determined by social and economic variables that influence resource access. Increasingly it is becoming clear, as McCabe (2004) points out: “Among ... contemporary pastoral peoples, access to markets, schools, medical facilities, and the extent to which they are integrated into regional and national economies exert a significant influence on the way they move and manage their livestock” (237).

The study of mobility requires identifying the reasons why a herder leaves one place and settles in another. A herder may say that they moved from campsite A to campsite B because it had better forage, a near universal response that any interviewer may hear and no doubt a primary cause of movement in many cases. However, the ultimate decision both to leave and to settle elsewhere is a complex and context-specific one and ecological concerns may be secondary or even tertiary. Moreover, the reason for moving away from one area and moving to another are often very different and possibly unrelated. Here, I steer away from migration modeling and examine the complex of factors and conditions that result in mobile outcomes beginning at the smallest decision-making units, i.e. the household and the individuals that make up those households.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> The work of Agrawal (1999) and McCabe’s (2004) most recent work are prime influences on my work.



Mobility is conceptualized as a situated strategy to maintain, enhance, or reduce the loss of access to geographically dispersed resources in order to construct a pastoral livelihood. Studying mobility in this way requires examining what enables people to be mobile and, conversely, what constrains their mobility. Clearly this also requires going beyond the household. Pastoral mobility is a scaled strategy, in that it is rooted not only in inter- and intra-household decision-making processes, but also within a broader political economy that organizes, assigns, and controls access to resources including 'common' ones. What is critical about such a perspective is that, viewing mobility in this way, I can demonstrate how outcomes accrue to differentially situated actors. This framework helps explain to a large degree the maintenance of socio-economic inequality and the stability of that inequality, particularly in the Mongolian context.

### ***Nuudel, Suudal: Historical Patterns of Migration and Settlement in Mongolia***

The labor exchange dynamics discussed in chapter 4 and the socio-political and administrative regimes discussed in chapter 5 have had important impacts on mobility patterns in their respective historical periods. The history of pastoral mobility in Mongolia, over the longue duree, has been one of decreasing distances of migration, diminished access to resources, and smaller social units of resource users. Here I discuss briefly the pre-feudal, feudal, and socialist periods.

From the limited sources that are available it is clear that pre-imperial mobility patterns were massive both in distances and in the size of social groups. As Bold (1996: 53) points out:

Altan tovch one of the most important sources of Mongolia history, reports that in the 13<sup>th</sup> century Mongolian tribes who kept livestock in the spacious pasture land of the eastern Khentii mountains between the voluminous Kherlen and Onon rivers, often moved in autumn far northeast to the Ulz river. The reason for this was the salty soils.

This was a move of many hundreds of kilometers. During this time, there were effectively no territorial boundaries and access to pasturage was limited by military capability to defend against rival clan raiding and open-field pitched battles. Movement was typically opportunistic and large scale. The massive groups of 20-100 households called xuree in Mongolian or nebun or negun in Khitan, were largely a response to this socio-political landscape. Xuree migrations were typically undertaken by whole otog or aimag (clans) under the leadership of the predominant male leader. Movements were also dictated largely by ecological factors as shown in Bold (1996:7). There Bold cites the work of Chinese scholars who have considered the vast historical records of China to demonstrate the correlation between dust-storms, bad winters, droughts, nomadic movements, and raiding along the northern border. In these works, it is clear that Mongol ethnic groups made

massive migrations over hundreds of kilometers during these times of stress. However, with the emergence of the imperial system following the unification of the Mongol tribes and the imposition of a new administrative system, movement patterns became more regularized.

every captain according to whether he has more or fewer men under him, knows the limit of his pasturage and where to feed his flock in winter, summer, spring, and autumn. (William of Rubruck cited in Dawson 1955: 93).

Rather than moving in *xuree*, these social groups moved in smaller collectivities called *xoroo* under the leadership of a local *myangat* or *zuut*. These leaders, appointed by the imperial ruling class, coordinated and controlled local use of pasture and migrations.

Yet, with the imposition of the feudal administrative system in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the solidification of the territorial hold by the noble class with the accession to Qing control, movements and the social groups that undertook them became increasingly smaller. Without the need for military defense such large groupings as Vainshtein (1979) argues, disappeared. During the feudal period as land administration became increasingly complex and groupings became smaller, movement patterns depended largely on economic and social factors. The poor generally did not own pack animals, mounts, or carts and when they did they were often employed as corvee for the nobles. The nobles who had their own means, and the corvee due to them, were much more capable of great distances. As Pozdneyev observes:

in general very poor Mongolian here seldom move, first because it is very difficult for them, due to the lack of transportation and second because of the extremely limited scale on which they raise cattle, the community does not press their moving, taking into consideration the fact that they do not consume much grass, and permits them to stay on the water meadows until these meadows are divided into plots and auctioned off to individuals for hay-making. (Pozdneyev 1971 cited in Fernandez-Gimenez 1999: ?)

Movement was further limited by new technologies such as the marking of campsites, raising of *ovoo* as territorial and border markers, and the recording of 'citizenship'. Also, local *zasag* administrations imposed fines and fees on the use of pasturage by non-local households.

It was also prescribed that sums and khamjilgas who crossed kshohuu borders with their livestock and without the knowledge of their lord were to forfeit their entire livestock to the khoshuu prince into whose territory they had entered. Severe punishment awaited them on their return to their original khoshuu. Bold 1996

Consequently, there are different records of movements during this time period. Clearly, the poor moved very little but some households moved 20 to 30 times in a year and sometimes great distances (Maiski 1921). Poor households were largely dependent on patronage in order to increase their movement. And additional labor obtained through patronage allowed wealthy households to be more mobile. It was during this time period that the four season cycle of

movement became increasingly regularized and campsite investment became increasingly important. Moreover, it was during this time that the practice of *otor* came into use as a migration strategy. Because *otor* is defined in opposition to a customary cycle, *otor* only becomes prevalent after the emergence of the four-season cycle. Movement to other *xoshuu* at times required paying a fee or a bribe. The local *zasag* would also at times arrange for the mass migration of local households to another *xoshuu* in order to escape drought or *zud*. In *Gazriin Xariltsaa* (1990) there are a number of legal cases pertaining to these very issues. One of the more common complaints is the overstaying of the time-period agreed upon. Many of the dynamics I describe in the dissertation are fascinatingly reminiscent of this time period.

In the socialist period, in many ways, mobility was maintained. In the years from 1921 to the mid 1950s the territorial administrative system although no longer founded in feudal modalities was largely retained. Poor herders still found it difficult to move outside the patronage of the wealthy. The wealthy benefitted from increased means of transport and the ability to call on labor. With collectivization and the significantly greater degree of control over movement, migration on the whole decreased, particularly in distance travelled. Erdenebaatar (1996) cites the work of a number of Mongol scholars who point out that the apparent decline in mobility during the socialist period, an outcome of a gradual but persistent drive towards sedentarization, was largely due to the increased use of short, flexible *otor* moves. The “reduction in the number of movements is due to the wider practicing of *otor* in the collectivization period, and a centralized fodder and water supply, improved delivery of services and schooling” (Erdenbaatar 1996: 64). As Humphrey (1978: 157) points out:

The Mongols agree that the goals of increased productivity in herding and the settlement of herdsmen are to some extent contradictory. Rationalization of pastures and of herding techniques has tended to make certain specialist suurs [similar to ail] more, not less, nomadic than before. This is because in pre-collectivized times some pastures were not used and other were overused, and there were quarrels over pasture in some cases. Poor people often could not organize long and frequent journeys since they had not transports animals. Although there was no general shortage of land, there was no overall authority to see that pastures were used efficiently in terms of production for the society as a whole rather than used simply to further the ends of individual herdsmen

In other words, herders became increasingly ‘settled’ because they were more mobile. The increased technological and material capacity of herders allowed them to use *otor* in more flexible ways than they had in the past. Yet, at the same time *otor* was also controlled to a degree by the *negdel* leaders. In the Bayankhtuag *soum* archives which contain a majority of the documents of Temtsel *negdel* I found numerous documents ordering the removal of herding households from

certain areas of the bag and the soum.<sup>174</sup> Herders were also frequently criticized in negdel and bag meetings for not doing otor or not sufficiently making use of the available negdel resources.

Luvсандорж's (1995) 'history of famous people in Bayankhutag soum', includes a number of biographies of famous herders including two Heroes of Labor. One of them, Batdalai, who has been described in several sections of this dissertation already, is praised for his independent and effective use of *otor nuudel*. Such practices were primary reasons for winning these awards. At the micro-scale, daily pasturing movements and decisions differed little from the past. Herders were given autonomy in this aspect, but with seasonal movements and otor during times of distress such as drought and *zud* they would literally be sent or '*yavuulsan*' by negdel authorities to other areas if not other soums. With the emergence of lease and contract herding, households increasingly took on a greater role in the decision making processes related to migration.

Since the collapse of the socialist government in 1991 a number of scholarly works have examined changes in mobility patterns. In some cases researchers have found increased movement (Foggin et al 2008; Fernandez-Gimenez 2004) and in others they have found decreased movement patterns (Fernandez-Gimenez 1999; Sneath and Humphrey 1999). Yet, in any given year, the numbers of moves and the distance travelled by each household, even in one area, can be widely different. Clearly, during times of stress average distances and numbers of moves will go up. Consequently, it is difficult to tell whether or not mobility has decreased or increased across the board. This is one of the points I make here in my discussion of mobility. By focusing on overall broader patterns we often miss the wide differences between households. In my sample of households, it was clear some households are very mobile, if not more mobile than during socialism; while others are less mobile. In other regions of the country, the problem may appear different than in Uguumur. In the poor regions of the west, with little socio-economic differentiation and widespread poverty (particularly after the *zud* of last winter) movement may, at a general level, be somewhat limited in comparison.<sup>175</sup> In the next section, I look at the strategies and practices uncovered during the research period.

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<sup>174</sup> See chapter 8.

<sup>175</sup> Moreover, this limited mobility may be part of the reason for the increased vulnerability of herders in the west to *zud* in the years since decollectivization.

## On the Move: Contemporary Household Mobility Strategies

Mongolian herders today practice a variety of mobile strategies.<sup>176</sup> Some households move very infrequently, if at all, and others move, as one household in the sample did, upwards of 50 times a year. Some move only a few hundred yards at times while others migrate distances of hundreds of kilometers. Contrary to popular descriptions that households are less mobile today than in the past due to the problems associated with open access, I found that herders practiced a diverse array of strategies that were dependent on a range of critical factors.<sup>177</sup> I discuss these factors here.

Moreover, these strategies in themselves are improvisational acts, but ones built on typologies of movement that have a long history in Mongolia. Although mobile outcomes are various depending on the timing and influential strength of certain critical factors, the ‘traditional’ four seasonal movement system found in the steppe and dry-steppe regions of Mongolia still serves in Uguumur as the basic model of ‘appropriate’ or ‘normal’ movement. In this section I look at these typologies that serve as common knowledge base amongst rural herders from which they construct their strategies. After this description, I look at the actual decision-making process and the factors that herders consider in real time that may lead to broad deviations from ‘customary’ models.

### Typologies of Movement<sup>178</sup>

#### *Customary Migration*

Movement or *nuudel* are organized in seasonal rotations based largely on the goal of optimizing local ecological diversity and ‘avoiding the consequences of long-term intensive and uncontrolled grazing’ (Erdenebaatar 1999). In the Khangai, steppe, and desert-steppe regions the rotational cycle includes the four seasons while in the *govi* or desert regions and in the *taiga* or forest regions the cycle typically involves only two major moves a year from summer to winter

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<sup>176</sup> Here I discuss movements of the ‘xot ail’ which includes the household and the livestock as a single unity. Later I will examine other kinds of movement including *mal tavix* or stock placement, split household strategies, and *otor*.

<sup>177</sup> Though in some regions households may be generally less mobile; however, because of the year on year shifts in ecology, household circumstances, and the broader political economy, as this dissertation illustrates, what the meaning of a change averages might be is somewhat difficult to pinpoint. Moreover, the fact that Fernandez-Gimenez has clearly demonstrated that decreases in mobility can, in just a few short years, increase demonstrates that movement is a critical resource use strategy.

<sup>178</sup> In this chapter, and the dissertation as a whole, I look at the movements between household campsites and do not examine in great detail daily herd movements. Consequently, I will not describe in the ways that herders pasture their animals in the different seasons. My experience is reflected in Fernandez-Gimenez (1997) where this kind of daily herd movement is discussed extensively.

pastures (Bazargur 2002). The model utilized in Uguumur is the four-season cycle. The cycle is based on the customary campsites or *baingiin nutag* herders use in different seasons discussed in chapter 4: *uvuljuu* or winter campsite, *xavarjaa* or spring campsite, *zuslan* or summer campsite, and *namarjaa* or fall campsite. Herders have typically utilized these campsites for many years. One household in the sample has been using the same *uvuljuu* since 1976. In most cases these campsites are located in the household head's *tursun nutag* or home territory (literally birthplace) and many have inherited them from their parents or even grandparents. These sites represent a high level of investment and consideration as they must display critical features. Movement between these campsites is considered the preferred, normative migration practice which herders should adhere to given beneficial conditions and, in customary terms, households will follow the same cycle settling on their these campsites each year as they make the seasonal round. As chapter 4 explained in detail not all households have customary campsites. Moreover, even for those who do have them, conditions do not always support a four season round.

### ***Annual Migration Cycle***

Herders move to their winter campsite or *uvuljuu* after the first snow in the 'nines' (*yus*) or a customary timing cycle during the winter that tracks the season's progression.<sup>179</sup> This usually occurs in the beginning of December but occasionally may be in late November. This move usually correlates with an increase in winds and the shortening of days. The move usually can take up to 5-7 days depending on the distance as herders try to minimize weight loss and conserve fat stores but also increase their livestock's cold endurance.

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<sup>179</sup> The 'nines' of winter consist of nine periods of nine days (81 days). These periods are different each year and depend on the lunar calendar: 1) airag (fermented mares milk) freezes, 2) arxi (vodka) freezes, 3) cow tails freeze, 4) cow horns freeze, 5) rice does not freeze, 6) roads appear, 7) hill-tops appear, 8) ground is wet, and 9) warm days begin. 'Horns freeze' is the coldest period and usually appears in mid-January. In my experience, mid-January was extremely frigid (-42 one night) and the nines were on the mark.



Figure 7.1. The four season round: Uvuljuu (winter campsite) - Xavarjaa (spring campsite)- Zuslan (summer campsite) - Namarjaa (fall campsite).

Households move to their spring campsite following Tsagaan Sar or the New Lunar Year celebration which typically occurs in mid-to-late February. Moreover, they try to move when the snow melts but before the stock begin to calve or lamb. Similar to the moves to winter campsites, moves to the *xavarjaa* are slow lasting up to 7 days depending on the distance. Herders try to avoid *nuudliin xarshaa* or movement exhaustion as stock can throw ‘*xeel*’ or fetuses.

Households move from their spring to the summer campsites around the time of the first rains in early to mid June when the heat begins to affect animals kept in lowland areas or in regions high in *ders*. Summer migrations are short lasting 2-3 days at most as animals are typically in better shape and can graze on the move much more easily than in the winter and spring.

Households typically move to their customary fall campsite when the first frost or snow falls usually in the beginning of September. During this first cold snap, temperatures fall quite quickly, although they usually rise again, and summer grass nutrient contents begin to drop necessitating the need for *xujir* and high-protein, *targaluulax* or ‘fattening’ grasses which put on the soft fat needed to maintain stock through the winter. Moves in fall are similar to summer ones lasting 2-3 days as livestock are in top condition and can graze while on the move.<sup>180</sup>

### **Otor**

Mongolian herders also practice a kind of movement called *otor*. As I explained in chapter 4, in the Mongolian literature and Western literature on pastoral practices in Mongolia there are a wide variety of definitions. Some present *otor* within the typical migration model as a spring recovery move or a fall fattening move. But such portrayals did not match the diversity of definitions I found in Uguumur. As I argued early, I consider *otor* a practice that leaves this four

<sup>180</sup> Below I discuss the different grazing requirements and circuits for different livestock species.

season campsite cycle. This is usually done in the following cases: (1) avoiding hazards and shocks such as disease, drought, or *zud*, (2) as a means to hasten recovery after a difficult winter and spring, and (3) to fatten livestock in late summer and fall. Because these moves are practiced in times of stress such as occurred in 2008, much of what I discuss in these chapters concerns *otor* specifically. Moreover, as these moves are generally to non-customary sites, the selection of *otor* campsites, and by proxy, *otor* migration itself, involves a wide number of variables.

### ***Modeling Mobility***

The inability to effectively develop a normative model is not limited to *otor nuudel*; in fact, the annual seasonal migration cycle described above, although widely presented as such in the literature, explains little about the contemporary realities of pastoral migration and settlement in rural Mongolia. Moves to customary campsites involve a complex decision-making process that complicates general descriptions of pastoral mobility in the literature and in ‘traditional’ notions of migration and settlement. In the following section I look at the variety of factors households consider when they are moving to another site and secondly I look at the various strategies that households in Uguumur employed during 2007-2008 that provide a broader more complicated picture of the improvisational, but also deeply practical nature of pastoral mobility in contemporary Mongolia.

The degree of influence any one factor has on mobility decision is mediated by a host of other factors, many of which are highly dependent on the social position of the household. Following arguments laid out in the previous chapters, it is clear that in Uguumur social inequalities such as class, age, gender, and ethnicity strongly affect the degree to which individual households have access to the resources, including material, social, and cultural ones, which enable a household to fully optimize their mobile strategies with their livelihood goals of increasing herd growth and managing risk. Consequently, modeling mobility is also problematic because households’ decisions are enabled and constrained in different ways. In the following sections I look at the factors that influence household migration decisions. Although all households may consider the variables such as weather or forage conditions, their choices are either enabled or constrained by other factors such as transportation costs, effective property claims, ability to mobilize labor, and others. This is most apparent in Uguumur between households of differing wealth and social capital.



## Formulating Decisions

In this section I look at three tasks that strongly shape the decision-making process and decision outcome: (1) gathering information, (2) authority dynamics, and (3) evaluating current location.

### *Sudlax: Information Gathering*

The amount of investment herders put into formulating their migration decisions is largely dictated by their ability to acquire information (sudalgaa) regarding current and potential campsite conditions. Most herders listened to daily and hourly weather reports on the radio.<sup>181</sup> If herders have satellite television sets they can watch the nightly weather reports for the aimag capital. The Provincial Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology issues important information that herders can gather at the soum government offices or in the aimag government center. Additionally, the aimag center has become a hub of information for Uguumur herders as many households maintain secondary gers there. These households meet with each other or visit and gather information about camp locations, forage conditions, weather forecasts, and a host of other kinds of information. One of the first questions herders ask each other when in town is ‘*nutag xaa wen*’ (‘*nutag chin xaana baina ve?*’ Or ‘Where is your campsite?’).

*Table 7.1. Location of secondary residence and access to communication. (Data collected in household surveys)*

	<b>Soum</b>	<b>Aimag</b>	<b>Cell phone</b>	<b>Television</b>	<b>Radio</b>
<b>No. of Households</b>	1	35	52	57	62
<b>Per cent of Households</b>	1 %	52 %	75 %	84%	92%

Herders with limited social networks, inability to visit information hubs like the aimag or soum centers, lack of ability to scout campsites due to lack of transport or inability to cover the costs of scouting, and/or limited in the time they can devote due to labor deficiencies are limited

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<sup>181</sup> Although others have shown that pastoralists, in East Africa for example, typically do not use or trust weather reporting, herders in Mongolia have used these since the negdel period when all herders depended on these radio reports for making ‘approved decisions’. Many of these reports give local weather conditions for all provincial capitals and during times of stress for specific soums or regions of provinces. Herders diligently listened to these. Running out of batteries for the radio is always a grave concern. Herders who could afford it, also watch the weather on television which often gives a better sense of conditions because they occasionally show images of snowfall for example. Being able to understand the weather and changing conditions from ecological variables such as changes in the sun, reading clouds, changes in animal behavior, and other forms of knowledge is highly valued.

in the information they can collect. Herders with either wide or strong social connections, enough freedom from daily work to scout locations or visit other herders with knowledge, are able to collect considerable information. These information asymmetries lend to highly divergent decision-making processes amongst herders. Poor, socially unconnected, and in some cases young herders, often move ad hoc with minimal scouting and little additional information from other households. Wealthy households typically enjoy broad social networks and therefore can collect a considerable amount of information regarding potential sites. In some cases, wealthy households may inspect a number of campsites. Their dependents, although usually poor and/or young, are able to benefit from this accumulation of information. Nevertheless, when such information is available, there is a common set of factors that all households have to consider when making such decisions.

### ***Decisions and Authority***

Often assumed in the literature on pastoral mobility is that where households are corporate units, the household head, assumed to be male in most cases, maintains singular authority to formulate and execute mobility decisions. Households, however, are neither internally cohesive, unified social groups nor are they autonomous from the various social relations that frame the connections of the household as a whole and its constituent members to the broader community. Consequently, decision-making processes involve both inter-household and intra-household dynamics. In the case of Uguumur, it was clear through fieldwork and in migration history interviews that some households, depending on the ways in which they are socially positioned, are constrained or enabled in the authority they have over migration decisions.

For example, sons who herd with their fathers have little authority or command over their own migration decisions compared to independent households. Clients and hired herders would obviously be included but so would female-headed households who are almost universally dependent on elder male kin during migration in the case of Uguumur.

Even within households migration decisions are the outcome of complex discussions that usually occur over the span of weeks. Wives, hired herders, household heads, and even children contribute to the decision-making process. Women in the household often have better knowledge of animal health, cost of inputs such as gasoline, and a sense of the overall economic cost of migration.<sup>182</sup> Active herding members, who are not always the household head, such as hired

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<sup>182</sup> Just as I do not want to leave women out of the decision-making process, it was clear that in some households, women were given very little voice in these circumstances. In some of my host households, however, women were very active participants in these discussions.

herders or children, contribute knowledge of animal behavior and condition out at pasture. Members who visit town or school may have learned pertinent knowledge that can inform migration decisions.

### ***Evaluating the Need to Move***

When a household (or sets of households) makes a decision to move to a new campsite they are also making a decision to leave their current one. As Erdenbaatar (1999) found, there is a weak relationship between pasture productivity and movement intensity. This reflects a general reluctance to move which corresponds to both my experience and observation. Most households, I found, utilize pasture as best as one can before moving and were reluctant to be opportunistic relying instead on their customary campsites. Wealthy households, however, are increasingly more opportunistic in their movement and herd placement strategies which will be discussed in the next two chapters. Yet, even the wealthiest prefer, *ceteris paribus*, to sustainably exhaust the pasture resources of their current site(s) before moving.<sup>183</sup> In this sense, movement is often a result of needing to leave.

Consequently, households must not only evaluate new campsites, they must also evaluate their current campsite and the migration itself. These are important points not just for theoretical purposes, they are also practical ones that herders recognize and engage. Whether or not one should leave was a question I witnessed my host households constantly consider. Moreover, the problems associated with *nuudel* itself, a liminal period of ‘un-settlement’, poses a wide variety of risks not previously considered in the literature.

Herders, before considering a move, constantly evaluate their current location – its pasture resources, water availability, salt/soda availability, distance from town, temperature, sun exposure, similar to the way in which they would evaluate a potential new campsite. Yet, when these factors begin to adversely affect their livestock’s ability to maintain or improve fat reserves, causes changes in animal behavior such as tiredness, compromises the regenerative potential of the site’s pasture resources, or their economic capacity to make a living, those herders, who can move, will begin considering moves elsewhere. When they do, herders evaluate destination campsites according to a variety of ecological, social, political, and even religious factors. All herders stated that they are generally against moving outside of their normal campsite rotation, but circumstances often force them to consider this. Customary campsites afford both familiarity with the social and environmental landscape as well as security. Nevertheless, at some point these considerations cannot counter the pressing need to move. The primary initial concern when

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<sup>183</sup> Wealthy households often occupy more than one campsite at any given time. Additionally, their animals may also be located at other campsites simultaneously.

selecting a new campsite focuses on the environmental resources of the site, particularly the three most critical variables: grass, water, and *xujir* (salt licks) or *maraa* (soda). Nevertheless, others may be as if not more important depending on the context.

### **Influential Factors**

Moving beyond the ability of household to gather information and the authority it possesses to formulate and execute a decision we must then look at the factors that are not only taken into consideration when herders formulate migration decisions but also those factors that limit or enable their ability to make such decisions. For example, the kinds of variables herders must take into account depend on the resources they have available and the existing material conditions, including political economic ones, which limit or enable decisions and actions. Clearly, social and economic position mediates the decision-making process. Moreover, the factors which impinge on decisions must be calculated in their various currencies whether that be in economic, political, social, and cultural terms (Bestor 2004). Below I look at: (1) ecological factors, (2) economic factors, (3) socio-cultural factors, and (4) political factors. At various times and for differently positioned households these factors will carry disparate weight.

### ***Ecological Factors***

Several works have examined the variety of ecological factors that influence mobility and pasture use decision-making processes in Mongolia. Fernandez-Gimenez (1997), in a strongly ecologically focused study, delineated the ways in which herders evaluate environmental variables when selecting pastures for livestock. Herders, she argues, consider nutritional quality, palatability, topography, elevation, aspect, eco-zones attributes, plant communities and dynamics, color of pasture, soil characteristics, water quality and quantity, and distance. Many of these variables also apply to primary movements which are in themselves important resource use decisions.

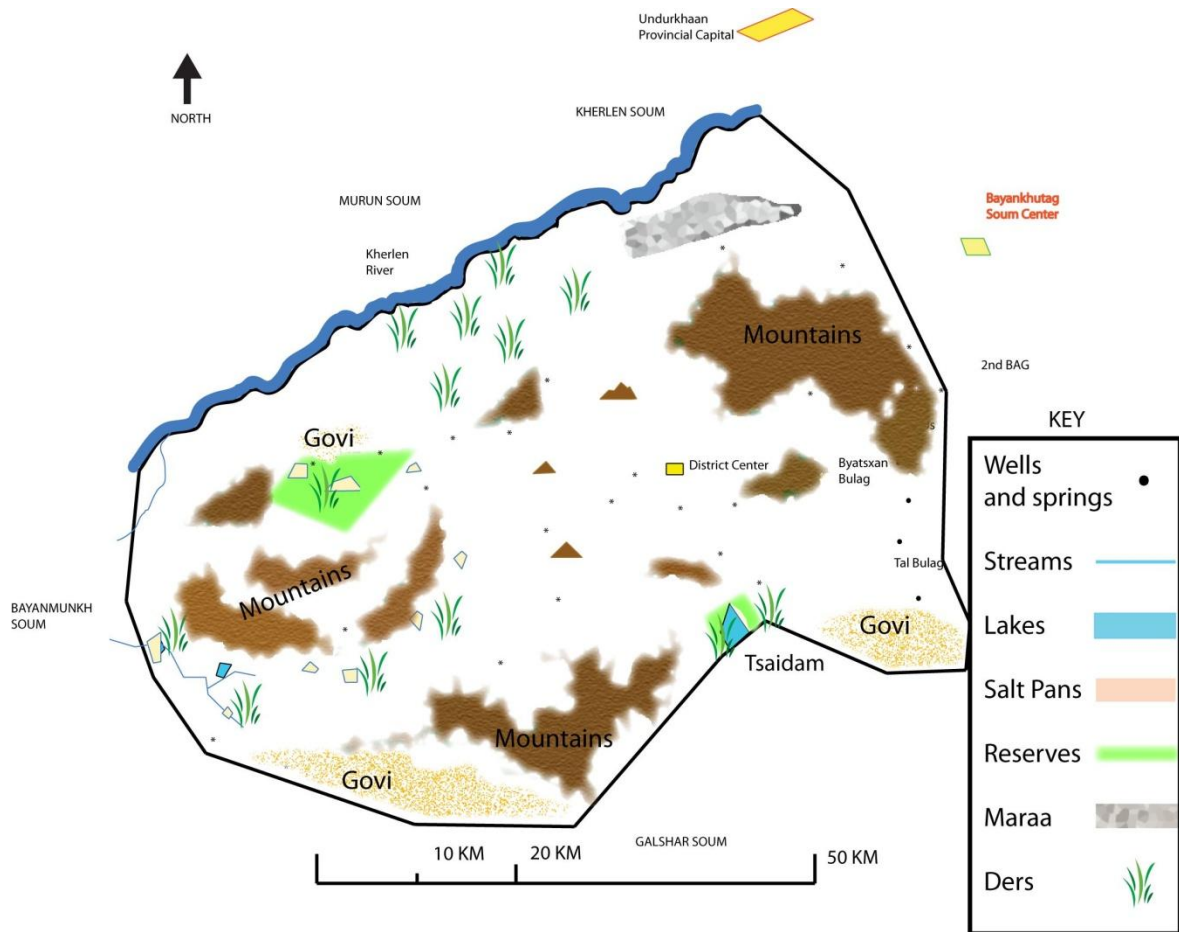


Figure 7.2. Location of important resources and various eco-zones of Uguumur.

### Eco-zones

Observations in Uguumur concur with many of her findings. For example, herders distinguish *khangai*, *xeer* or in Uguumur – *tal*, and *govi* or desert.<sup>184</sup> In *khangai* landscapes, absent in Bayankhutag, forage is considered to be abundant but poor in quality. Uguumur herders would complain that the *khangai* was ‘*dang tsetsegtei*’ or ‘completely flowers’. *Govi* forage species are considered high quality, but these zones are susceptible to drought and *zud*. *Tal* is situated in between. Uguumur is largely *tal*, although in the south the landscape also consists of *govi*. However, the lack of eco-zone diversity in Uguumur limited the distinctions that herders made or were aware of between these different regions. Fernandez-Gimenenez’s distinction between *gol* (riparian areas), *tal* (instead of *xeer*), or *uul* generally hold although *xuduu*, a term that simply refers to the ‘countryside’ was not recognized as a separate landscape feature.

<sup>184</sup> Another term for desert is *tsul* but this has a negative connotation to it and is used in practiced to refer to areas that have less forage than one would desire. *Govi* landscapes, also desert, refer to areas that have nutritious forage and dependable, yet low rate of annual growth.

### ***Landscape***

Nevertheless, within these zones, herders make distinctions between various landscapes features such as streams beds, minor mountains, hills, and valleys, and other topographic features such as slopes, grades, outcroppings, notches, passes, and depressions. As described in chapter 6, these features, too numerous to list, are often described using the terms referring to parts of the body. In many cases, these terms also refer to the ecosystems in and around these features. Many of these areas also have more descriptive place names and become associated with specific plant community features. For example, Xaya, a region along the river (*gol*) in northern Uguumur is dominated largely by *ders* (feathergrass) and *tsaxildag* (iris) attributes that all herders in bag and soum know.

### ***Forage***

All herders have a basic knowledge of important forage (*tejeel*) and their importance for each of separate species of livestock at different times of the year.<sup>185</sup> However, which species are best for which kinds of livestock is highly debated amongst herders themselves. For example, some herders favor *borog xiaq* (dried *agropyron desertorum*) for cattle and goats while others favor *agi* (*Artemisia frigida*). Herders' preferences for specific forages seem to match the location of their respective customary campsites where they are most experienced. Their animals may also be largely adapted to certain kinds of forage. Some herders have expansive knowledge of forages while others can only recognize the most important species. Nevertheless, herders have personal preferences for specific forage species and seek these out when considering potential campsite locations.

Whether or not herders are particular to certain forage species, most evaluate pasture forage according to conditions of growth, nutritive value, location, other plants in association, palatability, and resistance to grazing. The primary question herders have when considering a site is '*belcheer tejeel maldaa taarax uu?*' or will pasture suit my livestock. This is a two sided question; on one side, the question refers literally to forage and the familiarity livestock, and each species, will have with that forage, and on the other side, this is a spiritual question. The spiritual side will be discussed below. Regarding the former, livestock clearly have preferences for certain forages due mostly to their digestive familiarity around the customary campsites or nutag. Moving to a new campsite with new forages presents a problem for the stock who cannot

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<sup>185</sup> Fernandez-Gimenez (1997) carried out a cultural consensus model of forage rankings. She compared herder responses to those of experienced, elder herders whom she considered 'experts' and ranked their responses accordingly. However, I find that such approaches minimize the critical importance of diversity in ecological knowledge that underlie migration and pasture use outcomes.

effectively evaluate better pasturage (which livestock learn to a degree) and may not digest the new forage as readily. This can slow fattening (*targaluulax*) and put the stock at risk for faster *zuderex* during the winter.

### ***Pasture Condition and Capacity***

When herders scout new pastures they are concerned not only with the forage species available but also the overall pasture conditions. The presence of weeds or poisonous plants will deter the consideration of some pastures for campsites. For example, my host household was reluctant to return to their customary campsite in spring because of the increased growth of *tsaxiltag* which goats will eat but not other species. *Tsaxiltag* is a sign of overgrazing and signifies an unhealthy pasture. Although this did not deter my host household since other factors influenced them to return home, they expressed reservations about doing so. Other species can also cause problems. In fall the arrival of *xonxuuli* a kind of tumbleweed can both force households to move and to forego settlement. *Xonxuuli* can cover pasture in an extremely short period of time and it is not palatable by any of the species of livestock. The prevalence of *umxii uvs* can also signify poor pasture and overgrazing as well. Although it is palatable to camels, it is a poor if not poisonous forage for other livestock.

Herders will also avoid areas that have been *talxlagdsan* (crushed) or *talagdsan* (ravaged) by other herds. Overgrazed pasture can couple with events such as drought to produce severe conditions. In winter, *zud* disasters caused by this kind of overgrazing are called *tuurain zud*. A sign of potential overgrazing of pasture is the presence of other households. Herders in most cases will try to avoid areas with large concentrations. They do this for a number of reasons including the simple fact that more households often means more livestock and greater competition for grazing. Additionally, there is a concern these household groups may in fact be a part of a territorial *buleg* that is attempting to defend pasture land and in that case would expose the herder to *xuux*. In other cases these are new, inexperienced or young herders whose lack of knowledge and respect for local custom may cause other problems such as well coordination problems and *xonini nair* or herd mixing. Only in cases where high quality forage is concentrated in these areas do households consider settling. Wealthier households with large herds are often more successful in such situations as larger herds can both pressure smaller herds off pasture and literally ‘eat out’ the pasture forcing others to move.

One of the patrons of a household profiled in the next chapter selected an otor campsite in a neighboring soum 5km away from nutritious riparian pastures where 30 to 40 local households had camped, each separated by about a kilometer in distance. When I asked why he did not camp next to the river where the grass was close to a meter tall, he replied that the pasture was no good

because there were too many animals and if he moved his animals there he would have to move very shortly. Moreover, he added that many of the household were locals (*nutgiinx*) and most likely related. Consequently he camped a few kilometers away in a shallow mountain valley where he could still, if he needed to, access the pasture near the river without having to camp in such crowded conditions.

Of primary concern though when herders assess pasture conditions are whether or not there is significant *belcheeriin daats* or pasture capacity. Herders often said in conversation and interviews '*daats xurexgui*' (capacity will not 'reach or suffice'), '*daats xureltseegui*' (capacity is insufficient), or '*daats diilexgui*' (capacity cannot 'withstand'). Such concerns are more significant in households with greater levels of livestock. A household with 500 or 1000 head of livestock will have different pasturing requirements than a herd of 100 or 200. Poorer households were overall less concerned with overall pasture conditions when making campsite decisions; in contrast, they were focused primarily on forage species, water, and *xujir* requirements. The wealthy however, particularly those of extreme wealth, were constantly concerned about the ability of pastures to sustain their herds without degrading pasture. It is no surprise that this is a primary reason for why households with large herds either must move more frequently or find other ways to match available resources to the forage needs of such large herds.

In more dire seasons when *belcheeriin daats* is *muu* or bad, the threat for *gan* or *zud* becomes more real. However, drought and poor pasture conditions do not always signify the eventuality of *zud*, but the continued grazing of already degraded pastures in adverse conditions can certainly produce those very conditions. As described above, *tuurain зуд* is such an event caused primarily by the actions of herders themselves in concert with environmental factors.

### **Water**

Herders have preferences for certain kinds of water sources during different parts of the year. In fall herders prefer water sources that have salt or *maraa* in or around them. This typically includes lakes or springs. During the summer herders prefer the river which provides a broader range of access points rather than a well which has a central point. Wells are often associated with degraded pasture related not to grazing but trampling. Wells are favored in spring, however, because river banks, streams, lakes, and pools are too damp and could affect the stock should a cold snap or storm blow through. Wells located in regions with *ders* are highly valued as stock are protected while watering encouraging good intake and improvement in body condition. Wells that have salt water (*xujirtai us*) are most preferred. Standing water or pools that are lacking salt (*xar us* or blackwater) are generally avoided unless other options are absent. In the winter,



regions with sufficient but not excessive snow are favored as watering via wells can sap the stock's energy. Trekking to the well along trampled routes interferes with critical grazing time.

*Table 7.2. Numbers of households that use each kind of well. (n=68)*

<b>Private Well</b>	<b>Public Well</b>	<b>Coop Well</b>	<b>Others' Private Well</b>	<b>Others' Coop Well</b>
<b>18</b>	39	16	9	6

Nevertheless, differential access to water sources can affect mobility patterns in different ways. Increasingly wealthy households are digging their own motor-operated wells and hand wells of *shand*. 26 per cent of the household sample have access to a self-defined 'private' well despite the fact that the water in the well legally belongs to everyone. Wells have become a point of contention, a problem magnified by the contracting of local, formerly public wells to cooperative groups. Many of these groups, as mentioned earlier, are using their 'administrative' duties to regulate well-access to secure territorial control. By charging other households for the maintenance and operation of wells, they can limit other households' access to water. Consequently, households that are unwilling to pay the fees (usually one sheep, lamb or cash equivalent) must find other sources of water. Clearly, in times of drought or extremely hot summers when water access is critical, access to wells can have important impacts on migration decisions and pasture use. Moreover, the control over wells by wealthy and more socially connected households allows them to access deeper pastures away from the river and other natural points such as springs, streams, and seasonal pools.

### ***Weather***

Herders try to avoid deleterious weather and climate conditions. Extremes of heat and cold, excessive precipitation which can result in flood or blizzard, lack of precipitation which can result in drought, and the consequences of wind, dust, or hail storms are important variables herders take into consideration when looking for a campsite. Some regions and landscapes are more prone to these events. For example, herders understand that moving south may mean a greater temperature increase. Herders understand that regions between mountains and rivers are prone to flooding.

Because of the fast-onset nature of many weather risks in Mongolia, herders constantly evaluate weather conditions. Although, traditional methods for predicting weather have largely disappeared, herders attempt to do so ad hoc by examining cloud distance, height, color, density, and overall appearance. The color of the sun at different times of the day signifies changing temperatures. Animal behavior can also import information regarding the weather. One of my

host households in fact had a 3-in-1 temperature, barometer, and wind speed gauge attached to his *ger*. He was able to predict the changing conditions and avoid adverse conditions such as wind storms. While I was residing with him, I observed several instances when he would shorten pasturing distances for small stock dependent on changes in pressure and wind speed, ensuring that he could, if the conditions shifted for the worse, *xotluulax* or corral his animals. However, these instruments were not helpful in predicting longer term changes that would affect campsite selection.

Rather, most herders primarily get their weather information from radio and television sources. Every day at 3 pm the weather is reported for all aimag centers including information such as high and low temperatures, possibility for precipitation, and wind-speeds. On the television news herders can find weather information over the span of a week and can plan possible tasks and even moves accordingly.

Broader seasonal or annual weather patterns they gauge from their own experience, that of other herders, and local seasonal and annual weather assessments from the aimag branch of the Institute for Meteorology. The institute publishes inclement weather warnings that are posted in soum administration offices and are distributed to the *bagiin darga*. However, I rarely saw or heard of these assessments being used in any decision-making process. There are plans however, to broadcast weather information via cell-phones which are more readily used.

The aimag government also publishes pasture assessments done by the MoFALI which serve as a kind of early warning mechanism for winter *zud*. These assessments are discussed in detail at herders' *bagiin xural* to make or suggest plans. However, as herders explained these meetings rarely reach any conclusions. The pasture assessment for 2008 is discussed in detail below. Herders also refer to past knowledge of event sequencing and cause and effect logic to help evaluate what the future may hold. For instance, as one herder explained to me, herders avoid wherever snow first falls even if the snow melts as that area of pasture will be inundated with snow during the winter, completely covering the pasture.

The differential strategies that herders devise dependent on their social and economic positions is discussed in the following two chapters. Clearly, for some, certain kinds of weather events are less troublesome. The presence of certain kinds of weather-risk reducing assets such as *saravch* (shelter), *xashaa* (fence), and *xalxavch* or *xalx* (wind-block) can shift household migration decisions away from weather concerns to more opportunistic variables. *Xashaa* and *xalxavch* are mobile technologies and can be moved to other soums. *Saravch*, however, are too large and cumbersome. The distribution of these assets is not even (see Table 7.3). 70 per cent of all structures are owned by the wealthy and very wealthy categories who only make up 32 per

cent of the district population. In particular, 72 per cent of critical spring structures are owned by these two groups. Only 28 per cent of the rest of the sample categories (68 per cent) owns these important technologies.

*Table 7.3. Numbers of households with each structure at their customary campsites. (Data collected in household survey)*

Structure	Uvuljuu	Xavarjaa	Zuslan	Namarjaa	Total
Saravch	17	21	0	0	38
Xashaa	19	11	6	3	39

### ***Risks and Other variables***

Herders also consider other risks such as wolves, birds-of-prey such as eagles, and wild dogs, floods, lightening, disease, and numerous other potential threats. For example, in northern xangai regions where forest landscapes are more prominent herders perceive that wolf threat is the highest. Disease can also limit the choice of campsites. Herders avoid areas where *boom* (anthrax), brucellosis, foot-and-mouth, and other contractible diseases have broken out. These areas are marked with signs or, as in the past, large stone cairns.

### **Economic Factors**

#### ***Livestock***

Herders constantly evaluate the condition of their livestock, both as individual animals and as a whole herd. Worsening conditions in the herd can prompt a household to find a new campsite. In contrast, if conditions are improving or at a stable level of beneficial production, herders will considering staying.

In their evaluation, herders focus on the fat conditions of their stock. For example, sheep which have plump tails that jiggle and whose knees cannot be clearly seen are considered in good condition as long as they are spritely and energetic. When tails stop moving and you can clearly see a sheep's knees and thighs, they are in poor condition. Lethargy is also a sign of poor condition. This is hard to distinguish, though, in the middle of the summer heat when stock are exhausted from the harsh sun and in the deep winter of February when most animals are in a dire state. Most animals reach this point by early spring even in good years. Consequently, evaluating the timing of worsening conditions is critical. These factors are particularly important in considering moves and reducing the threat of *nuudliin xarshaa*.

Herders also have to consider their herd's composition and size. Different species require different kinds of forage and have different pasturing requirements. Herders also consider the species and products of their stock and the effect of local environments and forage conditions on

stock. Changes in stock conditioning can affect marketability. Considerations for their stock figure heavily into migration decisions.

### ***Transport***

For herders to move or occupy campsites at some distance from settlements requires considering the cost of transport. Many herders in the sample (see Table 7.4) owned their own vehicle, typically the near ubiquitous small, blue transport trucks such as the Kia Bongo or Nissan Frontera. The poor, however, often do not own vehicles and must rent when they are making moves. Despite reports that kin households share transport for primary moves, I did not find this to be the case. When a household requested the use of a vehicle from a relative, they paid the fuel costs themselves, in addition to reciprocal obligations they might incur such as providing meat. Every household must consider the cost of fuel which, when moving long distances, can be quite high. With large trucks, and because of the difficult landscape, every kilometer traveled translated to about a half liter of gasoline. At the time of research, gasoline was roughly 1,000 MNT per liter. A 50 kilometer move which may require over a hundred kilometers of actual travel would be approximately 50,000 MNT or two sheep, about the average monthly salary in Mongolia.

*Table 7.4. Number and percent of households with transportation.*

	<b>Car</b>	<b>Truck</b>	<b>Carts</b>	<b>Wagons</b>
<b>No. of Households</b>	27	22	45	47
<b>Per cent of Households</b>	40 %	32%	66%	69%

Moreover, households without pack animals, camels in Uguumur, must also consider the rental costs as many households do not share pack animals beyond the khot ail.<sup>186</sup> Some of these households do not even have the requisite carts and wagons needed to move with pack animals.

### ***Labor***

As chapter 4 made clear, labor is critical to household economies in Mongolia. The ability to effectively enroll, mobilize, and manage labor can significantly shape a household's mobility. Labor is critical not only for managing resource use at current campsites, it is also critical for migration and operating at distant locals. Many households have to hire extra labor for migration. Households with large herds, especially those over 200, must enroll extra labor to drive their herds to the next campsite. As stated above this can take anywhere from an afternoon

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<sup>186</sup> Camels rentals are charge in various ways, either in livestock, cash, or even labor. None of my host households did this however as they all had camels or access to them in their xot ail.

to weeks in the case of some long distance moves. One household in the sample moved over 200 kilometers. Such moves take weeks in order to ensure that livestock are not exhausted by the move (*nuudliin xarshaa*). Herds that are not driven with sufficient labor are forced to endure longer periods on the drive, weakening their condition. Keeping stock overnight on drives requires multiple herders as animals may attempt to return home and must be looked after more closely than normal.<sup>187</sup>

### ***Access to goods and services***

Herders in Uguumur are used to living in close proximity to settlements and consequently have developed livelihoods dependent more than those in other regions of Mongolia on access to consumer goods and state services. Hospitals, schools, shops, and government services are all located in either the soum or aimag centers. Distance from these vital services can factor heavily into migration decisions. Households with young children, pregnant wives, elderly or sickly members are wont to venture great distances from these services. Some may in fact move closer in order to access these services. Many children of herding families attend school in distant soum or aimag centers.<sup>188</sup> Parents, particularly of young children, prefer to be as close as possible to them. Although by law soums must provide services to all those settling in their territory whether legally or not, herders are reluctant to make themselves known for fear of expulsion. Moreover, switching doctors, uncertainty about care, disruptions to children and their support networks can motivate households not to move. Other government services include social security payments, disability payments, state child support payments, and other subsidies that are either must be obtained from government offices or, if they are automatically deposited in bank accounts, must be accessed through banks in the soum and aimag centers.

Herders in Uguumur also rely on a number of food stuffs such as flour, oil, sugar, salt, and vegetables that are purchased from stores in the aimag center. The two small stores in Bayankhutag soum center are too small and the goods are too expensive for herders who have to

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<sup>187</sup> Animals, particularly horses and camels, instinctively return 'home' which is often either the last campsite or in the case of otor migrations, their original nutag.

<sup>188</sup> Nearly all children, as it is required by law between 7 and 12, go to school. Very few children leave school before 16, however. The real question, however, is which school do the children attend. The school in Bayankhutag is continually rated the worst school in Khentii for a variety reasons, one of which is low attendance. Many herding families try to send their children to school in Undurxaan which is perceived to be better by rural households. Unfortunately, statistically one teacher told me, they have a greater chance of going to college from a soum school. Also, only in one case did I find a family whose child never attended school. Their child was mentally challenged they said and there was no opportunity for help. People with disabilities, particularly mental ones, however, are considered somewhat shameful as it is perceived to be related to incest. See Bulag (1999) for an excellent discussion of incest and disability as frames for understanding Mongolian sex and gender ideologies.

frequent the aimag center anyway. The need for bulk purchases of goods and dramatic changes in consumption patterns can pose problems for households that have limited transport means and live at great distances from such resources.

Living at a great distance from these services can pose a number of problems. Some households relieve the tension between these forces, the need to move and the settled-nature of critical resources, by maintaining two homes one in the aimag center and one in the countryside. Twelve households in the sample maintained split households where the wives live semi-permanently in the aimag center and husbands live in the rural countryside. For these households, having additional labor is critical for such strategies. Consequently, it is mostly the wealthy who do this. However, 35 households have an extra ger if not a xashaa and house in the aimag center. In both of these cases, families tend to spend the summer in the countryside when the weather is pleasant and the living is easy.

These secondary settlements though have different effects on mobility patterns. For split households the migration practices are generally not affected. These herders maintained highly mobile livelihoods; although, mobility and the split household strategies are also a function of their wealth which may account for the high mobility. For those with a secondary ger in the aimag center, the households seemed more restricted in their movement pattern as they did not want to stray from the aimag center and access to goods, services, and social networks.

### ***Livestock product markets***

For many households, particularly the poor who cannot withdraw from markets in times of stress, access to markets for livestock products is critical. Selling livestock requires transport to market that animal in Undurxaan. Itinerant traders typically only operate in the warmer months, yet, the poor who must sell throughout the year must find other ways. Migrating far from markets can force households to incur additional costs. Consequently, poor households are reluctant to move too far that it would limit their ability to access markets. Some households try to resolve this problem by marketing individual small stock by motorcycle, which presents lower fuel costs. However, they are limited to 1 or 2 animals and therefore do not reap the economies of scale by selling in bulk.

### ***Income***

Clearly, there are costs to movement. Households have to cover these cost with the income they garner from their livelihood activities. As discussed in chapter 3 households draw income primarily from pastoral activities; however, a number of households are engaged in secondary income earning opportunities. In a few cases these activities represent large and

important sources of income. Herders can use these additional sources to cover the costs of migration and especially in special circumstances like in disaster contexts. Increasingly herders in Uguumur are becoming reliant on financial services like banking and loans. In the case of loans, most use them to cover basic everyday expenses in anticipation of cashmere income. Others take out loans to invest in trucks, cars, new gers, or xashaa in the aiang center.

Households that cannot move to a new campsite because of high costs of transport, consider taking out herder loans from the local bank. But there are numerous problems with such practices. Firstly, banks are not inclined to give out loans to herders with few animals, who are typically those who need the loans most. Moreover, taking out a loan for a migration during a potential disaster could be doubly problematic. Households that did so had to sell livestock to pay back the loan after the threat of disaster waned. However, taking the loan would have posed a grave risk to their livelihood if they had lost a considerable number of animals in the *zud*. They would have had to pay back the loan with the few animals they have left. My first host household took out a small loan prior to moving in order to cover the cost of ice, hay, coal, *buuts*, *argal*, food, and other supplies for the *otor* migration in the east. That winter they lost many animals and had to pay back the loan with a big portion of their cashmere income in March. Although there was still income left over, the costs of moving coupled with the loss of livestock deepened their predicament which resulted in the adoption of a semi-sedentary strategy.

A new service available to herders is index-based livestock insurance. Although only 19 herders (28%) took out policies in 2007 the indemnity payments they received were significant boons. They payments more then covered the cost of migration. Fourteen of these households, however, had herds of 500 or more animals. IBLI over time could shift the need for loans as herders realize they would be likely to receive a payment if their stock die and instead would be more willing to sell livestock prior to a move to cover the costs of moving rather than taking out a loan. However, whether this is the case is yet to be seen. This could have impacts on mobility decisions in difficult years.

## **Socio-Cultural Variables**

### ***Religious concerns***

Herders must also be in good relations with the spiritual economy. Moving places a number of spiritual risks both on them and their livestock. Herders have to exit from one exchange relationship with the spiritual forces (*ezed* or masters) of their *nutag* and enter into another. For example, as discussed in those earlier chapters, when herders give offerings to the mountains, the mountain in turn bestows *buyan khishig* or good fortune on the worshipping

households. By moving, households move out of that dyadic relationship. Consequently, this poses great risk to their livelihoods. When they settle in a new location they must enter into a new relationship with a new mountain. Without access to the built-up spiritual capital invested in their own *shutdeg uul*, herders are in extremely vulnerable positions with respect to the new forces with whom they are only barely acquainted. Moreover, they cannot camp next to a *shutdeg uul* in another soum that is not their *nutag*.

Moreover, when herders are betwixt and between these relationships with the mountain spirits, migration becomes a risky, liminal state both spiritually and in material terms. They could lose livestock to theft or exhaustion. In winter or spring, they could be caught in a storm. Consequently, herders must seek propitious days on which to move. Many herders consult with lamas concerning both the right day and the right location to move. Doing so ensures that at least in spiritual terms they are minimizing the potential problems they could face.

The lama will ask ‘what kind of people are they and what are their personalities and character likes?’. We ask the lama ‘will my herd grow, will it fatten’, we just talk to him. And they [the lamas] were herders, too; so, the lama may tell us about their own experience. He may tell us a story, too. We do not ask such things about our own campsites only those of distant, unfamiliar *nutag*.

Yet, at the same time, not all herders are equally spiritual. Six households responded as being atheist (*yu ch shutdeggui*), 2 as strictly shamanist (*buugiin shashintai*), and one self-professed Christian. Although 62 households responded as being *shar shashintai* or yellow-hat (Gelugpa) Buddhist, most herders stated that they knew little of Buddhist philosophy and instead rely on a host of ritual practices that seek to bring about good fortune and minimize bad fortune, one of which is to visit the lama whom they recognize as a source of control over uncertainties. In this sense, spiritual worship is largely practical in orientation. For those who are not religious, good luck practices are still present, but they largely subscribe to a materialist worldview inculcated during socialism. These herders are less reluctant about moving and appear more opportunistic to others. For most though, beyond religious labels, mountain worship is the central practice in the spiritual repertoire of Uguumur households. This important practice clearly presents additional risks which herders seek to reduce and mitigate.

### ***Social activity***

The social nature of a household’s *nutag* cannot be underestimated. Moving away from kin, friends, and neighbors divorces households from the social fabric of the community, much in the way moving away from mountains divorces households from the spiritual fabric of the landscape. Absence from kin-celebrations and community-based religious rituals are important variables when herders consider the distances they are willing to travel. Being alone is for most



herders a scary prospect replete with uncertainties and an absence of critical social intercourse. This is particularly a concern in the winter when households must be farther apart due to pasture capacity issues but also require greater reliance on cooperation because of the hardships that households face. Facing an emergency when it is -40 F is significantly more problematic than in the summer when it is 80 F, sunny, and breezy. Moreover, increased social networks within a territory also increase access to knowledge, monitoring capabilities, and enforcement.

## **Political Variables**

### ***Formal Institutions***

As chapters 5 and 6 made abundantly clear pastoral landscapes in Mongolia are overlaid with multiple, overlapping, and dynamic fields of property and rights. Various formal institutions such as the constitution, successive land laws, rural administrative laws, and local and provincial 'acts' regulate legal access to land. Coupled with these legal frames are the administrative structures inhabited by variously positioned actors such as local and provincial governors, rural ministerial representatives, and Peoples Representative Councils. These institutions and actors serve as gatekeepers in local resource management assemblages. The regulation of pastureland access through citizenship, otor contracts, pasture and well contracts, and expulsion authority all inscribe the land with a dynamic political economy of resource access. Serving in monitoring, enforcement, and sanctioning roles these institutions and actors not only channel resource use practices but also impose various costs that herders must take into consideration when considering moves. Moreover, development institutions such as multi-lateral donors like the World Bank and IFAD along with non-governmental organizations act as proxy administrators in local land relations overseeing well contract, campsite contracting, and various other activities. Herders must also variously navigate these institutions by avoiding or embracing their very real material power over land and access.

As I described in chapter 5 and 6 in some detail, in order to activate these source of rural power to one's ends requires a number of strategic moves including variously defined gifts and bribes. Other kinds of transactions are also important such as campsite, pasture, and well contracts. The importance of such strategies for actual mobile outcomes and disaster management practices of households is described in detail in the next two chapters.

### ***Informal Institutions***

Herders must also navigate the complex mix of informal institutions, practices, and strategies that along with or at least in addition to formal ones mediate resource access. Herders must be able to successfully claim a campsite and have that claim legitimated in the broader field

of competing claims. Gaining legitimacy is costly, however. Enacting moral economies of mutual aid and support requires investments of time and, often, livestock. Reciprocity is not free. In more evident cases, herders must repel or avoid the various practices that others deploy to deter their settlement such as *xuux* whether that be through theft, territorial saturation, eating out pasture, threats of violence, verbal disputes, or other novel practices. There are serious costs to engaging these dynamics as much as there are serious costs in avoiding them. Households of different wealth are exposed in different ways to these practices. They are also unequally positioned to repel such advances. Households that simply chose to ignore them risk loss of livestock, moving during inopportune or downright dangerous times, and possible violence. For those seeking to *zoxtiso* or to harmonize relations they must find legitimate means by which to circumvent threats such as through purchase, rent, payment, fees, or gifts of livestock and cash. Clearly, for some these costs are small but for others they are exceeding high.

Additionally, leaving ones customary campsites and foregoing the monitoring and enforcement of one's right and claim to these sites and the risk of incurring serious pasture loss or theft are significant costs. Some are not willing to leave their customary sites or at least not to move excessively far from them. Others employ the use of *uldsen* ail in order to alleviate these problems, but such practices in themselves require investment. For others, the costs are unavoidable. Clearly, the ability to overcome and deal with the consequences of possible trespassing while on *otor* is not equitably distributed.

These political factors I argue play a critical yet largely unrecognized role in shaping individual household vulnerability to herd loss in the context of *zud* disaster because they play a primary role in shaping mobile outcomes. In the next 2 chapters this case will be evidently clear.

### **Making Decisions: Migration and Settlement**

When herders were asked what factors were most important in their initial decisions to move they most often listed ecological and economic factors, focusing particularly on matching pasture availability and quality to herd size and composition. However, as the above description of influential variables demonstrates, migration decisions are often much more complex than even herders own explanations. In general, herders were not prone to divulge the true impetus behind some of their moves, particularly when they had been forced to move either by local herders or by bag governors. Some resisted explaining how they accessed campsites, particularly when it involved methods that were not considered legitimate in the broader spectrum of 'rights'. Moreover, others were reluctant to state that they in fact may not have made the decision themselves but rather their fathers or more senior relatives instructed them to move to a new location.

The decision making process is a complex social phenomena. In the field the complexity of mobility decisions brought to the forefront the methodological issues of doing formal decision-making analysis. Formal decision-making analysis, migration surveys, and structured interviews would not have revealed the important issues herders confront in a fast-changing socio-political landscape. In contrast, such methods revealed a stereotypical portrait of pastoral decision-making, fore-fronting environmental variables and leaving critical political-economic and socio-cultural variables in the shadows. Early on in the research I abandoned more structured, formal methodologies for less structured ones as important variables increasingly came to the fore through observation and less structured conversation. Consequently, decision-making was elucidated through semi-structured interviews that were at times loose-ended and not at all uniform. It is difficult to present a full picture of decision-making. However, after significant experience in the field, I was able to gather a more than sufficient amount of data to examine how certain factors play an important role in constraining and enabling certain strategies in a smaller sample of 34 households.

Herders, in the best of all possible worlds, would prefer to be on *otor* constantly, finding and utilizing campsites with the best grass, the best shelter, the best access to water and salt, but herders do not and simply cannot maximize their mobility in such a way; rather, they optimize on what is possible. This optimization is not simply a calculation of economic and ecological costs, benefits, and risks, but it is deeply entwined in social and political dynamics. In order to make certain moves herders need to draw on their social networks and social capital. This is seen both in the kin group collective migration and herder cooperative groups who migrated collectively. Moreover, they must be able to render these strategies in culturally coherent ways in order obtain legitimacy in the face of other possibly stronger competing claims.

The diverse pressures and opportunities that households encounter result in a diversity of movement strategies. Although I am typically disinclined to create a typological description of such diversity, in the next section I discuss some of the more evident strategies that multiple households use over the course of the year. These strategies are in a way a response not only to the pressures and opportunities but are also a result of strategy preference and the dynamics of the decision-making process itself. After discussing these strategies I will look specifically at my 4 different host households and encounters I had with decision-making in the field.

## **Mobile Strategies**

In this section I present an overview of the migrations strategies used by households in Uguumur from July of 2007 to July of 2008. Overall households were significantly more mobile than in years past. During the second phase of interviews with the smaller sample of 34 households I collected mobility data from the July of 2006 to June 2007 which showed that households in a normal year are significantly less mobile than they were during the research period. Nevertheless, most households reported that overtime the number of migrations and average distance of migrations is on the rise. In the time period of 7/07-7/08 sampled households migrated on average 170 kilometers with an average migration distance of 35 kilometers. Some of these migrations included the use of customary campsites according to the customary migration model outlined above. However, increasingly herders have had to develop new strategies for increasing their access to pastoral resource not only to satisfy the requirements of larger herds (opportunism) and increased production but also to avoid what herders perceive as an increasingly risky environment.

Sampled Uguumur households migrated on average 5.2 times a year, 3 moves of which were to customary campsites, and 2.2 of which were to non-customary otor campsites. Moreover, on average households made 3.3 additional 'short' otor moves. However, this basic overview of migration does not include the multiple strategies that herders can use to increase their use of pastoral resources. In the section below I described the mobility strategies that herders utilized in the 07/07-07/08 time period. Some of these strategies require the movement of the entire household with their herds whereas others required only herd movements. Who can accomplish these various strategies is obviously restricted.

### **Customary moves**

Herders move to their customary campsites as a kind of default. In most cases, there are better areas of pasture and forage conditions, better water access, and better deposits of xujir and maraa elsewhere. However, customary campsites are optimal areas that herders have invested in continuously over the years and over which they have established claims. The sites became customary because they exhibited a host of optimal attributes that satisfied more or less the needs of the household and their herd. Consequently, herders consider fewer factors when moving to these campsites. Instead they focus more narrowly on environmental conditions and their herd's needs.

Evidently, only those who have customary campsites move to customary campsites and not all have them. Moreover, the limiting factors that affect other kinds of movement, can over time affect moves to customary campsites. My host household had over the years become so poor they could no longer afford to move between their customary sites and so sold them and became

hired herders. Others in the sample decided not to move from one customary campsite to another because they would be farther away from the aimag center.

However, most moves to customary campsites are not far. For some the moves are under a few kilometers and can be accomplished in less than a day. Only when the moves are of greater distance do other limiting factors play stronger roles. These factors are most readily visible though in *otor* migrations which force households to leave the four-campsite cycle norm.

### **Otor**

As argued above, I define *otor* as a pastoral technique whereby herders move outside the normal 4 season rotation to a non-customary campsite. Despite the confusion surrounding the use of the term, the kinds of strategies I classify here as *otor* are recognized in other studies. For example, Purev (1990) recognizes that herders, strategically use campsites and pastures in different ways: ‘there are many forms of utilization of distant pastures namely, penning on pasture, replacing of base-camp, changing of pasture, long distance camping or winter camping’. Following herders’ uses of the term, some of these methods are here described as *otor*.

Because there are a range of different household and herd management problems when conducting *otor*, there is variation in the resulting migrations. However, the migration data collected in Uguumur show that *otor* migrations do exhibit common features. Consequently, in this section I have classed all observed and recorded *otor* migrations according to distance, household configuration, and timing of movement. This classification results in two primary categories of short and long distance *otor* and secondarily, within those categories, satellite, continuous and single destination *otor*.

#### ***Short Otor (jijig otor)***

Short *otor* are those migrations under 20 kilometers that last from 1 day until 2 weeks. Households conducting short *otor* also frequently use satellite camps, consisting usually of a hired herder or the primary livestock herder, whether the husband or son. There are two strategies that are used with satellite camps: satellite short *otor* and permanent satellite short *otor*.

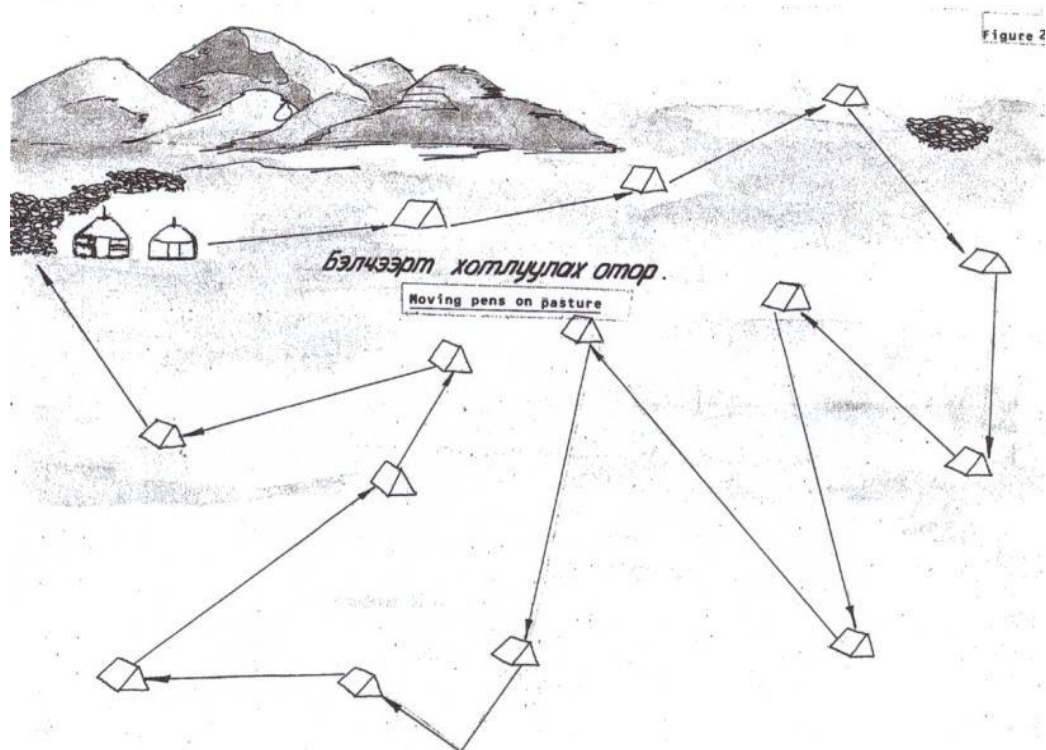


Figure 7.3. A kind of short otor practiced during the summer, what I call short continuous otor. (from Purev 1990)

During my time with one herding family in the summer, we conducted what I will call a *satellite short otor migration*. We conducted this using a truck and simply moving from day to day as we followed the sheep herd. At night the two herders would sleep in shifts watching the herds.<sup>189</sup> The purpose of this migration was to fatten the sheep without having to returning them to the base camp everyday, which would waste energy, preventing the sheep from properly fattening. We conducted this *otor* for 7 days and then returned to the main encampment. The hired herder, who I went with, went on *otor* again the following week for another seven days. This migration type is an important strategy for strengthening livestock after a harsh spring, encouraging acquisition of hard fat during the summer, and ‘soft’ fattening stocks for sale in fall. Typically only one or two species will be taken on this type of migration such as sheep/goats or horses. This type of *otor* migration requires little need to claim a campsite, as the herder will only stay a day or two at each stop during the night. This kind of otor can also be conducted with

<sup>189</sup> I was not involved in this rotation although I did spend time watching the herds with them.

horses rather than trucks and, overall, at very little cost to the household. Scouting pastures and ensuring access to resources like wells, however, are critical. Moreover, as with any satellite otor, this requires additional labor, particularly if the herds are separated by species.

Some households, however, maintain a more permanent or at least seasonal satellite camp. One sampled household maintained a satellite camp in spring, summer, and fall where the husband kept a small *otriin ger* with the bare essentials at the *otor* campsite in the southern govi region of the *soum* and his wife and children stayed at the winter campsite with the big *ger* in the central mountainous section of the *soum* near Uguumur mountain and the road to the aimag center. He would drive back and forth at least once a week if not more in his Hyundai sedan. The purpose of such configurations are to spread the risk of losses due to disaster, minimize the effects of drought, concentrate attention on different herds, minimizing grazing effect on pasture around customary campsites, increase speed and ease of movement allowing herds to be more opportunistic in utilizing distant forage cover, and minimize the stress on the household in constantly moving. In the case of the household cited above, the configuration was also a compromise between the household head and his wife who wanted to remain in a single location because she hated moving all the time.

This strategy, although labor intensive and stressful (or not) for the household members involved because of the social distance, allows herders to navigate the patchy distribution of pasture resources and respond quickly to adverse conditions such as crowding. Because of the high labor requirements of splitting herds and cooperating a second household, this strategy is typically used by households with clients, sons, trusted hired herders, or, in the case cited above, a household that is flexible in their relationship. In the cases where clients or hired herders are herding stock, the owner must have means to monitor their labor and the condition of their herds. This requires a high level of trust. Because of the importance of monitoring the distances between base and satellite and the distances between satellite moves are typically of a short nature, 1-20 kilometers at a time. Any farther than this would require the move of the base camp as well.

In contrast to base-satellite configurations are other households, typically those who are new households and/or have very small social networks within the *soum*, who employ a strategy whereby the base camp (1-2 households) conducts very short migrations continuously year round, what I call *continuous short otor*. They do not themselves have customary campsites; therefore, they have no migration cycle and consequently consider themselves on continuous otor. Two households in the sample conducted nearly all of their migrations in this way.

One of the households was Bayad, a very small ethnic minority found usually in the extreme west of Mongolia. His family was sent from the west in the 1970s and has had little

success in integrating in the broader Khalkha community. In 2004 they emigrated from Bayanmunkh soum in the west to Uguumur bag in Bayankhutag, but have decided not to establish themselves by claiming campsites and have simply migrated in and out of several other *soums*, moving up to 50 times a year. The household head argued that Mongolian territory belongs to all Mongols and he has a right to utilize pasture wherever he finds it. He avoids crowded areas and, typically, customary campsites of other households. Many of the other households in Uguumur do not even recognize his name. His migrations are profiled in chapter 9.

The other household was poor, recently married, and socially unconnected to other households in Uguumur. They had herded livestock for a relative in the 2<sup>nd</sup> bag but had exited that job in 2006 to herd independently because they felt they were not able to concentrate on increasing their own stock. Because both his father no longer herds and he lacks a customary campsite, the household for the time being is forced to continually make camp on new sites. In time they hope to find good sites that they can establish as *baingiin nutag* (customary campsites). Now, though, they must always be on *otor*.

There is a clear difference in these two cases. The first case represents the use of continuous short *otor* as an opportunistic strategy stemming from ‘nationalist’ claims of open access that seeks to evade other property claims and current administrative configurations. His vision of pastures rights is clearly also related to ethnic politics and the inability of his family to integrate in a predominantly Khalkha area who reinforce claims to campsite and pasture through both kin and ethnic-based claims.<sup>190</sup> His strategy represents both opportunism and resistance. In the second case, continuous short *otor* is a de facto reality resulting from a lack of access to campsites rather than a conscious strategy.

The last type of short *otor* migration is simply part of a long *otor* migration (discussed below) in which a household stops to rest both their livestock and themselves. Although these moves are short they are part of a much longer migration with a particular destination in mind. During these migrations usually only the hired herders, husband, and/or sons/grand-sons will go with the livestock. They take along a small tent or ger and fire-making equipment and go by horseback, while the rest of the household goes by truck and sets up camp. A few households went with everyone by truck doing these small migrations, stopping for upwards of two weeks at a time, benefitting as best as possible from the migration, before arriving and settling in a different *soum*. The households are also attempting to prevent *maliin xarshaa*. When they do

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<sup>190</sup> In the sense that Khalkha is associated with being ‘Mongol’ and Bayad and other ethnic groups are either questionable or simply not Mongol as many claimed about Uriankhai and Durvud.



camp for a week or two they will set up the full ger and fence their stock. They, however, remain ready to move in the case of *xuux*.

***Long Otor (alsiin otor)***

Long *otor* migration typically involves the entire household, although I did encounter several instances in which households maintained base camps in Uguumur and long distant satellite camps in other *soums*. Long *otor* migration whether in the *soum* or outside the *soum* is typically done for a season or more, even up to 2 years, and exceeds 20 kilometers at minimum up to 215 kilometers, the longest single migration recorded. Long migrations can be further categorized into collective migrations and individual household migrations, which will be discussed in detail below. Moreover, even though short *otor* migrations can be conducted within other *soums*, it is typically during long *otor* migrations that households must confront significant inter-*soum* issues. In fact, it is often the issues stemming from being in another *soum* that households conducting long *otor* migrations away from Uguumur and Bayankhtuag that force them to make significantly more short *otor* migrations within those very *soums*. As stated above, when households are on the move, local ethics prescribe that others will allow them time to rest and will not *xuux* or expel them. Most households going on long distance migration will take advantage of this allowance as much as possible staying at one site until the resources no longer suffice or until they are *xuusun* or expelled. Here I discuss two kinds of long *otor* migration.

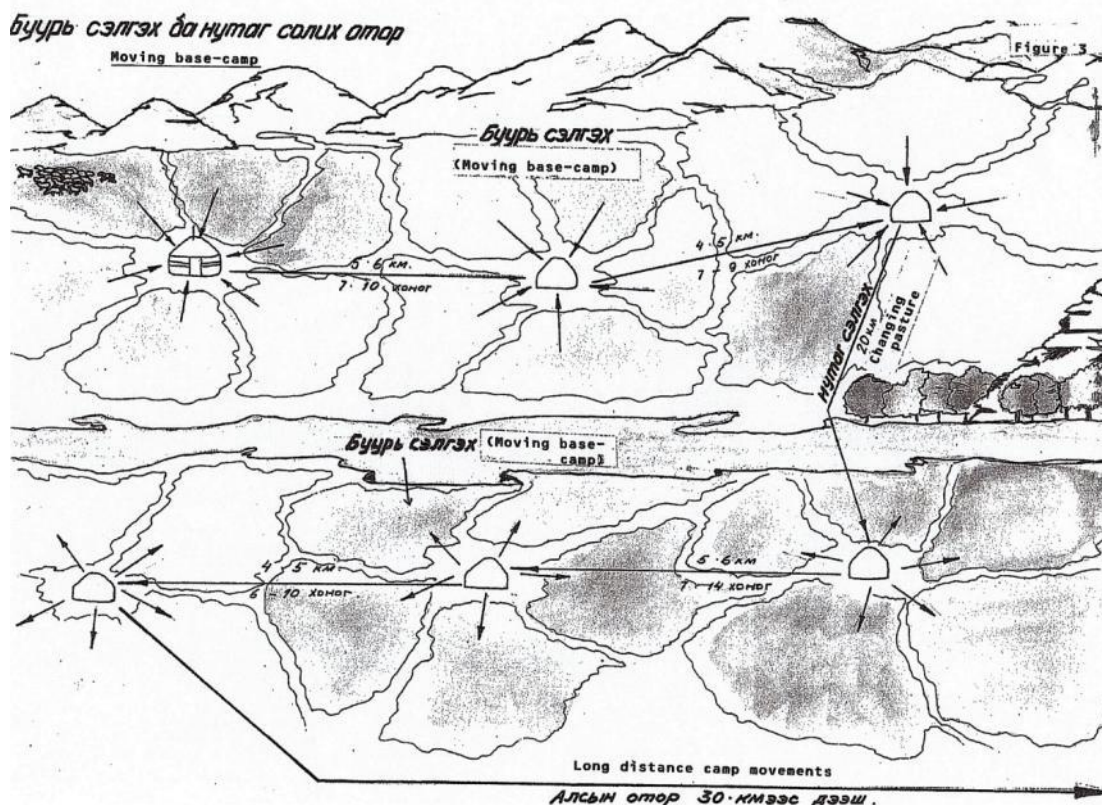


Figure 7.4. In this depiction, Purev (1990) distinguishes between 'buuri selgex otor' or 'moving base-camp', 'nutag solix otor' or 'changing pasture', and 'alsiin otor' or 'far otor'.

Long satellite otor typically occurs for a seasonal only, although in a few cases households were settled for up to a year. These cases all involved fathers and sons or patrons and clients. In no cases did I find either hired herders or cooperative households conducting this kind of migration. The monitoring costs in utilizing a hired herder make this kind of strategy prohibitive. At the beginning of the field research period in December the household I had arranged to reside with had sent their small livestock with a trusted client household to Murun soum, approximately 45 kilometers to the north across the frozen Kherlen river. Because they had only large livestock I moved in with a relative conducting otor in the eastern half of Bayankhutag. The client household returned after winter in time for combing and birthing. They were able to send their livestock north with this client, who two years prior had been his hired herder, because he was originally from Murun and still had relatives in the soum with whom he could uvuljix or winter. Additionally, the employer's relatives were wintering just a few kilometers away (see chapter 8).

Most households who utilize long distance otor in fact move as a whole base camp with their animals. Whether inside or outside the soum, most households either do not have trusted

clients or are not willing to split their household over such long distances. Moving inside their home *soum* is somewhat less complicated because of the legal claims households can deploy. *Otor* outside the *soum*, however, requires a complex calculation of significant costs and risks. Consequently, wealth is strongly correlated to inter-*soum* migration. Wealthy herders can afford the costs and can weather the risks and threats much more easily. Poor households are only able to do this if they go with a wealthy household. Wealthy have the labor necessary to make long migrations, have a wide network of kin in which to collect information, scout pastures, and organize migration and have the necessary wealth for paying bribes, rents, and other transaction costs. On such migrations households typically move in collective groups. Below I discuss the costs and benefits of collective versus independent *otor* migrations.

### **Collective *otor* migration versus individual *otor* migration**

#### ***Collective Otor Migration***

In collective migrations, typically an entire territorial unit, the kin group or the herder group, moves en masse to a new area, whether inside the *soum* or outside the *soum*. These territorial practices are an extension of those discussed in chapter 6. In doing so, they attempt to replicate their customary *nutag* thereby maintaining similar distances between households discouraging the settlement of other non-group households. There are a number of benefits to collective migration, chief among them is that they also can serve as a support network in case of emergency and can monitor each other's livestock to prevent herd mixing and theft.<sup>191</sup>

Many households that do go on *otor*, particularly when leaving the *soum*, go on *otor* in groupings of two or more households, even up to 12 households in one case. Fifty-six percent of all migrations recorded were conducted collectively in groups of 3 or more households (that do not settle as *khot ail*). These collective migrations are typically an extension of the kin group or herder groups. They are not however what researchers refer to when they say *khot ail*. These households do not necessarily cooperate in daily tasks and do not settle on one campsite but are spread out, typically with a minimum distance of 500 m to 1 km between campsites. They are more similar to the pre-Qing *khoro* – large groupings of households that move collectively but did not necessarily cooperate in tasks. The purpose of the *khoro* was more political and intended to secure access to pasture.

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<sup>191</sup> Although herders go on collective migration, they ultimately make the decision to join these collectivities as individual households (though under pressure from others). The point here is that there are costs to going it alone, although it is acceptable to do so. It is often these costs and risks that reinforce the central role of elder men in collective migration.

Seniors in both groups coordinate the timing and location of the move. With some of the older members of the group they will scout out locations, ensuring that there is space for the group's households but not so much space as to encourage others to settle there. These elders will often make the rounds visiting all the households in the group discussing their current situation, whether or not they need to go on *otor*, and what information they collected from friends and elsewhere about pasture, water, and salt conditions. These senior leaders will gradually come to a conclusion on the location of *otor* and then will consult the lama to ensure a propitious day for departure. As the day approaches, the leader will map out a route for the migration and delegate tasks to each household. These leaders are recognized as leaders and will speak as an intermediary between the group and *soum* officials. It is often they who pay bribes or offer gifts in exchange for a blind eye or a formal *otor* contract. In some cases they are also who the officials will kick out, knowing that if his household leaves all the other households will be compelled to go as well.

Herders who went on collective migration argued that wealthy herders must go on collective *otor* if they are visiting another *soum*. Their herds are simply too large to escape detection or to be of little consequence to their potential neighbors. Settling in a large group allows the wealthy herder to shield themselves from adverse problems such as theft, an important means by which local households expel non-local households. Collective groups also provide other benefits. Most herders, as stated above have houses in the *aimag* center while some even have businesses. Individual migration would make straddling between provincial center and the countryside extremely difficult. Consequently, herders will rotate in shifts, so that one herder can be in the provincial center while the other is watching the stock. This is particularly important to middle wealth and poor households. Wealthy households typically already have a hired herder or contract herder who is watching their livestock, freeing them up to maintain their businesses in the provincial center and visit friends and family.

### ***Independent Otor Migration***

For some households independent *otor* migration makes more sense as a viable strategy for conducting *otor* both within Bayankhutag and outside the *soum*. As I discuss in the chapter 8, some households have developed strategies that intentionally avoid cooperation with other households. They argue that collective migrations draw attention while independent migrations can be done quite covertly. Moreover, as the household profiled in chapter 9 argues, if one moves alone and in the 'margins' avoiding trespassing, one can move '*amar*' or easy. Moreover, independent migration requires little advanced coordination and investment. By simply scouting and moving one can reap the benefits of rapid movement. However, this strategy requires a large

investment in mobile technologies like trucks and cars. The one household that practices this strategy year round supplements their pastoral income with taxi income and with a small but close-knit stem family can move quite rapidly. For most though, this strategy is exceedingly costly and risky and since they live year round as herders and are deeply embedded in herding society, such strategies seem some incongruous with ‘tradition’. Moreover, few people find themselves in the same situation as this herder.

### ***Non-otor herd movements***

Non-*otor* herd movements do not require the actual movement of the household itself. Instead, herds are ‘sent’ to other households. Below I describe two major ways in which households do this. Although similar to satellite *otor* migrations, these movements are different from *otor* because they can be accomplished using customary campsites, albeit campsites belonging to others. These strategies simultaneously widen the range of resources one can access and avoid a number of limiting factors that otherwise would restrict such wide resources use.

#### ***Herd-splitting***

Herd splitting can be utilized in several different ways. Fathers and sons cooperate in Uguumur by utilizing two customary campsites at a single time and splitting their herds either by species or by breeding and non-breeding stock. Wealthy households, and particularly cooperative households, that have acquired more than one campsites contract utilize this strategy to increase the area of pasturage they can effectively utilize to increase herds. This strategy can also be used to reduce risk by reducing the grazing competition between animals and occupy different ecological niches.

Other households also do this during the period of *saaxlax* or *sax zoruulex* (weaning) when lambs or milking ewes must be exchanged in order to weaning the lambs/kid. In this case, each *saaxalt ail* or *xurshiin ail* (literally neighbor), utilizes either one customary campsites or two.

#### ***Taviul mal: ‘Put’ livestock***

*Mal tavix* or *sureg tavix* is the practice of ‘putting’ or ‘placing’ livestock with another household. Although satellite *otor* where clients, hired households, or contracted households are involved may seem structurally similar to *mal tavix* practices, the difference lies in that placed herds are usually cared for on customary campsites by client households rather than sent on *otor* even though the owner-household is attempting to accomplish a similar strategy of increasing their resource base. One of my host households ‘placed’ livestock during spring whereby he sent birthing stock to a client household in Kherlen soum where they were cared for on the household’s customary campsites. He sent 100 odd pregnant ewes from which he expected a

minimum return of his ewes and 80 lambs. The additional 20 or so lambs could be kept as a share payment.

### **Non-migration**

Individual and collective moves are clearly costly. Moreover, the threat of someone trespassing on one's campsite and using one's reserve pasture is severe if the trespasser has a lot of livestock (500 or more). This has led particularly poorer households, who struggle to afford the costs of moves anyway, to settle year round on one campsite. Some households are not necessarily poor but rather have intentionally limited their number of livestock. One sedentary herder's campsite is situated in a large pasture of *ders*, next to a well, and centrally located between the river and mountains, giving him access to a diverse and bountiful ecological range. Therefore, he does not have to move as long as he maintains a certain level of stock that will not outstrip the resources available around his campsite. He feeds his stock fodder in fall, winter, and spring, the only household in the sample to do this for three seasons. He also has a large percentage of goats in his herd allowing him to live at a reduced level without a major effect on his income. This herder, however, argues that he must manage his herds better than those who move. This strategy has proved problematic though for minimizing livestock mortality risk.

Some households do not move as part of the territorial *otor* strategy of kin groups. Rather these households stay behind or are '*uldsen*', left behind, in order to monitor their kin groups' customary *nutag* or territory. In two cases, kin groups had one household that settled permanently on a single campsite. These two households are compensated and their stock are cared for if they must be moved. In the example of migration decision-making discussed below, one of the households decided to stay behind and monitor their kins' *nutag*.

### **Other migration strategies**

In the sample of households there were as many strategies as there were households. Herders attempt to gain access to resources in a variety of ways besides those already described. Some herders straddled *soum* borders, grazing their stock on one side while residing on the other side. Others find far off kin in another *soum* and settle with them skirting the need to obtain citizenship or establish an *otor* contract. Although not necessarily a strategy initially, some herders will put animals with relatives of their sons' wives in other *soums*. Some kin groups will encourage a younger household to become a citizen in other *soums*, so that they too can access that *soum* by either placing animals with that household or by simply settling next to them. Two households from Galshar to the south of Bayankhutag had become citizens so that their older relatives could access grazing there. Some wealthy herders intentionally hire herders from other

*soums* so that they too can access their campsite or simply place animals there. Clearly, these strategies demonstrate the improvisational quality of herd and pasture management decisions amongst households in Uguumur.

### **Observations of Decision-Making**

Decision-making and the behaviors that flow from them, as I have pointed out, are encapsulated within fields of power where ‘possibility’ is unequally distributed. This is not to neglect the agency that individuals have in influencing the kinds of migration that result from the decision process. In this section I configure a decision-making narrative assembled through the use of episodic data gathered through observation and conversation with my host households. These decision-making processes and the actions that result demonstrates not only the varying influence of material conditions but also the ways in which decision-making process results from a dialectic of agency and structural conditions where social inequalities confront household strategies and desires.

The episode relayed here occurred over the span of several months, from April to August, as my host households recovered from the devastating effects of *zud* and the grim reality that, with late rains and little snow melt, pastures were slow to regenerate following the previous year of severe drought. The group presented here has been discussed in chapter 4 and 6 in some detail as Batdalai’s *buleg* (see territorial maps in chapter 6 for further description).

### ***Wagons East***

When I arrived in the field in December I joined an encampment of households in the southeast of the *soum*. I had originally intended to camp with Batdalai, a well-known Hero of Labor, who was residing on his customary *uvuljuu* in Tuxum *toirom* back in their home territory of Uguumur. When I arrived at his encampment he informed me that his stock had gone on to Murun *soum* in the north for winter *otor* because the conditions were so bad. He suggested I live with his niece’s family in the 2<sup>nd</sup> *bag* where they were also conducting a winter *otor* in order to escape the potential for *zud*. When I arrived there, three households were configured in a *khot ail*. My host was on the west side in a small *ger*. His mother-in-law, the wealthiest of the three households was situated in the middle. Her son, Amarkhuu was on the east side.

During my time there I attempted to understand why they had selected the campsite they did and why they had not moved with their relatives elsewhere, most of whom were in Murun *soum*. They stated that when they scouted pasture with the rest of the households in the kin group in late October they found this site to be suitable for their needs. Amarkhuu in particular was adamant about moving apart from the rest of the group whose herds were just too big for all to

benefit equally. Typically they would move as a whole group with Batdalai, the eldest male taking a central role in the decision making process and in coordinating the move. However, Tuya, Enkhjargal, and Amarkhuu decided to go out on their own.

Later that spring he asked me what the campsite and pasture were like that winter and I said ‘*muu*’ or bad because so many animals died. He replied that he had told them it was dangerous to stay there because soon the horse herds would come through. The area was *aduu ixtei* he said because of Tumentsogt soum the east in Sukhbaatar and Galshar to the south. With the possibility of a *xar zud* (black zud typically caused by drought) their owners would move the horses herds to more predictable water sources he said like the many wells in eastern Bayankhutag and the Kherlen river. The valley they were going to camp in was also major migration route north. His prediction was correct; the horses came and destroyed the pasture creating a *tuurain zud* situation for Tuya, Enkhjargal, and Amarkhuu. Batdalai said they were ‘*zuruud*’ or stubborn for moving out there; clearly, a comment both on their resistance to his authority as the elder ax and their blind decision. “They wouldn’t listen to my advice and look what happened” he said.<sup>192</sup>

That winter Tuya and the others lost a considerable number of livestock in the zud. Amarkhuu lost so many animals initially that he moved in the middle of winter, a potentially risky decision, to the southern edge of Murun soum, within a few kilometers of the rest of the kin group. His losses abated. Tuya and Enkhjargal, however, decided to stay. In the end, this was a disastrous decision.

In the spring all the households in the kin group had returned with their animals to their home territories in Uguumur, Xaya and Tuxum, a few kilometers away. The main section of the group that had gone up north had lost few livestock while Tuya and Enkhjargal together had lost over 100 animals including 26 cattle. By April Batdalai and the others were already considering a move elsewhere since there was little snow melt and no rain. The winter episode would serve as a backdrop to the decision eventually made in August to move east again.

In April, while I was residing at Batdalai’s camp he was considering a move northward up to Norovlin or Bayan-Adarga soum where a number of Uguumur herders had gone on winter otor contracts and passed the winter with ease. Batdalai had heard that they had extended the contract period until August or at least until after Naadam and that opened an opportunity for him to arrange an agreement between the Bayankhutag soum governor and the governors in those soums. Batdalai was also considering a second strategy: rather than move under an otor contract

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<sup>192</sup> Their decision not only contradicted his own, it also showed little respect for experience and knowledge. As I discussed in the previous chapter, this is an important resource in legitimating his authority.



he would hire a herder from Bayan-Adarga and simply camp on his customary sites. In April, I went with him to the aimag center where he met with and interviewed a new hired herder who still had animals in Bayan-Adarga.

Yet, Batdalai had reservations all along, though, that Bayan-Adarga may be too forested to monitor one's herds (*buren modtoi, yu ch xaragdaxgui*). He insisted that the landscape was full of wolves (*dan chono*). Moreover, he was concerned about *xuux* or expulsion. He knew that moving en masse both provides protection and can bring about problems. He said however that if the pasture is good enough he would move there. Regardless, by mid April he was already setting out to organize his kin group for a big move.

We visited my former host household, belonging to his sister Tuya, where he dropped me off so that I could pack up my bedding supplies and a few of my books. While I was there, he went on to the oldest of his younger siblings, Sodnompil, a champion sheep-herder often referred as *avarga* or 'champion', who also commands a certain amount of respect amongst the kin group. To a certain extent he has his own following within the group. He discussed with Sodnompil the prospect of moving either in late Spring or in summer to a site up north. When he returned to Tuya's he discussed with her, her son-in-law Enkhjargal, and several of her sons about the prospect of moving together (*buunuur*) elsewhere. They discussed potential problems they must look out for including many of the variables discussed above.

Enkhjargal though approached Batdalai outside after most of the discussion was over. He said that moving for him might be '*demii*' or pointless because he had so few stock and suffered so greatly the previous winter. Batdalai said that moving might be pointless but that he needed to find a good place to camp. Enkhjargal had sold both *uvuljuu* and *xavarjaa* to other herders for livestock 2 years prior, most of which he lost in the *zud*. Batdalai suggested that Enkhjargal stay on his campsite. He pointed out that there was *ders*, *buuts*, plenty of *argal*, *xujir*, and much grass. Enkhjargal asked if that would be okay, having his animals graze his pasture, stay in his *saravch* and use his well and Batdalai said that his stock were too few to make much of a difference. Enkhjargal said he would think about this.

When I got in the car with Batdalai, I asked he why he suggested that Enkhjargal camp on his nutag and he said the Enkhjargal will *belcheer xamgaalax* or protect pasture. Moreover, his presence would deter other households and if they were not deterred he could *xuux* or expel them. When I asked him later, it was clear that Enkhjargal understood this.

By May, Batdalaia and Sodnompil also began considering a site out east near Idermeg on the Bayankhutag-Batnorov border where they had done *otor* 2 years prior. At that site, they had successfully weathered a difficult summer and fattened their livestock. They made the decision

not to move until after Naadam. In Late June I was planning on beginning the survey portion of my research. I had hired Batdalai's son Baya for this phase of the study. He was more than willing to rent himself out as a driver and his jeep because we were planning to visit the soums to the north where other households were on otor. He wanted to scout the pasture and campsites. Going with me would mean he could save on fuel costs and make a little extra at the same time. However, because the weather had turned and the rains started I delayed the visit north where flooding is a much more significant problem. Batdalai, his father, was frustrated that I had delayed the visit until after Naadam when they knew the otor contracts ended. Moreover, he had heard word that the households were being expelled. Consequently, he was no longer considering going north. When I was finally prepared to go north, Baya, at his father's instruction, refused, leaving me to find transportation elsewhere. When I asked others why Baya, who is 38 years old, suddenly declined to go north, they said he could not do anything without his father's consent and that he must '*ugend orox yustoi*' or obey. Going up north with no need was '*demii*' even if someone else was paying the bill.

After returning from the visit up north, I ran into Batdalai in the aimag center. He said that he was no longer considering going up north, but now had started to think about going east to Idermeg where Bayankhutag, Batnorov and Bayan-Ovoo soums meet at the Kherlen river. He and the rest of the heads of households were planning to go on a scouting trip by truck in a week and that if the conditions were right, they would move very soon. While in the aimag center I visited Enkhjargal's second ger and asked whether he would be moving north. He said he would not be going because he has too few animals and should just stay close to the aimag center. Idermeg was 70 kilometers away and he needed to be around his wife and son who were planning to stay permanently in the aimag center until they built their herds back up again. He said that he was still considering staying on Batdalai's *nutag* but that he was reluctant. He did not say specifically why but as I learned over the course of the field-work, submitting to Batdalai in such a way would result in a loss of face, particularly because Batdalai (68) was only 15 years older than him (53) and not even blood-kin. Eventually he decided to stay near the river.

When Batdalai and the others including Sodnompil and Tuya scouted the area, the pasture was plentiful with *mongol uvs* (a good forage) and few households were there to compete with. The campsites they selected were just a kilometer or 2 from the river. The sites were new camps, unused previously and therefore lacking in claims. The area had gently sloping hills and a long flat valley a perfect landscape for fall fattening. By mid August the group had resolved to move en masse (*buunuur*) by truck to the Bayankhutag side of the river near Idermeg. They set out on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August early in the morning (see photo series in Figure 7.5). Each household

called on its reserve labor including children and wives. For the households with huge herds such as Batdalai and Sodnompil, they employed additional labor to help drive the stock. Cattle and small stock left early and behind followed the horse herds, driven by motorcycle. The drovers made camp over a series of 5 days sleeping in the beds of trucks, tents, and small make-shift gers. The households moved that day straight to the campsites out east, setting up the gers and arranging the campsite. The camel train with equipment, fencing, and other supplies arrived in 3 days. When the herds arrived the campsites were already set up.

*Figure 7.5. A series of photos from the actual migration from my host family's home nutag to the eastern side of Bayankhutag. Top left: my host household breaks down the ger. Top right: we see another household in the group preparing for the move. Bottom left: the camel train begins the journey. Bottom right: Trucks are loaded and on the move. (Photos taken by author)*



While there they configured themselves along the valley north to south. In chapter 6, I discussed these territorial configurations in some detail. The purpose of moving en masse in such a situation is to saturate a landscape and deter other households from settling. This strategy depended greatly on the group's ability to configure settlement so as to cut off access to certain resources like wells or river banks. Within a few days though, a huge influx of households camped in around them in the valley including a number of Uguumur households returning from

up north in Bayan-Adarga and Batnorov. Moreover, local households were returning from otor in Tumentsogt and Tuvshinshiree soums in Sukhbaatar aimag to the east. The area quickly became crowded with massive herds and the pathway to the river became blocked by other households and their herds. The well to the south seemed a viable option but the area was dominated by weeds resulting from trampling and overgrazing. Even though these territorial issues posed serious problems, the most significant problem was the lack of *xujir* deposits or even *maraa*. They had assumed a local pond was a kind of *tsaidam* or salt lake. In fact it was black water or *xar us*. *Xujir* nutrients are critical for herds in the fall when they are trying to fatten. Without *xujir* the stock would not fatten fully and the quality of the stock would drop as winter set in.

Because of this, in September, after only a few weeks along the river, they decided to move 10 kilometers south-east on to a valley near the foot of Bayan Khuree Uul in the former negdel otor reserve. Sodnompil, however, decided to move further east to the border of Bayankhutag and Tumentsogt soum where he would camp on the border with his daughter-in-law's relatives. The rest of the group, however, found a series of valleys and rolling hills just east of Bayankhuree. Here there were few other households to compete with, a well within a short distance, and a small stream with significant pockets of *maraa*, *xujir*, and *ders*. When I visited some of the local households, I asked them about the presence of Batdalai and his *buleg*. The local households expressed admiration and respect for his presence. Being a Hero of Labor, he is more than a local celebrity, he is the embodiment of herding success. This title carries such weight in the soum and the province for that matter, that Batdalai would have little problem being welcomed anywhere they said. Batdalai and his group remained here until I left the field in November. Just before I left I took some of the household heads around the area to look for winter campsites.



Figure 7.6. Households in the fall encampment occupying a valley. (Photo taken by author)

### Analysis

The purpose of relaying this narrative of decision-making is to illustrate how variously positioned households of different wealth and different degree of social connectedness attempt to

formulate migrations. Moreover, the households in this group were also affected by and considered sets of factors in different ways depending on their capacity to move. Ecological, economic, socio-cultural, and political factors both influenced and enabled or constrained these households' decision in clear ways.

The initial rationale for moving was born of the environmental conditions present in Uguumur. It was also deeply shaped by previous events including the herd losses during the winter. Tuya's household might not have moved so willingly at Batdalai's behest had they not lost livestock the previous winter. Moreover, the options they had were limited by their ability to cooperate with other households. None of these households were willing to migrate alone. Yet, within the kin principles of *ax-duu* some of these households were in positions of authority while others were not. Clearly Batdalai was in a position of authority and Tuya and the other junior households were not. They were instead beholden to his decision in this instance. Consequently, Batdalai's decision, arrived at in concert with the others, compelled his kin group to move collectively to the east.

In that process, Batdalai and the others considered ecological factors such as forage conditions, water and *xujir* availability, landscape features such as flat land and small hills, and various other factors. Each of the households also took into account the economic costs. Enkhjargal, lone among the kin group, rejected the move in favor of remaining in Uguumur because his herds were too small, the cost of moving was excessive, and the distance would make his new split household strategy exceedingly difficult. Consequently, he did not move. Socio-cultural factors such as kin ideology and authority dynamics evidently shaped the decision outcome and in the case of Sodnompil influenced his decision to move along the border with Tumentsogt soum after the group's failure to find *xujir* and *maraa* deposits near the Kherlen river. Moreover, Tuya refused to leave the soum. This was partly based on religious sentiment regarding mountain worship. She found moving out of the deeply harmonious relationship with her mountains of worship was not just offensive in a spiritual sense but also risky in material terms. Cultural framings of citizenship, property rights, and land ideologies meld with political structures and institutions in ways that significantly shaped these outcomes. All of the herders involved were concerned about their ability to secure claims to campsites over which they had little legitimate rights beyond citizenship. They recognized that technically as long as the other household did not have contacts for the campsite they could settle anywhere they pleased in the soum. However, for them, even in another bag, such actions were not proper and consequently they settled on new campsites so as to avoid *xuux* and disputes. Ultimately, they had to move again as prevailing environmental conditions and the needs of their livestock no longer matched.

In this episode, Batdalai was clearly better positioned amongst his kin to move. He could mobilize labor, enact territorial strategies, fend off *xuux*, and easily cover the cost of migration more than once. Moreover, his title and fame carry significant weight as cultural capital and others understand that by moving ‘under his wing’ they enjoy a high level of protection from strategies like *xuux*. Others like Tuya, although wealthy in livestock, could not exert such influence over others. As a woman, her ability to organize and realize a collective migration, although not impossible, is highly tempered. As was evident she is highly dependent on her sons and other men like Enkhjargal. Yet, Enkhjargal, now with so few livestock and the need to access the aimag center, is simply not in a position to effectively migrate in ways that would benefit other households like Tuya. Each of these households, although they desired to exploit the most beneficial resources, were each highly enabled, as in the case of Batdalai, or constrained, like Tuya and Enkhjargal, by a range of social and material factors. In the following two chapters, I explore these factors in greater detail.

### **Conclusion: Mobility and Access**

In this chapter I have described the various factors herders must consider when moving. Some of these factors are opportunities and others are risks. Moreover, I have attempted to convey some of the factors that either enable or constrain variously positioned actors to use mobility as a strategy. These constraints can limit the timing, distance, and end location of migrations. Conversely, enabling factors allow others a range of freedom in optimizing their choice of campsites. Access to critical resources such as migration itself is mediated by these various factors. Social connections, kinship, and other various relationships also play a role. In particular I have sought to stress the importance of effective, recognized, and legitimate claims to a campsite. The ability to access a campsite, in the Mongolian context, makes a mobile livelihood possible and migration strategies feasible. There are significant and very real consequences of the inability to claim and utilize a campsite. In the context of disaster, as the next chapter describes, lack of campsite access and therefore migration as a risk mitigation strategy, can severely impact a herder’s ability to make a living on the range. In chapter 8, I look specifically at the role of law and governance in mediating how herders can manage the risk of *zud*. In chapter 9, I look more closely at individual household migration strategies over the course of the research period and how these positioned strategies result in varied rates of livestock loss in the context of risk and looming disaster.

## **Chapter 8 Administering *Zud*: Law and Disaster ‘Management’**

### **Introduction**

As I argued in chapter 2, *zud* is a historical production, borne not from some externally-derived ‘natural’ event, but is generated in the dynamic processes of human-ecological interaction. In the last several chapters I have explored the deep inequalities that reign on the steppe, themselves partial products of the post-socialist transformation and the various kinds of institutional work in the years since. In this chapter I explore another critical point of this production, one that is much closer to the moment of disaster itself. The current administrative apparatus in Mongolia includes institutions that are charged with ‘managing’ disaster like *zud*. Included in these state institutions are legal procedures and administrative personnel that, as critical tools of governance in the context of dire consequences, can do a great deal to alleviate the potential effects or even occurrence of *zud*. Here I explore how these institutions, procedures, and personnel are reflected in on-the-ground actualities of negotiation, decision-making, and governance in action. Doing so is extremely critical. The formation of *otor* contracts was one of the single most important resources that allowed some to escape *zud* and forced others to face it.

Consequently, in this chapter I describe the history of disaster management institutions in Mongolia, many of which have been retained for hundreds of years. Additionally, I unveil the current formal state-based structure of *zud*-related disaster management at the national, provincial, and local levels. In doing so I explore how various actors at various levels of government interact to produce *otor* contracts. Inseparable from such discussions are the various positioning of law and the forms of patronage and strategic ‘gifting’ practices through which these meanings are filtered.

### **History of Disaster Management**

#### **Pre-socialism**

Prior to solidification of the feudal system in Mongolia, there were few administrative mechanisms to deal with climatic shifts or weather-based hazards. As Bold (1999) demonstrates, the primary technique for dealing with hazards like drought and adverse winter conditions was large-scale migration. He examines research conducted by the Chinese historian Wang (1980), who collected data on winter conditions and dust storm frequency from a number of historical sources between the periods 250 BC and 1900 AD. During that time there were 202 years in

which winter storms such as blizzards or other problematic conditions occurred.<sup>193</sup> Additionally, between the periods 470 BC and 1790 AD he tracked the occurrence of dust storms. The timing of these weather events, winter storms and dust storms, correlated with periodic migrations of nomadic Mongol ethnic groups south into China. Raiding, pillaging, and war were common in these occurrences. These migrations would have been conducted at the clan level but lacked any institutionalized form and were largely opportunistic.

With the emergence of the imperial bureaucracy and feudal administrative system the management of disaster became increasingly tied to the state apparatus. The ability to deal with these events was restricted or at least mediated by a vastly different socio-political system than in previous eras. As I described in chapters 4 and 5, the feudal apparatus was acutely pre-occupied with boundary maintenance and the territorial control of feudal serfs. Consequently, the framework for dealing with adverse conditions reflects this historical configuration. In the text *Gazriin Xariltsaa* (Land Relations) there are a number of references to *zud* and drought. Moreover, in Rasidondug (1975), there are number of legal cases concerning the treatment of serfs in times of stress. Local *zasag* in difficult years would arrange for cross-border pasture use, similar to today's *otor* contracts. Natsagdorj (1963) quotes an 1885 source from Tsetsen Khan *xoshuu* near contemporary Uguumur:

In the event of a drought or *zud*, in order to keep livestock from their pasture, each person must carefully examine the situation, searching for a means not to scatter too far, and must return immediately to his original *nutag* when the weather improves (107)

Many of these documents deal with the legal issues surrounding cross-border pasture use during times of stress. Such arrangements were not always free.

In another case banner officials insisted that several commoners move with their animals south of a river, but by giving the officials over 160 sheep and 20 rubles the plaintiffs obtained permission to stay on the better northern side until the weather became warm. (Sneath 2001)

Some disasters were so widespread that the administrative system itself was put at risk. Bold (1999: 35) cites events in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries:

The long drought in 1737 in the Tsetsen Khan aimag and the droughts in the Zasagt Khan aimag during the reign of emperor Jiagingqing (1796-1820) and in the Tusheet Khan aimag during the reign of emperor Shan-fung (1851-61) which were especially devastating have been ascertained. The drought in Zasagt Khan in particular was so bad that duty from the aimag to the government was deferred for 20 years (citing Natsagdorj 1963).

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<sup>193</sup> This seems to match the 1 in 10 years frequency of widespread, catastrophic *zud* observed today. Most herders rate the frequency at 1 in 5 for bad winters with one major *zud* and one minor.



In addition to permitting cross-boundary movement, local zasag and other nobles organized hay-cutting among their khamjilaga. One of the primary methods of providing corvee was the cutting of hay in late summer and early fall. Corvee was also provided in the form of transport stock, carts, and other technologies that increased mobility. By increasing mobility, the nobility were significantly better placed to deal with the risk of drought and zud.

Although the system of disaster management reflected the bureaucratic administrative framework of the time, as it does today, the primary goal was the maintenance of mobility. Clearly, inter-xoshuu movement does not compare in distance with the massive pre-feudal migrations of ancient Mongolia, but the movement system was nevertheless maintained albeit at a smaller scale. In the years between the end of feudal authority and the negdel collectives, there was virtually no institutional capacity for assisting herders in managing weather-based hazards. Yet, the resource management regime was largely open access and cross-border movement was relatively free. Moreover, as a herder here points out, weather conditions were also very different.

D: In that period did you do otor?

Herder J: In the past of course we did otor. Then there were no cars, trucks, or these big wagons. They went by camel cart. If you visited here you would see we only had camel carts. We also went on otor to other soums. In 1943-44 during the year of the monkey a really bad zud happened. We went way far north of Umnudelger almost into Russia. There was a drought and so there was nothing here. No grass and this dangerous zud happened. Then the war.

D: So before the negdel gan and zud happened.

Herder J: Yes, not so bad, zud would happen. We went to Galshar soum to the south because there was too much snow here and to the north. There was no drought during that time, though. Zud happened, but drought was very rare. It was not like now. Since 2000 it has become really warm, desertification and drought are happening. Then during the summers there was plenty of rain, but winter there was much snow.

D: So that period you were going south to Galshar? Normally?

Herder J: Yes, we were going, very often. Now we do not go south. Now droughts happen and the sand storms come this way northward. So we have to go north now.

## **Socialism**

In the 1950s and 1960s the emergence of socialist collectives vastly altered the institutional risk management apparatus in Mongolia. Negdels introduced a hay-making and fodder production system that outstripped the capacity of individual households and kin groups by far. In 1985, for instance, negdels and state farms (since collapsed) produced 1,275,600 tons of hay for normal non-emergency fodder provision (Swift 2005). Additional emergency fodder was raised, cut, and stored for use during times of stress as well. At times this emergency feed would be trucked or even brought by helicopter to households during extreme zud events. Moreover, negdels provided trucks for transport and instituted auxiliary brigad whose sole occupation was

moving households from one campsite to the next. Negdels also provided veterinary assistance, shelter and corral maintenance, and well-building. Deep water wells provided greater access to pasture during difficult times such as xar zud when there is little snowfall. The high investment in technology such as trucks, tractors, and even helicopters to bring in emergency hay was unprecedented.

The most important risk mitigation measure developed in the collective period was the organization of movement which included sending employee households on long-distance otor by trucking livestock and herdsman out of affected areas to unaffected ones. This was also supported by a vast network of technical staff and formal resource management institutions. The local land authorities mapped out local distribution of resources and the Institute of Hydrology and Meteorology began pasture yield surveys in 1960. This data was used to both to predict poor conditions and coordinate the movement of herding households. A number of works cite the increased use of otor in the negdel period (Bazargur 2002; Erdenebaatar 1999; Humphrey 1978; Humphrey and Sneath 1999). In the soum archives I found numerous orders directed at the movement of herders. In 1976 a drought was declared by provincial Institute of Hydrology and Meteorology. Consequently, the Ministry of Agriculture which had superseding authority over herder movements submitted a *togtool* or order to Temtsel negdel.

*Otor Directive has been recieved.* MoA office has ordered that all livestock are to be sent on otor from June until October. Report 10 day otor results to N. Davaadorj. (Temtsel negdel) otor [shtab] organize the following:

In the first period from June 10<sup>th</sup> until July 10<sup>th</sup>, send households to territories with sufficient water and *xujir* and *suur* (similar to khot ail encampments) herders must move and change pastures no less than 3 times. During this period organize milk work and collect dairy products.

This increased risk management capacity was strongly supported by herders. In interviews herders lauded the achievement of the negdel in assisting herders in dealing with drought and zud.

Herder B1: In the negdel, we did fattening otor but this was in our nutag, close to our campsite we would do otor moves. But the negdel prepared everything and would tell us where to move, this way, that way. They would move us. Bag darga, soum darga, and other leaders were always coming and checking and asking what we need. They'd bring hay, bring labor, and they would bring other things too like oil, it was like this then. In the negdel period when a zud would happen, they would really help, they would bring hay and xiiveg, they would bring flour, dried milk, and other things ...

Herder G3: They would send us on otor, the trucks and extra labor would come and send us on otor ...

Herder B1: In the negdel period, they really helped us so much – for example, during the spring when lambs and kids are born, they would send 'breeding assistants' (tulchin), but now since the

private economy has come, we must do this ourselves, there is no assistance, we must decide ourselves.

Herder Sh: The animals went on otor then too. There were pasture reserves in other soums like Bayan-Adarga that herders were sent to. The stock was sent there once before, many years ago. Yes, herders would be sent to reserve pastures in other soums. Bayan-Adarga is over 200 kilometers away and they would send all the livestock there.

Clearly, the negdel system instituted a risk management apparatus that reduced and mitigated the catastrophic consequences of hazardous conditions that can produce zud. Much of this system however, was lost in the immediate years following the democratic revolution.

### **Post-Socialism**

The institutional apparatus for dealing with disaster risk largely disappeared as the central government lost Soviet aid and pushed through various reforms aimed at minimizing government services. Decollectivization, livestock privatization, and decentralization reforms continued this path toward near total institutional collapse in the rural countryside. In the intervening years, however, with the growth of targeted development aid the institutional apparatus for managing disaster has grown significantly. Legal reforms, ministerial reshuffles, the formation of new institutions and agencies, and local level development projects have all been aimed at improving institutional risk management capacity and reducing the risk of drought and zud disasters. The extent that this apparatus positively affects herders' ability to manage the various risks they face is highly questionable.

In 1993 the 'law on government' shifted much of the disaster management responsibility from the Ministry of Agriculture to the newly created Ministry of Nature and the Environment (Swift 2005). The MoNE was charged with the protection, sustainable use, and rehabilitation of natural resources, formulating ecological policies, prevention of natural disasters, and the 'rational' management of land use planning. Conversely, the Ministry of Agriculture was charged with livestock and crop sector policies, food security, policies to protect livestock from disaster, vet and breeding services, use of agricultural land and pastures and supply of water, agricultural extension, rodent control, and the operation and maintenance of state hay and otor grazing reserve. At the institutional level, in many cases, there was only one person assigned to each of these duties. The MoA (eventually MoFALI), however, was significantly larger and more robust than the MoNE and has a significant institutional history in dealing with these issues. Yet, even there the budgetary funds were utterly lacking. Combined with the legal and institutional confusion, risk reduction, management, and emergency preparation was not prioritized during the initial years of 'transition'. Moreover, the years between 1993-1999 were rather pleasant with mild winters and summers.

The legal situation remained stagnant until the 1999-2000 *zud* when new impetus to reinvigorate the administrative capacity to manage and risk disaster risk came to the forefront of national politics. In 2001 the state released *Togtool* 48 which specifically addresses *zud* management. The various ministries were charged with:

specify(ing) the roles of different government agencies, economic entities, and livestock owners coping with potential risks from drought and *zud*, in minimizing losses, and in maximizing preparedness and operational readiness and ... elaborate(ing) rules of assessment of emergency situations, identify forms of action and organizations able to minimize negative consequences and set up efficient and operational natural risk management networking.

Moreover, *Togtool* 48 specifies activities individual agencies and ministries should undertake. As pointed out by Swift (2005) the order is guided by the concept of ‘subsidiarity’ or the devolution and decentralization of activities and authorities to the lowest level of administrative hierarchy as possible and as close to the citizens concerned as warranted. Another result of the 1999-2001 *zud* disasters was the passing of the 2002 land law which specifically addresses activities local *soum* administrators can undertake in order to assist herders in averting *zud*.

52.2 ... based upon local conditions and traditions the carrying capacity of pastures and the opinions of *bag khurals*, *sum* governors can decide to allocate winter and spring pastures to groups of herders under conditions and contract for the purposes of preventing degradation and of restorations.

54.8. In the event of a need of evacuation or a movement to territories of other *aimags* or *soums* due to natural disasters or other emergencies, the relevant level governors shall make a decision to reach an agreement. Where an agreement between these governors cannot be reached, the case shall be resolved by a higher level governor or the Cabinet.

54.9. Citizens Representatives’ *Khurals* of *aimags* shall determine *soum*-level reserve rangelands to be used in the events of natural disasters, *dzud* and droughts, including its boundaries and limits. The Cabinet shall determine *aimag*-level reserve rangelands, including their boundaries and limits upon requests of [*aimags* or *soums*].

These laws give vast authorities to local *soum* and *aimag* administrators. I discuss these legal provisions in some detail below. Moreover, in 2005 the National Parliament created the ‘National Coordinating Council of Pastureland Management’ by *togtool* and accorded it a budget and work plan; although, it is uncertain what they have accomplished up to this point.

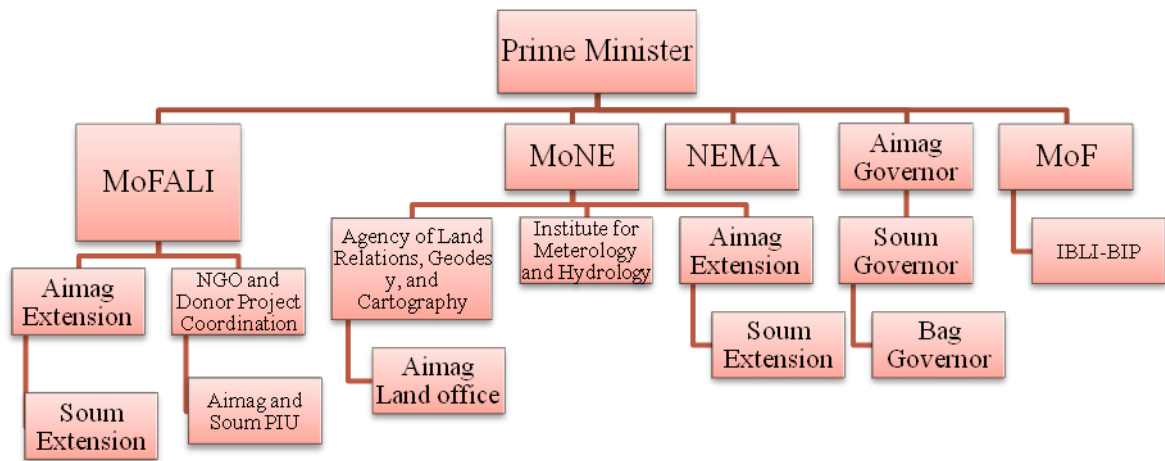


Figure 8.1 State central government ministries, institutions, and actors involved in disaster management. (Compiled from Swift (2007), interviews, and observations).

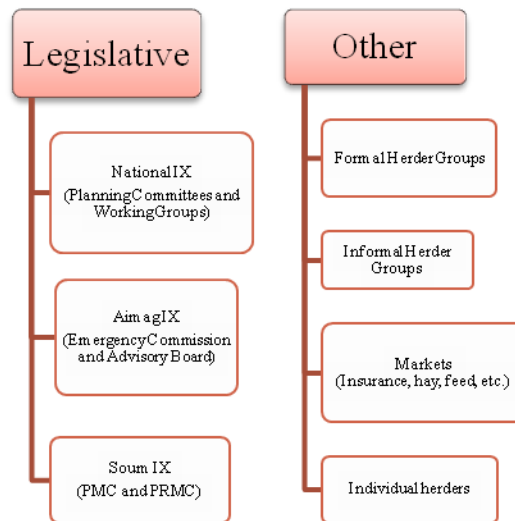


Figure 8.2. Legislative and non-governmental institutions involved in disaster management. Development and aid institutions are managed by MoFALI (see Figure 8.1 above). (Compiled from Swift (2007), interviews, and observations)

In Figures 8.1 and 8.2 above I have charted the various agencies, institutions, and actors that carry responsibilities and duties in the prevention or mitigation of a zud disaster. The most important ministerial institution in disaster risk management is the Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Light Industry. The ministry is charged with emergency fodder and hay production, the operation, organization and maintenance of emergency otor grazing reserves such as Kherlen-Bayan Ulaan, veterinary support, encouraging commercial hay production and smallholder irrigated hay production, well building, rodent control, inter-aimag otor grazing, and national meat reserve. The MoNE operates the Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology which sends out

long-term forecast and advice on ‘young animal rearing’, conducts weather forecasting, radio support along with the MoFALI including 2,6,12,24 hour, five day, weekly, monthly, and seasonal forecasts, pasture assessments, winter preparedness reports, and hazard forecasting.<sup>194</sup> Each of these ministries have aimag and soum extension officers. The *aimag* land office is charged with managing inter-soum movement and pasture disputes; although, I found that it is rarely involved in either of these activities and occupies most of its time with administrative possession contracting and the private land market. Within the ministries there are often only a few people charged with managing these tasks for the entire country; consequently, there simply is not enough capacity to handle many of these problems. In addition to these ministries is the National Emergency Management Agency created in 2004 with support from the UNDP under the 2003 Disaster Management Law. They now control the delivery and operation of the state emergency fodder and hay fund and emergency distribution of fuel to local administrations. The agency is largely charged with a coordinating function and supporting with technical expertise in the event of a disaster. At the soum and aimag levels, local administrations are charged with maintaining local emergency hay-fields and grazing reserves and establishing emergency management plans in order to effectively react to fast-changing conditions on the ground.

In practice each of these institutions and agencies has demonstrated limited capacity in fulfilling these duties. Emergency hay reserves are often of poor quality, insufficient in quantity and excessively slow in delivery. In Uguumur and other zud-affected areas as I describe below this fodder made next to no difference in stemming or mitigating the effects of worsening conditions on livestock. Additionally, in 2000 hay production was at 689,000 tons despite a huge increase in livestock. This is half what it was in 1985, when livestock numbers were significantly lower. The private companies that now operate commercially utilize outdated equipment and produce quantities nowhere near sufficient. The hay market is also very poor as herders do not buy hay during good years. This unpredictability means hay making is not a manageable venture for most small businesses. Relief agencies supply additional hay and herders for the most undertake this activity themselves when they can; yet, production is still dwarfed by socialist levels. Emergency otor reserve coordination has also faltered. For example, Kherlen-Bayan Ulaan was set aside during socialism and left unused during most of the year so that there would be

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<sup>194</sup> Radio transmission of weather reports is a vital and nearly universally used technology. Yet, most herders only listen once a day as they do not have the income to purchase batteries. I found that wealthy herders, however, often leave the radio on for a good portion of the day. Unfortunately, because the forecasting reported only covers regions, herders only use this service to give them a general picture of what the weather is like. For more locally specific weather information, herders rely on each other and evaluating local conditions.

sufficient grazing for an emergency. Now herders live in the reserve and consequently, the area has not been utilized in an effective way to support herders during disaster. This problem has been replicated at aimag otor reserves and soum reserves. Veterinary services are also now provided only for a fee; consequently, many herders choose to forego vaccinations and medications. There is also an immense amount of corruption surrounding veterinary services and medical treatment.

Many of the institutional responsibilities of the ministries are simply unfulfilled. MoFALI, for example, lacks a presence in most of the activities they are charged with in Bayankhutag. With only one extension agent and the immense amount of responsibilities and duties assigned to her, there is simply no reasonable expectation that all of these duties will be accomplished. Many of the activities are ‘coordinated’ at the ministry level on paper but are not actually undertaken at the local level because of lack of coordination, funds, and initiative. MoNE is able to accomplish many of their goals remotely. IMH does most of its activities out of the aimag center where their staff is located. The information is transmitted through pamphlets and radio. Yet, Swift (2005) points out that their pasture assessment surveys, conducted in coordination with MoFALI, are of poor quality and radio reports can be slow or too general to benefit herders.

In place of the ministries, institutions, and agencies responsible for managing disaster risk in Mongolia a number of development and aid agencies have stepped in to fill the vacated space. A number of institutions such as IFAD, UNDP, World Bank, and Swiss Development Agency have carved out roles in the risk management framework of the country. Through the Sustainable Livelihoods Program the World Bank has instituted a Pastoral Risk management component which includes projects like the Index-Based Livestock Insurance project. A number of institutions have promoted herder cooperatives as a means to deal with disaster risk. These projects at varying degrees have implemented pasture management groups, herder cooperative groups, soum risk management committees, aimag risk management committees, and various other institutions. A number of organizations have also attempted restocking programs, cash-for-herders programs, well construction, and the dissemination of herder manuals for risk management (Erixson 2009). These development and aid initiatives are part and parcel to a larger drive to decentralize power to aimag, soum, bag, and household level as the concept of ‘subsidiarity’ promotes.

In reality, herders themselves take on much of the responsibility of disaster management, utilizing various measures to avoid disaster risk including mobility. Herders prepare fodder and hay, either by purchasing it or cutting and preparing it themselves, take out loans to cover the

costs of moving, establish savings accounts in case of emergencies, and in the last few years some herders have taken out IBLI policies on livestock. Access to financial institutions is critical as mobility has become increasingly costly and mobility has become the primary means by which herders avoid hazardous conditions. In the next section I look more closely at how herders were able to manage disaster risk in the face of zud conditions. What I hope to make clear is the importance of administrative institutions in mediating how disaster, and the strategies herders take to avoid disaster, play out on the ground.

## **Governing Disaster in Uguumur 2007-2008**

The unfolding of the winter 2008 zud in Uguumur and herders attempts to effectively mitigate and react to the underlying hazards through migration are intertwined in a complex historical process preceding the actual onset of the weather events themselves. Narrowing my focus here to the immediate events of the previous year, in the following section, I focus primarily on the interaction between varying levels of government, from the prime minister to the local bag governors, and with local herders themselves.

Below I have included a time line of events surrounding the zud disaster and sets of actions taken by both herders and administrative actors alike. This time line should serve as a guide for the following discussion.

### *Time Line*

#### **2007**

##### *June*

- Herders recognize a drought is unfolding

##### *July*

- A few herd-owners have placed their animals in other soums or have left on otor
- Galshar households move en masse in groups to Bayankhutag

##### *August*

- Aimag issues Togtool 43 which authorizes otor contracts
- Some herders have already left Bayankhutag, many have left Uguumur

##### *September*

- Herders continue to leave
- Aimag re-issues and extends Togtool 43
- Aimag Soum Governors' meeting – initial contracts negotiated by soum governors under the recommendations in Togtool 43.
- Bag Herder Meeting in Uguumur – herders are told to leave and go to contracted soum. A number of herders contest the contract.

##### *October*

- Herders continue to leave to other nearby soums, some move to contracted soum.
- Prime Minister issues Togtool 261
- Prime Minister issues Daalgavar 12



*November*

- Herders continue to leave to other nearby soums and other parts of Bayankhutag.
- Bayankhutag soum governor arranges new contract in Kherlen for herders on otor there.
- Bayankhutag soum governor arranges new contract in Bayan-Ovoo for herders on otor there.

*December*

- Most households have reached their winter campsites.
- Tumentsogt households enter Bayankhutag

**2008**

*January*

- Winter conditions worsen in Uguumur and Bayankhutag, animals begin to die, some herders face *zud*
- Bayankhutag soum governor arranges new contract in Norovlin for a single household
- Emergency hay arrives at soum center in Bayankhutag, few households obtain it

*February*

- Winter conditions improve but pasture remains poor

*March*

- Contract periods end for all soums except Bayan-Adarga
- Many households have returned to Bayankhutag

*April*

- Soum governor helps households extend contract in Norovlin

*May*

- Bayan-Adarga soum ITX attempts to expel herders; herders reach extra-contractual arrangement with bag and soum governors

*June*

- Rains are late, possibility of drought seems eminent; some households begin considering otor again

*July*

- Bayan-Adarga soum orders Bayankhutag households to leave the soum

*August until departure from field in November*

- Households leave Bayan-Adarga soum; only a few households still on otor in other soums – Kherlen, Norovlin, Batnorov, Bayan-Ovoo, largely under non-contractual arrangements or attempting to evade detection

**Administrative Organization of Disaster Preparation**

***‘Formal’ Institutions***

Much of what observers would term ‘formal’ disaster management institutions on the ground resembled ‘informal’ ones. This is largely a product of decentralization policies which have severed in many ways the connections between local authorities and those at successively higher levels of the state. Given the wide berth of legal powers and authority assigned to soum and aimag governors, the presence of the state has largely been filtered through their offices. Although there are number of ways in which the state retains political control through technologies such as registering, welfare entitlements, and education, the operation of local governance has taken on an informal quality that is mediated largely through the personal

interactions of governors, other administrators, local representatives, and rural citizens. This interaction produces a context in which state power and local mediation is difficult to separate. Consequently, I attempt in this chapter to demonstrate the situated-ness and messiness of governance in action rather than governance as some abstract ideology by focusing largely on the socio-legal and institutional means through which rural administrations attempt to mitigate disaster such as through pasture assessment, the issuing of *togtool*, and the negotiation of *otor* contracts.

### **Institutions and Responsibilities**

Various institutions govern the response to emergency and disaster. The constitutional and legal framework for emergency and disaster management situates responsibilities at each successive level of governing body from the national government down to local bag administrative bodies. For general emergency situations there are the *Ontsgoi Baidliin Xeltes* (Emergency Response) at each respective level but most prominently at the national and provincial level. However, these emergency response teams are largely responsible for non-zud emergencies and disasters. For example, in the May 26, 2008 storm, emergency response teams helped in the clean up and prevention of disease but were not responsible for assisting herders prior to the event in a risk management role or in helping herders cope with the effects of the storm.

Pastoral risk management issues and zud disaster management are organized and coordinated primarily at the MoFALI which has long been responsible for organizing and coordinating the primary risk management activities like weather forecasting, otor organization, national emergency grazing reserves, and hay production. Many of the most important activities take place however at the provincial level. The gathering of data for pasture assessments, winter preparation plans and activities are done largely by the provincial MoFALI extension and local Institutes for Meteorology and Hydrology. These are then collected and analyzed by MoFALI and announced on a national scale via the Prime Minister's office. However, there are few procedural outlines for how disaster management should be organized between the various governing bodies. Much of this is done immediately prior to an event, during the event, and as I found, often after the fact. Below I look at the way in which the process worked leading up to the zud of 2007-2008 in Uguumur.

In the flow chart (Figure 8.3) seen below I have illustrated the ideal, formal process for disaster management preparation, organization, and execution including the declaration of disaster for the establishment of otor contracts specifically. I do not look at other activities such as emergency grazing reserve coordination or emergency hay production because these activities

did not affect the herders of Uguumur.<sup>195</sup> Uguumur herders, also, were not contracted to enter the national emergency grazing reserve at Bayan Ulaan in Delgerkhaan aimag. Herders from other soums and other aimags were given priority.<sup>196</sup> Rather, the critical disaster preparation activities carried out by local governments were otor contracts. In the sections that follow I look at the formation of winter and spring otor contracts between Bayankhutag and other soums.

Before I do this, I want to define some of the legal terms that are critical in understanding this process. *Togtool* are resolutions or orders that are issued as legal acts and have the weight of law. A strict translation would approximate to ‘imposition’. They are not law per se, however. Proper law or *xuuli* are only issued by the national UIX. However, all *ix xural*, at the national, provincial and soum level can issue *togtool* which are much more limited in scope and time than *xuuli* which affect all until they are overturned. *Daalgavar* are instructions or tasks that take the form of legal acts as well but do not carry the weight of law. They are essentially procedural issues that inform institutional actors of their assigned duties and activate dormant administrative roles. The issuance of these legal acts is formulated in an encapsulated hierarchy of governance and authority. Sequentially ordered, they flow from the top down. In reality, however, the sequence is often found to be in reverse. Many of the orders and instructions discussed below were issued after the fact.

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<sup>195</sup> For example, the distribution of emergency hay in Bayankhutag was an odd affair. The hay came in early February after most animals had died and was of such poor quality that even I was shocked when I saw it. Herders complained to me that it was all weeds, moldy, and generally inedible. Few even bothered to obtain the hay. Moreover, the local government was charging herders 4,000 MNT for only a few *boodol* or bales. What made the situation even more odd was that herders were given 1,000 MNT to cover transportation costs!

<sup>196</sup> Regardless, most herders pointed out that the reserves are no longer reserves anyway as local herders in Delgerkhaan use the reserve throughout the year reducing the capacity of the pasture to satisfy otor herds. Moreover, the coordination of these grazing reserves is haphazard and is often conducted no differently than other otor contracts. Technically each province and soum are thought to have grazing reserves where herders can go during difficult times to pasture their herds. Bayankhutag is a good example of why this is no longer the case. The old grazing reserves in Tuxum and around Bayan Khuree mountain have largely been contracted by local cooperative groups and wealthy herders through possession contracts and well contracts. Moreover, there are no active institutions which are charged with monitoring and enforcing the rules that are thought by some, including those in the otor reserve office in MoFALI, to govern these reserves. These realities are not lost on herders who fully understand that grazing reserves are a thing of the past.

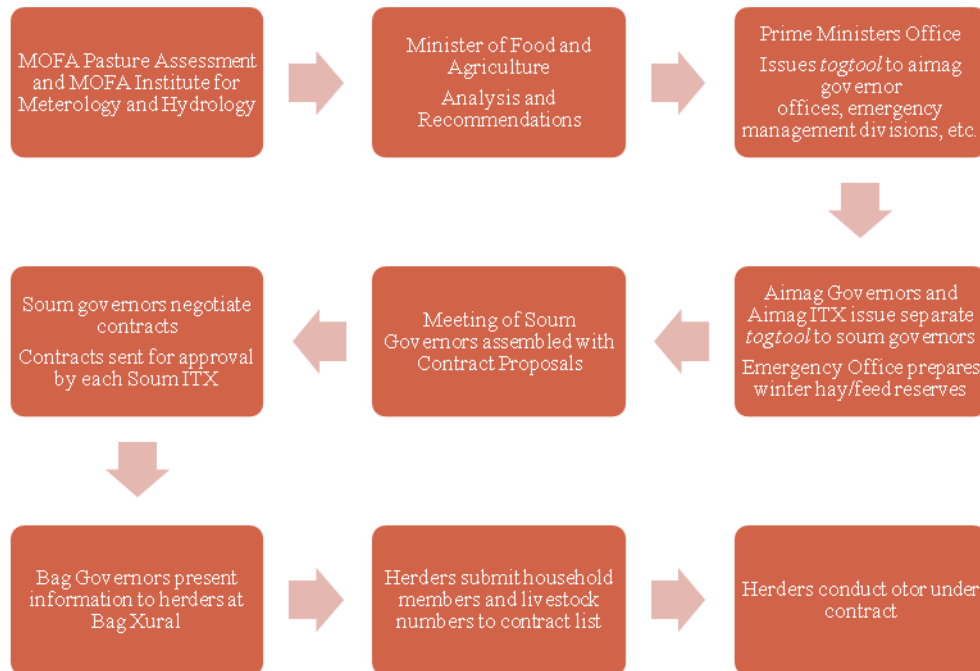


Figure 8.3. Ideal flow chart of how otor contracts should operate in principle. (Assembled from interviews with soum and aimag officials)

### Pasture Assessment

By mid-summer of 2007 rainfall in Uguumur had been meager and with the continued lack of rainfall the possibility of drought increased. Herders themselves, months before state and local administration officially declared Bayankhutag and Uguumur as drought zones, recognized the need to move. Many of the households in the study sample were already conducting otor elsewhere when the MoFALI conducted the annual pasture assessment upon which the declarations were based. In August of every year since 2000, the MoFALI, the local meteorological stations, and the soum MoFALI extension agents across Mongolia conduct surveys of pasture capacity in each bag. The data is then compiled, analyzed, and published as maps to aimag and soum administrators. In September of 2007 the MoFALI released the map below of Mongolia. In the map we can see regions marked by several different colors. The assessment attempts to predict pasture conditions in winter and spring based on 3 overall factors: species diversity, overall biomass, and projected precipitation or temperature changes. Dark green represents very good pasture conditions; light green good conditions; yellow fair conditions; orange poor conditions; red severe conditions. There are problems with this assessment. The MoFALI uses terminology that presents the conditions as stemming from the result of over-

grazing and they do not distinguish between drought and severe degradation.<sup>197</sup> Consequently, dark red is defined as a condition where pasture resources have been exceeded (*xetersen*) 5 times rather than simply resulting from a severe drought. Nevertheless, the map does adhere at least to ‘pasture condition’ whatever the source of ‘pressure’ at least for Khentii.

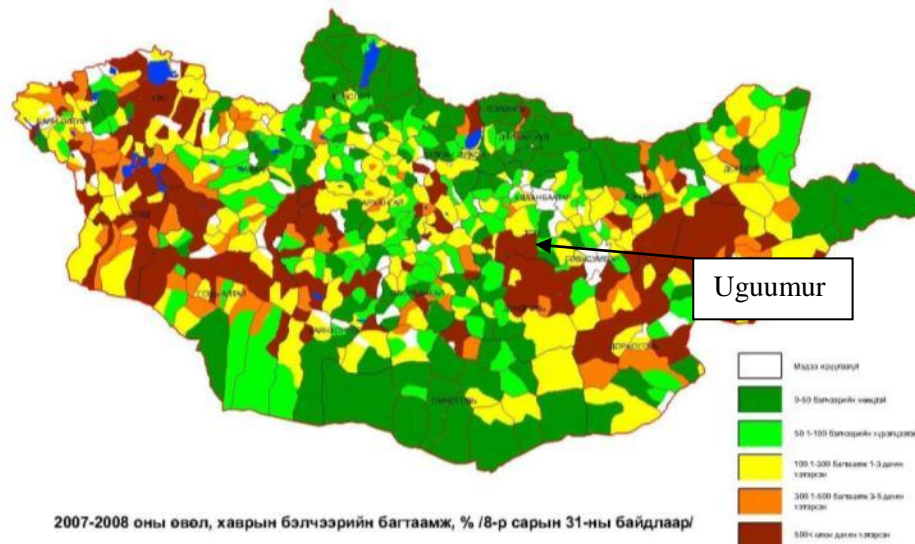


Figure 8.4. 2007-2008 Pasture Condition Assessment. Dark red represents ‘severe conditions’. (Obtained from MoFALI)

Whereas in years past the Bayankhutag soum administration and MoFALI extension agent had failed to comply with legal requirements and organize pasture surveys, they completed the task in 2007. In the pasture assessment map below (Figure 8.5), we can more clearly see the distribution of pasture resources across the province. As the map makes sufficiently clear, the southern part of Xentii aimag, including Bayankhutag, was experiencing severe pasture conditions. As the rainfall data shown previously demonstrates, this was predominantly a result of drought. In the official description released to government institutions, the situation in Bayankhutag was described in the following way:

Bayankhutag soum: In all bags *todorxoilson* (described). In all territories pasture capacity has been many times exceeded. There is no opportunity for pasturing animals and hay/forage preparation. Water resources are also poor.

<sup>197</sup> This is part of a pattern of blame which the government has shifted onto the shoulders of herders.

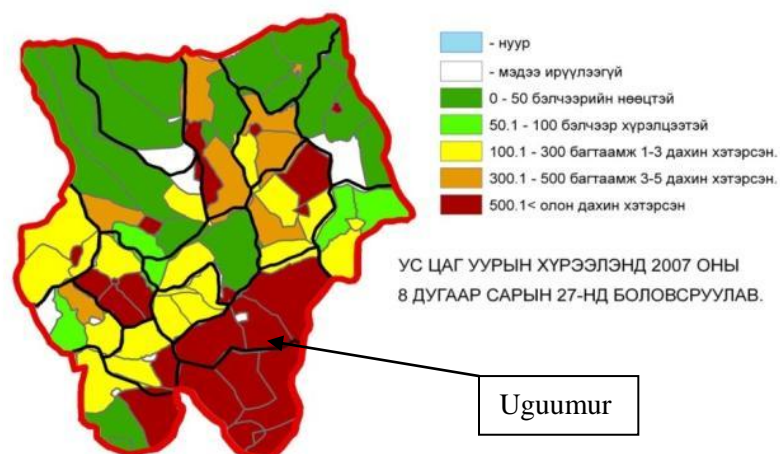


Figure 8.5. Pasture Conditions Assessment data produced by provincial extension office in summer 2007.

Though the official line also blamed herders for overgrazing, for herders in Bayankhutag and Uguumur the situation was clear. Lack of rainfall had resulted in a severe drought; for many, the worst they had seen since privatization. The conditions were so poor they set in motion a series of actions by national, provincial, and local administrations. Evidently, herders themselves, if they could, were not going to succumb to fate; many actively began the process of organizing long otors to better pastures with or without government assistance or oversight.

### ***Togtool: Governance Ex Post Facto***

Prior to the release of the official MFA analysis and recommendations, the local Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology in Undurxaan made recommendations to the Aimag Governor and the Aimag ITX which released in late August an order or *togtool* to soum governors concerning the drought situation and winter preparations.

According to the aimag advisory resolution and the recommendations of the Aimag Food and Agriculture Office concerning the pasture situation and animal wintering preparations in Galshar, Bayankhutag, Darxan, and Umnudelger soums the Xentii Aimag ITX has ordered:

1. According to agreement, due to insufficient pasture resources, to allow soum governors to settle [livestock] for short periods according to established contracts in the following specific territories: Galshar soum 30 thousand animals to Bayan-Ovoo soum territory and 50 thousand animals to Norovlin soum territory; Bayankhutag soum 50 thousand animals to Bayan-Adarga soum territory; Murun soum 30 thousand animals to Binder soum territory; Umnudelger soum 10 thousand animals to Binder soum territory and 20 thousand to Batshireet soum; Darxan soum 50 thousand, Jargaltxaan soum 20 thousand, Bayanmunx soum 20 thousand animals to the National Otor Reserve of Xerlenbayan-Ulaan in Delgerxaan soum territory.

2. Galshar, Bayankhutag, and Bayan-Ovoo soum governors to take means to add pasture capacity by not allowing otor households in degraded pasture territories and organize revitalization of pasture territory by expelling non-local households in each respective soum who have not received permission to settle and thereby leaving pastures ungrazed.

3. Soum governors to immediately create new accounts and enter required spending into specific budgets.

4. That this order supersede Xentii Aimag ITX's May 15, 2006 order number 32.

This order number 43 was submitted not only for winter preparations but also for the late summer and fall due to the drought. The purpose behind the order initially, according to the Bayankhutag soum governor, was to relieve pressure on pastures and prevent further deterioration. The goal was not solely to organize winter and spring otor contracts because of *zud*. No one knew *zud* was going to happen. What the pasture assessment map showed was, to many officials, the result of overgrazing not simply drought. Accordingly, pastures had to be relieved not necessarily livestock or people. Not until after the maps and official MFA analysis were released in September did the MoFALI make official the required recommendations to the prime minister's office concerning winter preparation or *uvuljiltiin beltgel* which included instructions to organize winter and spring otor contracts with expressed purpose to avoid possible *zud*-like events.

In Togtool No. 43 the ITX, which has the legal authority, allows some soums to send households and livestock and other soums to receive them. The numbers, largely arbitrary, and the conditions of their entry are to be mediated by the contract process. However, there is great ambiguity about the degree to which these contracts 'must' be entered into. For example, are they 'orders' or simply 'permission'? The wording here is odd because soum governors can legally enter into these agreements already without aimag consent (see below). Do soum governors have authority to reject unfair or problematic contracts? Can they contest them? And once these contracts are entered into what is the aimag government's role? The soum governor of Bayankhutag argued that if he could he would reject unfair or problematic contracts. But whether he has the authority to do this is uncertain. Additionally, soum governors in Galshar, Bayankhutag, and Bayan-Ovoo soums are given expressed authority to expel non-local households and even local households who are doing otor in 'degraded' lands. Yet, soum governors already have this authority according to the Law on Land of 2002 as long as authorities over them do not order otherwise:

54.8. In the event of a need of evacuation or a movement to territories of other aimags or soums due to natural disasters or other emergencies, the relevant level governors shall make a decision to

reach an agreement. Where an agreement between these governors cannot be reached, the case shall be resolved by a higher level governor or the Cabinet.

54.9. Citizens Representatives' Khurals of aimags shall determine soum-level reserve rangelands to be used in the events of natural disasters, dzud and droughts, including its boundaries and limits. The Cabinet shall determine aimag-level reserve rangelands, including their boundaries and limits upon requests of [aimags or soums].

In September, the Xentii Aimag Government and ITX again instructed the local soum governors with another togtool only a few weeks after the previous one. Part of the reason for re-issuing many of the aspects of the previous togtool was to make clear that such preparations were for winter and to reinforce aspects of already codified laws that soum governors, as will be seen, are often prone to ignoring such as the proscription against expelling contracted households and withholding of social services for otor households under contract. Moreover, the previous togtool oddly did not find its way to the desk of many soum governors' offices until September and did not specifically 'order' them to form contracts. One soum official argued that the togtool was backdated for reasons unknown.<sup>198</sup>

According to the decision of the Aimag advisory committee and the Aimag Citizen's Representative Xural's August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007 Number 43 order concerning the provision of animal husbandry winter preparation for 2007-2008 it is hereby ordered:

1. Collective Hospital (Batjargal), Police Station (Dorj), MFA Office (Tuvshinzaya), and the Education and Culture Office (Dashdavaa) have specially ordered that in order to provide services to otor herders coming from other soums for short periods during winter and spring otor social issues will be centered in the respective soums.
2. The duty has been given to soum governors, if they accept, to form contracts in order to settle for short periods otor herders in their own soums and inform herders about their territory.
3. The duty has been given to soum governors planning to settle winter and spring otor households to enter and settle herders with proper organization according to rules and principles and contract agreements.
4. Aimag Food and Agriculture Office (Tuvshinzaya) has been enlisted to supervise and inspect the order fulfillment.

Again we see that soum governors are given a duty but only 'if they accept'. In its language, the togtool gives the impression that such duties are not previously existing. But they already exist in the Land Law of 2002. Moreover, it allows soum governors to accept or reject on their own accord. Interestingly, this is not always how the togtool was interpreted because as we will see

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<sup>198</sup> She also argued that it seemed odd that the ITX made such specific recommendations for otor, including location and numbers of livestock, without having the pasture assessment. Yet, neither of us could fathom a reason as to why the order was backdated to before the pasture assessments.



below, some viewed this as an order while others positioned these togtool strategically as orders when, in fact, they were much more ambiguous.

Much of the legal administrative framework for such authority is, to be sure, unclear and ambiguous and results in ‘governance ex post facto’ or governance ‘after the fact’. By September, many households had already left on otor to other soums without contracts. Some had arranged their own private agreements with local households, bag governors, and even soum governors. Moreover, the togtool gives soum governors the right to reject otor contracts. If they accept, however, they are required to follow ‘rules and principles’ which is different from following the law. Yet, there are few laws that govern or inform the process of contracting or even pasture regulation beyond the broad, ambiguous duties given to soum governors. What ‘rules and principles’ the *togtool* refers to remains unclear.

On October 10<sup>th</sup>, the Prime Minister submitted National Togtool 261 to the Minister of Food and Agriculture, other important ministries, and to aimag and soum administrations which are instructed to organize otor contracts and try to alleviate the potential effects of the drought conditions and prepare for winter. The contract is worded as follows:

The Mongolian National government has issued the following conclusions from the MFA’s Emergency Office concerning the plan for wintering livestock in 2007-2008:

1. National resource units and extensions should approve the distribution of additional preparatory hay and feed according to primary locations of need.
2. MFA Minister Terbishdavga has ordered the aimag governors should convene in November 2007 to implement the organization and means to coordinate otor migrations.
3. Mongolian Minister Otgonbat has ordered the following:
  - a. Take measures to relocate prepared hay and feed before snow covers the roads and passes to the national reserve units and extensions in the aimags where the winter situation will inevitably worsen.
  - b. Coordinate the regional otor territories, to aid herders who are conducting otor, to protect herder health, take measures to prevent livestock theft, and to take measures, in order to be efficient in the administration of aimag otor territories, to preregister vehicles distributed from the national reserves with the UAZ 396292 vehicle license.
4. The government has agreed to take out of the reserve fund 550 million MNT to buy 2000 tons of hay and 1500 tons of feed to add to the national reserve. The Financial Minister Bayartsaixan has ordered that this take place before October 15.
5. Health Minister Tuya, Social Protection and Labor Minister Demberel, Education, Cultural and Science Minister Enkhtuvshin, have been given the duty to take effective means to efficiently organize aid, without reductions, providing herding households who are passing

through their territories on otor with health and social services, and school and kindergarten services to those aimag governors to whom this applies.

This togtool, very similar to Togtool 254, orders aimag governors to organize otor and other winter preparations despite the fact that many soum governors had already had already done so. Just as many herders pre-empted the Aimag council's declaration of drought and emergency preparations in Togtool 43 and 254, the aimag government has pre-empted the central government despite the 'formal' order for organizing responses to drought and disaster management. Also, many of the orders such as 'aid herders who are conducting otor' or 'coordinate otor migrations' are quite ambiguous considering the lack of protocol for how this should be done or where, much less how this affects current authority configurations in territorial administration.

Moreover, much of this directive is concerned with inter-aimag grazing rather than inter-soum grazing which is nationally unimportant as a risk management strategy compared to inter-soum grazing. The meeting it orders to be convened in November among Aimag governors, for herders who are desperate to avoid disastrous consequence, seems somewhat late in the year considering the preparation herders must themselves make in order to plan and conduct otor of such long distances especially for the poorest. Governing after the fact can have serious consequences.

Again on October 12 the Prime Minister's Office issued their most complete instructions concerning winter preparations. Rather than *togtool* these are referred to as *daalgavar* or instructions which have fewer legal implications than *togtool* but are still consider 'legal acts'. *Daalgavar* are similar in practice to *tailan* or 'summaries of actions taken', because much of what is 'instructed' is in fact a description of what has had already happened at lower levels in the administrative structure or even by households themselves. Yet, the 'legal' intention, and presumption by those who are either ignorant or ambivalent about local dynamics, is to coordinate future actions. Even so, much like Togtool 43, 254, and 261, *Daalgavar* 12 is highly ambiguous and leaves significant room for strategic interpretation.

Consequently, although these documents carry 'legal' weight as will be seen in the following section, they leave considerable space for maneuverability and strategic use. This is not to say that non-compliant or alternative actions are 'illegal', technically no one really knows without litigation and judicial review and even then 'law' is interpretation, strategic or otherwise. Rather, in contemporary Mongolia, 'law', as exemplified by *togtool* and *daalgavar*, is mutable and flexible allowing space for customary law as well as personal claims to bear on negotiated interpretations. For example, whose 60,000 livestock will be sent to Bayan-Adarga? Do herders

have a choice? Who can and cannot go? How will the government choose? Are they being ordered to do so or are *togtool* really suggestions? What if herders prefer to go to other soums? Why Bayan-Adarga? What about herders there? None of the *togtool* or *daalgavar* answers these questions nor addresses them in any way. The answers, however, are found out in practice, borne of ambiguity and negotiation.

### **Otor Contracts**

The issuing of *togtool* is not the only example of ‘governance ex post facto’ and the mutability of ‘formal’ institutions. This can also be seen in the way *otor* contracts are organized. Here the importance of *togtool* and *daalgavar* allow herders to strategically manipulate, through soum and bag governors, the weight of ‘law’ to their own ends. They are able, in this space, to mobilize their political and social resources to pursue their own strategies and shape the course of events. In this sense governance is an outcome of exchange between the state and herders. Here I explore how ‘contracts’ are negotiated and the ways actors deploy certain meanings and interpretation of law in social discourse. Additionally, I also examine how herders manipulated the meanings of exchange in order to garner such state services.

### **Law in Practice**

This focus also brings me to the study of law and governance in practice. Formal law and institutional organization does not exist outside of interpretative endeavors or on the ground practices (Mundy 2007; Moore 1986; Nader 1969; Pottage and Mundy 2004). Nor do these domains of ‘social reasoning’ exist outside of broader legal discourse across society (Bowen 2003; Greenhouse 2005). The social arena of law is subject to malleable practices, strategies, and continuous negotiation in action (Riles 2000). However, I do not argue that social action in these realms is void of structural power and material force; rather such action is enabled and constrained in various ways depending on the social actors and social structures involved. The arenas for actions themselves are also highly structured. A herder who bribes a governor to set up a contract is demonstrating both the mutability and strategic nature of practice, as well as the clear, unabashed, structurally conditioned (class and state-based in this instance) power of those involved.

What makes this more interesting additionally, are the various sources of ‘law’ that actors can draw on and the multitude of ways in which they can ignore ‘law’ (Berry 2000; McCarthy 2004). In sites of legal pluralism, much of what is called formal law is often not followed because it contradicts on the ground realities; other sources of legal inspiration may be more a propos (Benda-Beckman 2004; Li 2000). In turn, both in the gaps of formal law and in the interpretive

practices of actors, ‘customary law’ is drawn on for overriding formal legal principles, rendering obtuse laws comprehensible and salient, and providing inspiration where law is absent or lacking (Nader 1969). In disputes, where legal codes may not be clear as discussed in chapter 5, ‘customary’ or common law is an acknowledged source for principled governance.<sup>199</sup> For example, such codes as the ‘moral economy of the steppe’, customary ‘state’ ideologies (i.e. *tur zasag*), and other ideas about property, right, and belonging, become integral aspects of ‘formal’ legal negotiation and implementation as we see below in formation of *otor* contracts. Interestingly, many of these so-called customary institutions, are the result of deep legal histories in Mongolia, in contrast to the ‘customary’ normative systems of pre-colonial societies elsewhere (Moore 1986; Merry 1988).<sup>200</sup> Nevertheless, these institutions are perceived as ‘custom’ and ‘tradition’ rather than the result of historical processes of state-generated administrative practice, largely because of the way they are contrasted to socialist social orders which negated the ‘need’ for custom-in-practice. Consequently, in these cases and others, strategic uses of customary principles become ‘state-like’ take on the weight of formal legal acts, behind which is the force of structural, state-based power (Timmer 2010).<sup>201</sup> Clearly, access to such ‘weight’ is *not* equally distributed. Some benefit from the current configurations of rural governance and law while others do not.

In the proceedings below, various administrative actors deploy a variety of notions and understandings of governance, the state, law, resource management science, and morality. Some actors prefer older models of strong, central state rule while others embrace the decentralized, virtually autonomous nature of *soum* governorship. Others see the state as patron while others see it as a hindrance. Law is mobilized as supreme and in other instances as mutable. Rational resource management is contrasted with custom and morality with economic science. In some cases, individual actors hold contradictory sentiments and in other cases they adhere strictly to singular modalities. These strategic uses of ideology are also interpreted through culturally salient discursive techniques which make bitter pills easier to swallow. Such dynamics affect not only how disaster is experienced but *who* experiences disaster.

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<sup>199</sup> This is spelled out in Mongolia legal codes.

<sup>200</sup> Consequently, as I argue elsewhere, we must not oppose state-based formal legal orders to local, informal ones, for they are often mutually constitutive and intimately integrated. See Lund’s (2006) ‘Twilight Institutions’ for a similar assessment.

<sup>201</sup> Interestingly, this also means the past legal orders continue to impact current ones.

### Negotiating Otor contracts

The following is an excerpt from a winter otor contract negotiation between Bayankhutag soum representatives and those from Bayan-Ovoo soum.<sup>202</sup> In this case, a number of Bayankhutag households had already migrated to Bayan-Ovoo including a very wealthy herder from the 2<sup>nd</sup> bag and a number of his clients from Uguumur. Local Bayan-Ovoo herders alerted their presence to their bag darga who visited and informed the otor households of the laws and regulations regarding inter-soum grazing, which in this case required their expulsion (*xuux*) from the soum (see the Land on Law 2002 and Togtool 43 above). The wealthy herd-owner then contacted the Bayankhutag soum governor who agreed to help them arrange a contract for winter otor in that soum. The meeting, arranged by the Bayankhutag soum governor, was conducted on November 14, 2007 in Bayan-Ovoo soum governor's office with representatives of each soum including the respective soum governors, all bag governors, the Ministries of Food and Agriculture and Nature and Environment extension agents, and the Bayan-Ovoo soum ITX Secretary. The meeting was somewhat contentious as can be seen below. The households entered the soum before the formation of a contract and Bayan-Ovoo was also a soum given documented expulsion rights in Togtool 43. The soum was only included as a recommended destination soum for herders from Galshar, south of Bayankhutag, depending on contract negotiations.

In the following excerpt I dissect the negotiation strategies and techniques utilized by the respective parties to bring about their own desired ends.<sup>203</sup>

BX Soum Governor: Everyone knows that in most territories in Khentii aimag the pasture problem is quite severe. Particularly in the southern half of the aimag the situation is quite severe. My soum now has 200,000 head of stock. Out of this there are plans for roughly 140,000 head of stock to go on otor, wintering in other soums, while only 60,000 head will stay in Bayankhutag. By the research we did, roughly 60-70 households will do otor migrations. Beside the herders from my aimag who are doing otor, there are also herders from other aimag's coming to do otor. I proposed to the Aimag Zasag Darga that *I will release a directive expelling (xuux) these households forcefully*. However, the government released the 'imposition' 261 and official daalgavar 12. According to these orders and instructions, *our own directives and orders have been struck down and these things are not allowed to be done, we have no say in organizing our own territories, we have been given the duty only to discuss and form contracts, following behind our herders who go on otor outside the soum*. Our herders (BX) have gone on to do otor in 9 soums. In your soum 14

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<sup>202</sup> Bayankhutag had only negotiated one other contract at this time with Bayan-Adarga. They would eventually arrive at other contracts although they were mostly *amiin geree* or verbal contracts agreed to largely over the phone. For example, the Bayankhutag soum governor and the Norovlin soum governor were old friends and simply made an agreement over the phone. Prior to 2007-2008, they had only completed otor contracts in one other year in 2005-2006. That year they did contracts with Tuvshinshiree, Munxxaan and Uul-Bayan soums in Suxbaatar and Delgerx soum in Dorngovi to the south. Droughts had occurred there but not as severe as 2007. Consequently, very few households came.

<sup>203</sup> BX = Bayankhutag soum representatives, BO = Bayan-Ovoo soum representatives.

households and 10122 head of stock from my soum have just arrived. We have come in order to form a contract concerning these households. We are hoping that you will say *'please have these herders winter here'*. If, however, you do not accept, there is no problem, our herders will turn around and move they have said.

In this interaction we see several examples of the problems of 'law', 'governance', and 'authority' in action. In the second section of his statement, the Bayankhutag soum governor claims that he attempted to file a directive to forcibly remove households from the soum but was blocked by the Aimag governor and the official orders. Specifically, he points to the orders and instructions issued by the Aimag ITX and central government. Yet, the orders do not prohibit him from expelling households. The togtool 261 and Daalgavar 12 do not prohibit soum governors from expelling households, and in contrast, togtool 43 specifically instructs that he and the Bayan-Ovoo governor do so. They are only prohibited from removing households that are under contract or residing in the soum legally and not in 'degraded' areas. Moreover, the ability of the aimag governor to prevent him from doing this is debatable.

Yet, by focusing on the errors of his statement, one misses the strategic nature of this statement. Rather, in the second highlighted section, what he is trying to do here is to empathize with the Bayan-Ovoo governor's position. In effect, by commiserating, he is pointing to the problem of governance and authority, the limited nature of soum administrative capacity and authority, and their shared problems. He also reinforces the togtool despite the fact that they are extremely unclear about official authority. In the end he makes a very polite request without veiled threats: an appeal to aid during crisis.

BO Soum 2<sup>nd</sup> Bag Darga: Stock from your soum have gone to 9 soums. In our case there is no pasture in the west half of our soum.

BX Soum Governor: We saw on the road coming here. However, it is not worse than in Bayankhutag. From such a bad summer, of course these things happen.

BO Soum 2<sup>nd</sup> Bag Darga: What will I do with herders from other soums? From Galshar soum there are 30,000 head of stock that will come they have said.

BX Soum Governor: We don't know where you will put herders from other soums. But herders from Galshar will not come. They have settled on the northside of Undurkhaan.

BO Soum 2<sup>nd</sup> Bag Darga: I want to expel these herders! Will we take livestock taxes from your herders?

BX Soum Governor: There is no legal basis for taking taxes or other 'tat' [pulls = 'fees']. However, *where a herder chooses himself to live, settle is spelled out in the laws. Today we have no choice but to follow the laws on land in coordinating this otor migration problem. From on top the decision has come out, and we have been given instructions to organize otor without complaint*

*from the Aimag governor's office. Otor herders from other soums have been coming to Bayankhutag for ten years now. However I know that these herders do not have considerations for my 'nutag' in their hearts. Periods of settlement for over 198 days, in such situations MFA-official tax will be paid, according to the law.*

The Bayan-ovoo 2<sup>nd</sup> bag governor disputes whether they have the right to *xuux* – saying they want to do so or take taxes. Although he does not cite it, he is within his power to do so as spelled out in Togtool 43. But the Bayankhutag governor again makes the case that there is no support for this in the law, an interpretation which is not exactly a strict constructionist reading of the legal codes and orders. He cites the constitution which allows citizens the right to determine residence by stating ‘where are herder choose himself to live, settle is spelled out in the laws’. Even though this right can be regulated, as other laws state, he is drawing on the idea of supreme law – a salient cultural expression in Mongolia. Moreover, while simultaneously misrepresenting the legal codes, he makes a claim to the rigidity of law and their duty to follow it. The sense of strict duty and order points to nostalgic reminders of a socialist past. At once pointing out that there are those above them whom they must obey and those below them to whom they are obliged to serve. Such sentiments emerge from a hierarchical interpretation of political and social order in Mongolia with the state (*tur*) and its institutions (*zasag*), regardless of legal language, exerting supreme authority over local decisions.<sup>204</sup>

Additionally, he makes a claim to the ‘moral economy of the steppe’ when he states that herders from other soums have been coming to Bayankhutag for ‘ten years’. In other words, he is claiming that Bayankhutag has been *uglugch* or *uguumur* (giving or charitable) by allowing other herders to come and use their resources. Yet, where are others when Bayankhutag is in need? In other words, he is arguing that others are obligated now to reciprocate such generosity. At the same time, preempting claims otherwise, he makes it clear that such forms of mutual aid should have little to do with whether or not a herder has another’s ‘nutag at heart’ because others have not had his nutag at heart. He does this while also making concessions such as taxes after a certain date. The Bayan-Ovoo governor, before the negotiations have barely begun, concedes to this argument but not for legal reasons.

BO Soum Governor: In my soum the situation is severe. In my case 5-6 ails have already come. Besides these, we do not want to take any more households than this. If it does not snow the water situation will also become severe. *We have no choice but to take them [not formal law]*, but if we take them there is no place to keep them.

BX Soum Governor: The direction of the otor migrations has become very specific. Additional households will not come.

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<sup>204</sup> See my discussion in chapter 6.

BO Soum MOFA Extension Agent: We must make this decision in accordance with Galshar. After doing this contract, if Galshar ails come, the situation will become extremely severe.

The Bayan-Ovoo governor in saying that they ‘have no choice but take them’ concedes to the contract. Yet, this is not a recognition of some formal statute or legal requirement. Rather, it is a recognition of the customary principles rooted in the moral economy of the steppe and an interpretation of togtool as ‘coming down from on top’ or *deerees* which plays into Mongolia ideas about the state or *tur*. However, not all in her retinue agreed. In contrast, some of the Bayan-ovoo representatives make very different counter-claims and ones that are rooted in rationalist ideas of pasture capacity, efficiency, and moral hazard.

BO Soum MONE Land Extension Agent: We have been talking about the pasture situation since 2001. In asking [BX Soum governor] who has been working for 8 years as governor. Before how did it work with herders from other soums. Let’s say stock from your soum enter my soum. How did orders from upper levels of administration resolve this? [*sarcasm*] There was no problem that we kick out your herders. Having your herders come here, they will have eaten the grass. However, after they finishing eating the grass, then you have left the problem here. Land in Bayankhutag soum is plenty. How will we protect our pasture?

Here the Bayan-Ovoo extension agent contests the Bayankhutag governor’s claims regarding the empathetic use of a ‘fate’ discourse in empathizing with their positions in the administrative hierarchy and customary moral economies of aid and support. She recalls earlier periods of ‘stronger’ governance such as during socialism or even in earlier periods of the post-socialist years when soum governors acted more authoritatively, at least as she claims, to protect natural resources like pasture against inefficient and irrational use. Sarcastically she asks him regarding past actions fully knowing what actions were taken. Here she is making a claim to a stricter, more forceful state but also decentralized, rationalized government action. Additionally, she is presenting an argument rooted in resource management science. She worries about the misplaced incentive of allowing what she views as ‘free-riders’. Such concerns about moral hazard emanate from an economistic narrative of institutional efficiency and rational justice rather than from customary moral codes.

BX Soum Governor: Currently, there isn’t a single way of protecting pasture in Mongolia. Other than kicking herders out and driving them away, there is no other method of protection. *In the end we are seen as the culprit, yet in legal meetings they have not yet found a way of controlling this.* Herders for the most part are becoming younger. The psychology has become different. *I understand that a difficult time has come when we are not allowed to confront things strongly.* There are many things to do but the budget difficulties are many. Budgets will reach what?



The BX governor concedes some of the points, even lamenting times past when the state could ‘confront things strongly’. But he understands that the Land Agent has no power in this contract and that her vision of rural governance ignores the realpolitik of ‘governing’ in a post-socialist world. Rather than arguing in that vein, he keeps his target on the other soum governor. Again he empathizes, acknowledging that they will be to blame for pasture problems while at the same time raising a salient complaint about those in the National Parliament who have authority to actually make ‘law’ or ‘*xuuli*’ but are resolved to simply issuing temporary ordinances, resolutions, and instructions.<sup>205</sup> For him, this is an evident problem of decentralized, ambiguous governance structures and laments the absence of old styles of top-down governance. He continues by mentioning the oft heard complaint concerning youth and changing attitudes, the necessary tasks of soum governors, and the lack of budgets to cover such needs. They are bound and compelled by an ineffectual legal system, that while the higher power (at least as he interprets it here) because of the state’s right-to-rule, also undercuts their authority as *darga*.

BO Soum MONE Land Extension Agent: By my understanding, first you do the contract and then afterwards you must enter the herders. However, by having done the opposite, *they have caused our names to drop heavily. Herders must respect the soum that they are visiting.*

Forcefully, in order to contest the order in which the contract negotiation is unfolding and the delegitimization of her ‘rationalist’ appeal, the BO *gazriin daamal* draws on both a strict sense of order concerning how contracts should be negotiated and culturally valid claim to ‘name’.<sup>206</sup> In other words, for her, in addition to the fact that herders are neither following ‘orders’ nor the ‘law’, she claims herders by doing so, violate essential social codes by ‘dropping another’s name’. She makes clear that formal legal codes are intimately integrated with moral economies of respect.

BO Soum Governor: The most important thing in the future is that we must give reminders to our herders. They knowingly settle, eat up the pasture of another person’s *nutag*. Also the well and

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<sup>205</sup> In this negotiation the soum governor alternates between ideas of *tur* and *zasag* when it suits him. *Tur* refers to the ‘right-to-rule’ or sovereignty (see chapters 6 and Humphrey and Xurelbaatar 2006). It implies an essential presence of power to which they are subject. *Zasag*, however, refers to the government. *Zasag* does not retain the respect that the term *tur* does. *Zasag* are simply those people momentarily charged with state power. In effect, he can criticize the *zasag* and contemporary configurations of it, but he cannot reject *tur* or state-power to which he is subject. Moreover, law, in its more general supreme sense emanates from *tur*. Legal proclamations, individually, are a function of *zasag* and therefore are open to considerable contempt.

<sup>206</sup> Names are guarded with great respect. Recall the practice of *avgaalax* or name avoidance for elders. The process of naming a child is a long course of naming and renaming. If children become sick or unfortunate events befall them or the family, these problems are associated with evil spirits. By changing the name, the spirits will not know who the child is. One of the more common names in rural Mongolia is ‘no name’ or *Nergui*. Other names such as *Enebish* (not this) or *Terbish* (not that) also exemplify this belief.

water situation must be reflected in the contract. We ourselves will free up pasture for other households to eat without pressure.

By this point, the formation of the contract is a foregone conclusion. The Bayan-Ovoo governor admits this while at the same time participating in placing blame on herders rather than those above them, such as herself and the BX soum governor. This turn is important for several reasons. The Bayankhutag governor has essentially made this negotiation about who is to blame for this situation rather than whether forming a contract in this way is legal or even necessary. These tropes reflect several modalities. The blame discourse originates from the socialist past and is maintained by the bureaucratic realities of the present. However, the difference between these two periods is reflected in the fact that this is a negotiation where legal proclamations are being formed rather than being followed. The soum governors and even the bag darga who simply wanted to expel the herders fully understand this while the extension agent tries to reject this. The governors clearly grasp that there are gaps over which they have obtained the space to rule while also lamenting past forms of authority. In my interviews with the extension agent these ambiguous margins reflected to her not an opportunity for flexible management in regulating resources but a lack of political development in Mongolia.

BX Soum Governor: I understand all your thoughts and wishes. We will make our herders understand the situation regarding the wells and water here.

BO Soum Governor: There is no opportunity to accept anymore ails other than the ones you have written down on the list. This must be reflected very specifically in the contract.

BO ITX Secretary: Now that we are as one, let's form the contract. However, we would also like it reflected in the contract concerning those who come and settle on the border but enter to use the pasture and wells. I would like it to be understood that they must enter into the common well fund.

BX Soum Governor: I would like to propose a thought that we give additional support to the common well fund. We in the contract will enter these instructions concerning the duties and responsibilities.

Again the Bayankhutag governor commiserates, empathizes, and concedes points while offering additional support to the well fund. Here he succeeds on several fronts through a strategic use of situational logics of governance, authority and rule while tapping into customary ethics of the steppe moral economy. This interpretive interplay had different effects on shaping the ability of a wealthy household and his clients to access better pasture and mitigate the possibility of disaster

Written Resolution:

Khentii aimag, Bayankhutag soum 14 households and 10122 head of livestock. Camels 40, Horses 1514, Cow 396, Sheep 4852, Goat 3320 stock have been resolved by the establishment of this contract to winter in Bayan-Ovoo soum.

The Bayan-Ovoo officials could have refused this contract and expelled the herders, as other soums did, including Bayankhutag. Regardless of the instructions ‘from on high’ (*deerees*), these agreements are to be done prior to entry, not after and not for specific individuals. Bayan-ovoo representatives were out-negotiated not because they did not have a full understanding of the law, but because the BX governor understood the ways in which ‘law’ can in one instance mean multiple things while serving a single purpose – it is both ‘binding’, from ‘on top’, a ‘duty’, a ‘service’, all of which are combined in various ways with customary notions of hospitality, empathy, obligation, and generosity. He understood how law is mutable and flexible even by portraying it as immutable and inflexible. The contract does not reflect a strict adherence to legal codes and frameworks but rather emerges from the interplay of strategic interpretation and practice.

Approved: Xentii Aimag, Bayankhutag Soum Governor _____	Approved: _____ Aimag _____ Soum Governor _____
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A contract formed between two soums  
 in order to send on winter otor, households and herds  
 from Xentii Aimag, Bayankhutag Soum  
 to \_\_\_\_\_ Aimag, \_\_\_\_\_ Soum.

2007.\_\_\_\_.

One. Basis and Purpose of Contract

The purpose of this here contract is to organize, approve, and originate between the two concerned parties that, in accordance with the Mongolian National Government order 261 of October 10, 2007, the Mongolian National Government [daalgavar], Xentii aimag ITX order number 43 of July 27, 2007, Xentii Aimag governor's directive number 254 of September 19, 2007, since, in the territory of Bayankhutag soum, Khentii Aimag there is no opportunity to winter due to drought and poor pasture growth and capacity specific number of households and livestock herds will be sent to conduct winter otor in the territory of \_\_\_\_\_ Aimag, \_\_\_\_\_ Soum.

Two. General Items

1. This here signed contract shall enforce a contractual period from the date signed until \_\_\_\_ year, \_\_\_\_ month, \_\_\_\_ day.
2. The parties entering into this contract will fulfill all accepted duties according to the contract, all orders, regulations, and laws.
3. The parties accept responsibility according to the law in the event that such duties assigned in the contract are not fulfilled.
4. The parties will resolve under basic consideration and discussion any problems concerning additions or changes to the contract.

Three. \_\_\_\_\_ soum's accepted duties.

1. Will inform winter and spring otor households on the territorial borders and boundaries of territorial in which they are settled.
2. Will not allow local households or bag or soum administrators to pressure, apply taxes or request fees, or attempt to expel winter and spring otor households.
3. Will provide according to National regulations available state services to winter and spring otor households.
4. Will inform by phone counted numbers of households and herds of the households concerned in this contract for the 2007 end of the year national livestock census.

Four. Bayankhutag soum's accepted duties.

1. Will send the agreed households and herds to the specified territories.
2. Will be responsible for ensuring that herders fulfill duties spelled out in contract.
3. Until the contract period ends, will be responsible, on the foundations agreed to with the otor territory leadership, for problems that winter and spring otor households leave behind.

Five. Otor households' accepted duties.

1. Households going on otor will work to realize the requirements given by otor territory soum and bag leadership, to live peacefully, and be responsible for interacting correctly with local households.
2. Households going on otor will remain in contact with their home administration during the contract period.
3. Will not start fires during the dry season thereby fulfilling the legal statutes and civil law regarding forest and steppe fires, prevention of criminal acts, health and livestock breed protection laws.

Six. Other items

1. Will attached by name the households, number of household members, and number of livestock. Also will attach meeting notes concerning the two parties' agreement for water use in the otor territory.

Contract formed:

Bayankhutag Soum Representatives: _____	_____ Soum Representatives
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MFA Extension Agent _____ 2 <sup>nd</sup> Bag Darga _____		
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*Figure 8.6. Draft otor contract used for all winter otor contracts in 2007 and 2008.*

## Obtaining Contracts

Obtaining such contracts is critical for many households since the contracts allow households to stay on campsites designated for their use without fear of ‘*xuux*’, taxes, payments, bribes, or other kinds of pressure tactics. Moreover, they are allowed access to state services. Securing a contract though is not always so easy. The 2002 Land Law and 2003 Disaster Law both give soum governors authority to enter into such contracts. If they cannot resolve a contract, the soum governor can then submit a request to the aimag governor who will then resolve the case. However, this is rarely the case. In fact, a recent 2010 report from the Swiss Development Agency cites this lack of coordination as a major reason why many households did not leave the blizzard affected areas.

Obtaining contracts, therefore, requires motivation on the part of numerous actors, including the mutual governors. However, governors themselves have little impetus to enter into contracts unless there is demand for it. Amongst the soum governors I interviewed, outside of the provincial togtool, none were motivated to form contracts unless requested by their constituent herders to do so. Moreover, because governors are afforded great authority over contracting and territorial governance, they also in effect become gate-keepers as exemplified in the interaction described above. This configuration of authority positions governors in such a way as to foster various forms of patronage. Even in the case of official formal contracts suggested in the togtool by the provincial council, exchange is not absent. In the case of most of the contracts that I investigated various forms of exchange took place in order to form contracts, encourage governors to enforce contracts, or to extend the contract period.

This is clearly demonstrated in the case of Altangerel. In the winter of 2007 they left on otor for Bayan-Adarga, a contracted soum outlined and designated in Provincial Togtool 43 as the advised destination soum for households and herds from Bayankhutag. As we see in contract item 3.2, the contracted soum administration “will not allow local households or bag or soum administrators to pressure, apply taxes or request fees, or attempt to expel winter and spring otor households.” This is even spelled out in Provincial Togtool 254 and National Togtool 261. However, in the winter of 2008 his *buleg* of households confronted local households who were pressuring them and harassing their animals. They visited the bag darga and soum darga, both of whom reside in the soum center, and requested assistance in toning down the pressures other households were putting on them. The soums governor obliged, but what exactly occurred at this meeting and how a decision was reach is not clear; each actor had a different story. What is clear is that 150,000 MNT and livestock exchanged hands. Moreover, in spring again livestock was given and then again in May more livestock were given to the bag governor. Each party describes

the transaction in different ways, but all attempt to dress the situation with language that positions the transactions as gifts (*beleg*), donations (*xandiv*), payments (*tulbur*), tax (*tatvar*), pulls (*tat*), or fees (*torguuli*).

The cooperative group leader, rather hesitantly, describes the transaction when I visited him in Bayan-Adarga in late June of 2008:

D: If you do otor in another soum, is it difficult?

L: Yes, difficult. They will expel and drive out, and payments (*tulbur*) and donations (*xandiv*).

D: Here in Bayan-Adarga do they try to 'expel'?

L: Once we gave, it became a bit better. At first it was very difficult. Then, in giving the 150,000 MNT and 3 or 4 sheep it became no problem.

A few days later at the Bayan-Adarga soum naadam and the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the soum I interviewed the soum darga and bag darga concerning these transactions:

D: Did you take any kind of fee or fines?

SD: There was not an exact size or specific fee or tax. Okay, so citizens voluntarily entered onto the bag nutag and these 'visiting' people gave donations that were not 'officially' required. Truly by their good will, from putting their cattle on our degraded pastures, they financed aid to the bag.

The bag darga whom I interviewed shortly afterwards explained the situation like this:

D: Did you take fees or payments from herders?

BD: No, we did not take fees or anything like that. In our case the soum ITX passed an ordinance that said that households coming on otor and staying on the soum 'nutag' put 150,000 MNT into a small interest account. Such an ordinance was issued. So according to the instructions of the law, myangat herders put 100,000 MNT into the small interest account. They said it was good to finance budgets spent on social problems or any kind of problem in the bag. They said they wanted to do this.

The next month in another interview with the group's leader I brought up the issue again because of the governors very different responses

D: Your group gave 150,000 MNT, right?

L: Yes, to Bayan-Adarga soum.

D: In your opinion, was this okay?

L: Nowadays, we must give such payments (*tulbur*).

D: On the otor contracts it is specifically written that bag darga are not permitted to request such things.

L: Well, I gave. In my case, this is not such a bad thing. You go to someone's territory and you cannot leave things undone. Is there really a law against taking this? I don't think there is a law or rule. A deviation of custom, maybe.

D: When does the contract end, then?

L: They said it ends in April. But I spoke with the bag darga and gave 2 or 3 sheep and so after naadam, the anniversary celebration.

D: Who did you give to?

L: I gave to the bag darga.

Another member of the cooperative group:

D: When you went to Bayan-Adarga they ask money from you, right? But I read the contract and they are not permitted to request such things from you. So why do they request money from you?

E: The livestock made it through the winter (*ond orox*), so they took what they called a 'livestock pasture tax'.

D: So what did you say? About the 'tax'?

E: They took the pasture tax. [annoyed with the questions]

D: Well, in your opinion was this okay?

E: Now, well, we spent winter and spring there and they did not cause the livestock to die. Before we gave it seemed there was no cure/magic ('domgui'), so they got from us a xandiv. This was volunteered (from our 'good desire' or *sain duriin*). We can give and we cannot give. We also gave a naadam xandiv. We gave a sheep.

From the perspective of the bag and soum governor these exchanges were posited largely as a kind of aid or donation from the visiting herders to the people of their bag. But their language is unclear. Interestingly, the soum governor argued that the exchanges were instigated by the herders themselves while the bag governor argues the local ITX required the payments as a kind of 'required donation' which has an air of being a 'tax' or at least a 'pull' or *tat*. For the herders themselves initially the payments were seen as a way to minimize the problems they were encountering such as *xuux*. As Herder E points out the situation was 'domgui' or without remedy or cure. Giving money and livestock settled the situation as the bag governor was able to temper the various measures local households were taking. The herders, in initial interviews, refer to these exchanges as *tulbur* (payment) and *tatvar* (taxes). These formal terms match to some degree the bag and soum governors' description of the role of the ITX and the various, supposed ordinances that were passed, despite the illegality of such acts according to national and aimag stipulations and contract agreements. In this light the exchanges seem highly instrumental and a clear case of bribery, particularly considering the high likelihood that, as the herders stated, the animals and money went to the governors.

Yet, in later interviews, they posited the exchange as a reciprocal one. By settling on and using pasture in the soum their livestock did not die. As we see in Herder's L argument, the livestock literally 'entered the year'; meaning, in other words, they survived the winter. Herder E used the causative tense when he says that 'they' did not cause the livestock to die (*uxuuleegui*). In essence, they both attribute the survival of their stock to the 'cure' brought about through the

exchange. The ‘hospitality’ of the bag and the resources of the territory, finally acquired through this prestation, ensured the survival of their herds. Returning the favor with money and livestock was, for them, important as ‘to not leave things undone’ as Herder L states.

Yet, clearly and admittedly, the Bayan-Adarga soum administration applied pressure on Altangerel and his group to transfer 150,000 and livestock, the number of which the parties do not agree.<sup>207</sup> As Altangerel himself said, the situation with local households and the bag governor was difficult until they gave money and livestock. Other households that went on otor to other contracted soums felt that contracts sometimes did not matter until there was an exchange. When going on otor the possibility of payments, requested gifts, bribes, or taxes are real, potential costs they must take into account when they leave the soum.

These instances of exchange whether considered as bribes, as many others do, or as some kind of extension of appropriate ‘gifting’ practices, the increasing incidence of transaction even in the case otor contracting points to post-socialist realities of governance. Rentals from local households, purchases, gifts, and other kinds of payments to campsite ezen or local households demonstrate that there are other authorities in the land beyond formal powers or law. These must be placated even in the context of formal institutions like contracting.

### **Other contracts**

The information released by the MoFALI concerning pasture conditions in Uguumur and Bayankhutag were not only released to the aimag and soum administrations. The bag governors utilized the maps and information in bag-level herders’ meetings to impress upon herders the need for otor migrations outside of Uguumur. At the meeting in September the 3<sup>rd</sup> bag governor forcefully instructed everyone to leave the soum, a scene more reminiscent of the socialist collectives.<sup>208</sup> However, a number of households argued that they could not leave while others stated that they would not leave. He instructed them that they stay at their own risk and that the government would not be responsible for their losses should they face *zud* (*zudand nuurlex*). He presented the recommended otor contract with Bayan-Adarga and many herders scoffed at the distance the government expected them to travel. Many argued that the contracts should be closer. Why for instance could they not do otor in Kherlen, Batnorov, or Bayan-Ovoo or another closer soum where the likelihood of *zud* was lower? The bag governor instructed them that the government had willingly arranged this and if they went on otor in other soums they would be on their own, which as we have seen is not entirely true. Some households ended up on their own

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<sup>207</sup> This is discussed in detail in chapter 5.

<sup>208</sup> I was not in the field for the meeting; however, herders and the bag governor described the meetings for me.



while others did not. The meeting was contentious and many herders were not satisfied with the togtool and otor contracts.

By November the soum governor of Bayankhutag had reached additional agreements with the governors of Kherlen soum and Bayan-Ovoo soum in addition to Bayan-Adarga. A number of wealthy herd-owners and cooperative group *axlagch(id)* requested that the governor organize otor contracts on his own terms and for their own, personal benefit with the Kherlen soum governor outside the original aimag otor recommendations in Togtool 43. Some households were already in the soum managing to avoid detection. Others, however, who had not migrated sought to do so via a formal contract. Requesting the formation of a contract prior to entering another soum is legal unlike the Bayan-Ovoo contract where herders had already entered the soum. The situation is the same for those who had already migrated to Kherlen. However, other soums are not obligated to reciprocate and approve such contracts. In other words, the Kherlen and Bayan-Ovoo governors did not have to agree to such contracts because the Aimag ITX did not specifically ‘order’ (togtoox) them to do so; just as the Bayankhutag soum governor rejected contracts with Galshar soum and Tuvshinshiree soum in Sukhbaatar. The formation of these additional contracts again depended to a great extent on the governors’ ability to negotiate and the need for other governors to monitor households that were there already.

Yet, just because requesting a contract is legal does not mean that all have access to this ‘service’. Most households do not carry enough political or economic weight to motivate the soum governor to form these contracts. Other households can only benefit from contracts after the fact. Moreover, they must also be privy to the existence of a contract. Many households I met with in the winter did not even know there were contracts for Kherlen and Bayan-Ovoo soums. They had only heard of the contract with Bayan-Adarga which for most herders is simply too far away. Whether or not this would have changed their migration decision I am not sure, although herders said it might have. Nevertheless, it is clear some benefitted from the contracts while others did not. These dynamics are critical to understanding where households were able to settle in the winter of 2008. Moreover, these dynamics, enabling some to move, critically shape households vulnerability to herd loss.

## **Conclusion**

What I have hoped to make abundantly clear in this chapter is that the current administrative configuration of disaster and emergency management in Mongolia and in Khentii province in particular cannot be reified as formal (Lund 2009). In fact, though certain aspects of the administrative bureaucracy have significant state support and architecture, the various actors, laws, codes, and institutions that make up these networks of governance cannot be excised from

their deep integration in the broader society (Benda-Beckmann 2004). This is not intended, however, to give such dynamics an appearance of complete contingency. In debates surrounding the nature of property (Berry 2004; Peters 2004) and which adhere to similar debates in the anthropology of law and the state, these kinds of institutions are increasingly being viewed as mutable, contingent, near random social phenomena. In fact, a number of works draw on the concept of ‘fuzzy’ property rights (Verdery 2003) to explore how property is made in the moment; in other words, how various configurations of moral codes, identity, and discourse are assembled in the moment to constantly shift legitimacy in unpredictable ways. Goodale (2010) critiques a similar tendency in the anthropology of law, where legal precedents and laws themselves are given the air of aimlessness and infinite interpretivity. In contrast, others argue that we have lost sight of the patterned, forcefully material ways in which property and law works consistently (Peluso 2009). Structural inequalities and deeply embedded state power structures might interpret law, and non-state actors are clearly implicated in this process, but they do so in patterned ways that reflect over-riding moral codes and material interests of those in society.

In this context, otor contracts, whether obtained through strategic exchange or enacted through nebulous configurations of customary moral economies and socialist political rationalities, are themselves real institutions that have power when they are enacted. Moreover, when they are enacted they have important implications that are very serious, particularly to those who need them and, vice versa, to those who must tolerate them. Moreover, their inaccessibility as a state-based resource demonstrates the very real way in which herders live in a highly stratified social world. In the next chapter I look more closely at the implications of otor contracts and other measures households take in the context of potentially hazardous conditions. Moreover, I explore the effects these institutions have on household herds.

## Chapter 9 Disaster in Uguumur 2007-2008

*In the herdsman Odonbaatar's winter quarters, the snow fell thickly, and so he went to the winter quarters of herdsman Bohisharga.*

*Dashbalbar, Poet*

*From "The Battle for Our Land Has Begun"*



*Figure 9.1. A herder rides out by motorcycle to return camels to camp. Uguumur, January 2008. (Photo taken by author)*

### Introduction

This chapter explores the unfolding of disaster in Uguumur over the course of 2007-2008 tracing the movements of households across the landscape of central and southern Khentii in relation to livestock loss. In addition, I explore through household profiles how four households constructed mobile strategies and confronted these hazardous conditions.<sup>209</sup> These households were selected for their varying livestock mortality rates and representativeness of certain wealth and social categories within the sample population. From these migrations profiles we can see how various factors and conditions limit or enable herders' most important risk management practice: mobility. Moreover, through these profiles we see how the very transformations discussed in the previous chapters have impacted the ability of differently positioned households to evade the consequences of *zud*.

I also explore the complementary use of both quantitative and qualitative data in ethnographic research. From the statistical data I present on households, mobility, and land use it is clear that in the contemporary political economy of Uguumur wealth and social connections

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<sup>209</sup> An additional six are included in Appendix B.

are vital to survival on the steppe. In conjunction with the qualitative descriptions of the profiled households we gain a deeper understanding of how households mitigate the social landscape and how they mobilize wealth, labor, and rights in land to implement their own strategies, some of which are successful and others of which are not. This complementary use of quantitative and qualitative data help lay bare the shifting, yet forcefully ‘real’ structures of access, entitlement, and property that differentially distribute the resources which make mobile livelihoods possible.

### **Disaster and Migration 2007-2008**

The maps below (Figure 9.2) show the location of sampled households over the fall and winter seasons preceding the concurrence of conditions that created *zud* for some households.<sup>210</sup> In fall, as mentioned above, we see in the first map that a number of households had already left Bayankhutag *soum*. Many of these households belong either to collective kin groups (*buleg*) or are wealthy herd-owners in their own right. Also noticeable are the numbers of households in non-contracted *soums* or at least in *soums* pre-contract formation. By late November, only Bayan-Adarga had been officially contracted. As discussed in previous chapters, herders utilized a number of strategies to thwart the institutional layers which attempt to prevent their settlement. For those who can absorb these costs or at least manage them, a broader range of possible settlements are open to them; for those who cannot, such constraints can have disastrous consequences. In the second map we see that a high concentration of herders moved to Murun, Kherlen and even Batnorov *soums*. Murun and Batnorov were never contracted. However, households were either able to mitigate the consequences of moving without contracts or arranged favorable conditions with local households on their own. In the case of Murun, many households were able to connect with distant kin and use those relationships as a means to access campsites.

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<sup>210</sup> As of the summer of 2007, only a few households had left the *soum*.

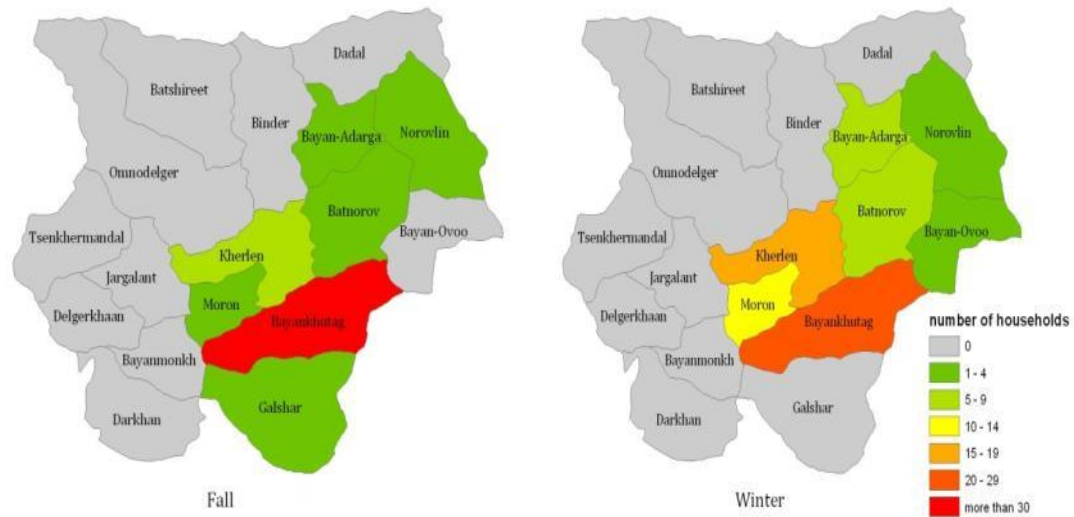


Figure 9.2. Locations of households in fall and winter of 2007-2008. On the left (a), locations of sampled households in Fall of 2007. On right (b), locations of sampled households in Winter of 2007-08. (Maps compiled by author with survey data)

Despite these strategies, many herders sought out the benefits of otor contracts which, although time specific and limited, can afford considerable protection from these threats. Accessing such contracts clearly is not possible for all. Households must be able to move given the formation of a contract and more importantly they must be able to encourage the soum governor to form a contract on their behalf. For example, in mid-winter the Bayankhutag soum governor, at the request of an extremely wealthy Uguumur herder, arranged what he called a ‘verbal’ contract (*amiin geree*) with the Norovlin soum governor so that the herd-owner and his clients could winter there after facing an altercation with a local Bayan-Adarga herder. Poor households and socially unconnected households do not have access to such political capital and thus are relegated to managing adverse weather conditions in other ways.



*Figure 9.3. Uguumur in early December of 2007. There was no grass, excessive snow, and few households (left). Pasture conditions at my host family's otor campsite in February (right). (Photos taken by author)*

By winter, even these households, the non-wealthy, were on the move. Many found refuge in the eastern half of Bayankhutag soum where the threats from local households and administrative institutions are less severe. Moreover, they can make, at least in ‘legal’ terms, legitimate claims on campsites. But even such moves were difficult.

Herder B: Just to move here we spent 200,000 MNT to move, very expensive. When we go on otor, to far places, we must bring ice, wood, coal, cow dung, xurzun, they will dry it at their winter campsite and spring campsite and we must bring this for winter, of course, and buuts if there is not enough buuts, we must bring that as well. Sometimes we even have to buy argal and xurzun. We have to sell livestock to do this, so this eats into our herd and we have fewer animals just to save our other animals. Other households take loans from the banks to pay for moves.

Other households, however, migrated to regions where they had other connections such as in Murun soum, immediately north of Uguumur. A number of Uguumur households, including several of my host households, have kin in Murun. Before the advent of socialism, the regions were administratively connected so a number of kin relationships are still present, albeit distant. My host households and others utilized these connections to access campsites in Murun. Other households used their kin connections to migrate to Galshar, Batnorov, or Kherlen soums.

A number of herders conducted otor migrations in Batnorov soum, a non-contracted soum notorious for ‘unruly’ locals and livestock theft. Moreover, the soum maintains the highest number of horses in all of Mongolia. Horse herds often cause a number of problems in the context of disaster. Horse herds move quickly over the landscape and can quickly trample and over-graze pasture. In Batnorov, herders talk of herds of 300 or more horses, a number which can easily lay waste to a pasture in a short period of days to weeks. Two major kin groups sought to winter in Batnorov. The soum governor was unable to establish a contract between the two soums and told the herders who were there or planning to winter there that settlement would be illegal.

Consequently, he could not protect them from ‘xuux’ and other sanctions. Regardless, the households who had not already left, went. One kin group spent the better part of fall and winter moving from campsite to campsite as their animals were continually being stolen by locals trying to expel them. The other group moved on to Bayan-Adarga soum to the north.

Because conditions were so much more favorable to the north, many of these households did not bother making preparations for tough conditions. Many did not buy hay or supplementary feed. Some did not even bother bringing make-shift shelters with them and opted instead for simply fencing for their corrals; yet, households who were capable of migrating northward suffered lower rates of loss.

Households that were not able to navigate the complex institutional landscape were forced to face increasingly worse conditions in Uguumur and other regions of Bayankhutag. These households, mostly poor to middle wealthy but also including *uldsen* ail or the left behind households, were relegated to coping with these conditions in other ways. In this brief section I look at the methods households employ to cope with ‘livestock famine’ and the non-migration opportunities available to them.

Most households to a certain degree prepare in advance for adverse conditions in winter. Many households buy hay and feed, pack fences and wind breaks, truck *buuts* if they are moving to a new campsite, and prepare numerous other supplies. Yet conditions over the course of the winter can prove too much for these methods. My host household split their herds into two groups of weak and strong animals, leaving the weak behind to be fed prepared forage rather than having them burn energy out at pasture and compete with the stronger livestock. In *xar zud* (black zud, caused by drought) or other contexts where snowfall is lacking and well access is difficult, households will often truck in ice from the river to melt for their stock. Wealthy households utilize portable *xulug* or troughs to provide supplementary water.

Supplementary non-hay feed can take various forms. Supplemental feeds always, in my experience, had *xiiveg* at their base. My host household mixed beef broth and vegetable peels with *xiiveg* as a feed. Other households give eggs, fish oil, *baraashig* (a kind of home brew), meat, corn, rice, or other grains in a combined mixture to their animals. Households administer these feeds in different ways as well. Some boil the mixture, some make frozen balls of the mixture to stick in animals mouths, and others simply feed the mixture straight without liquid. One household even gave melons they had frozen to their animals. All over Mongolia there are endless varieties of home remedies for stemming the course of exhaustion and wasting in livestock. With my hosts, supplemental feeding rarely worked.



*Figure 9.4. Winter strategies. Top left: Feeding xiiveg to calves, Top right: Calf wearing a nemxii or cover. Bottom left: hay reserves fenced in to protect from starving livestock, Bottom Right: collecting ice for drinking water and mixing with xiiveg for weak stock. (Photos taken by author)*

As animals weakened too far to restore their condition, herders are left with two possible choices: slaughter or migration. For most, at this point, migration is very difficult and would put additional stress on the herd. In some cases households are able to transport weak animals by truck to other pastures. In late January, the households of my host encampment shipped all 26 of their cattle to Undurxaan to be kept in a fenced corral and maintained with feeds. One of the brothers chose to move his herds to the Murun soum border. The cattle all died save 3; in contrast, the brother's herds survived and eventually regained their former condition. Only 17% of households moved in the winter.<sup>211</sup> For these households the rationales for movement only in a few cases included 'zud' and only one of them was poor. The majority, including wealthy herders, coop members, clients, or hired herders, moved because either they were expelled (*xuusun*) or because better opportunities existed elsewhere. Only one household that suffered a high loss rate moved in the winter.

<sup>211</sup> I define winter here as the critical months of January and February.





*Figure 9.5. Winter strategies. On the left, a herder separates the weak from the strong. On the right, several of the hired herders slaughter weakened stock for sale in Undurxaan. (Photos taken by author)*

As I discussed in chapter 3 distress-slaughtering of livestock is generally a luxury of the wealthy. Although poor households do slaughter animals, I found that generally the poor retreat from the market and attempt to smooth assets rather than divest of them. Although markets are open and trading during the winter, particularly since meat demand increases in urban areas, poor and middle wealth households face serious difficulties. Trekking animals to the market is not a possibility, finding transportation that can manage the deep snow can be difficult, and the cost of gasoline for such arduous trips is very high. For the wealthy or at least those who do not perceive a serious asset-loss threat and are capable of covering the costs of doing so, will sell weakened stock. Only in a few cases had I heard stories of households that sold their animals in dire situations as an exit strategy but I did not uncover such practices during the research period.

### **Livestock Losses**

The overall mortality rate by species for Bayankhutag soum ending in the summer of 2008 after the zud disaster was just above 15 per cent. Cattle, as is normally the case, were the worst hit with 31 per cent loss across the soum; although, cattle are a more important species in the other two bags.<sup>212</sup> The loss rate for horses also reflects ‘lost’ horses such as through theft. Goats and sheep are typically lower; however, goats are not selectively culled for meat, strength, and overall health and therefore are more susceptible to loss. The overall mortality rate for all species was 18%. However, the sample of households from Uguumur only experienced an average mortality rate of 7%, a marked difference. This can primarily be attributed to the distribution of wealth across the soum. The majority of wealthy livestock-owners are in

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<sup>212</sup> This is largely a reflection of household herd compositions. The other two bags have a deeper history of raising cattle and are generally poorer. As I showed in chapter 3, poor households have a greater percentage of cattle in their herds.

Uguumur. Additionally, Uguumur herders, disproportionate to those of other bags, were able to take advantage of the winter otor contracts.

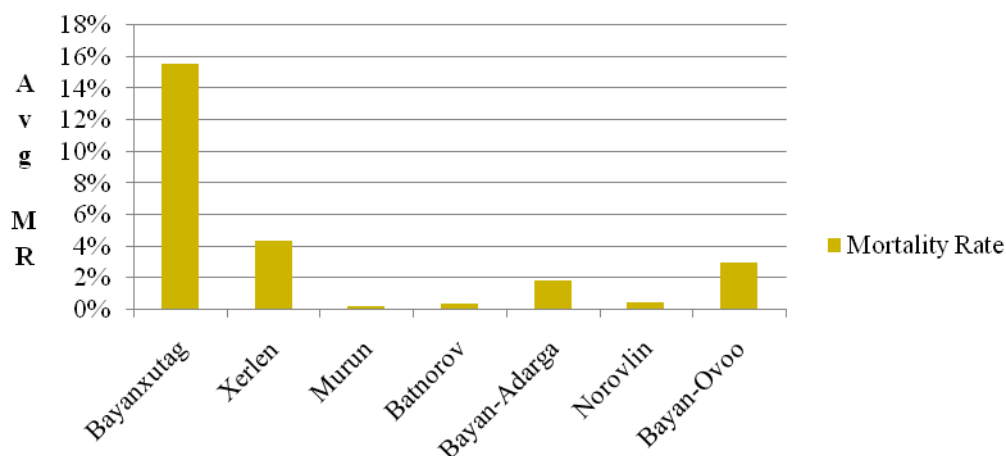
On the official list of households under the otor contracts, 67 % are from Uguumur even though Uguumur has fewer households than each of the other two bags. Consequently, the same dynamics that produced differential exposure to adverse conditions within the bag affected those beyond the bag. The two eastern bags, whose populations are on average poorer but larger, suffered higher losses than Uguumur, largely because they were unable to go on otor in other soums as evidenced by their small representation on the otor contract lists. The higher mortality in these two bags is reflected in the soum mortality rates. .

The Uguumur average, like the other bags it is presumed, also includes a wide range in variation of rates. The highest total mortality of a sample household was 30%, a disastrous loss of livestock. Yet, a number of households who avoided zud by moving suffered 0% zud-induced mortality. These households may have lost animals for one reason or another but they did not ‘zuderex’ (exhaust or waste away) or ‘zudand nuurlex’ (face zud). The importance of migration and settlement in shaping this pattern of variation is critical. In other words, mobility pays.



*Figure 9.6. Consequences of zud. Left, carcasses left behind after zud . Right, a burn pile for dead animals. Burning prevents the spread of disease.(Photos taken by author)*

In Figure 9.7 we see that winter location of households was an important indicator of livestock mortality rates. Those who stayed in Bayankhutag averaged nearly 16% mortality, very close to the soum average, while those who migrated north to other pastures averaged approximately 3%, a marked difference in mortality. Moreover, those who migrated to the closest soum, Kherlen, suffered the second highest rate of loss.



*Figure 9.7. Average mortality rates of sampled households by winter location.(Compiled using data from household surveys)*

Those who visited more than one soum over the course of the winter suffered less than those who did not. Households that accessed three or more soums suffered mortality rates of just under 2%, households who migrated to two soums suffered rates of just over 3%, and those who visited one other soum experienced losses of roughly 6%. The individual capacity to access more than one soum is not only a reflection of differences in wealth and ability to cover the transportation costs but also reflects an inability to successfully make claims to campsites through transactions such as contractions, sales, rentals, gifting, bribery, and other methods and avoid monitoring, enforcement, and sanction when operating outside the legal bounds. This discrepancy in loss rates between those who left and those who did not has significant implications for herd growth, livelihood security, and future vulnerability to difficult conditions. To the degree that such discrepancies were due to differences in wealth or other factors will be discussed in greater detail below.

### **Post-disaster**

After the winter disaster of 2008, many herders returned to their customary campsites in Uguumur or to other territories within Bayankhutag soum. The contract periods for all the soums except Bayan-Adarga had technically ended and so households were no longer covered under the otor contracts. Moreover, many households are comfortable wintering their livestock without the use of shelters but spring poses critical challenges that seriously threaten stock during the birthing season. Most households were unable to move their *saravch* or shelters with them on otor as this would require significant labor and transportation costs. Therefore, many households were forced to return.

Yet those households who had left for more northerly regions, particularly in Bayan-Adarga and Norovlin had invested a significant amount time, energy, and money and were not going to return so quickly. Several of these herders argued that Uguumur was degraded and their herds were too large; capacity would not suffice or ‘*daats diilexgui*’ they would say. These households were also the most wealthy. They had transported their saravch and fencing to the north the previous fall and intended to spend the entire year.

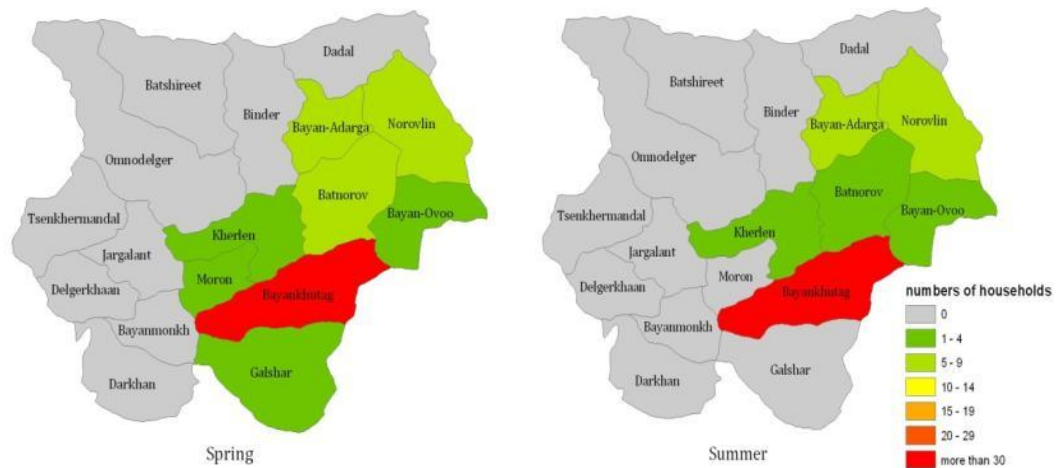


Figure 9.8. Locations of households in spring (left) and summer (right) 2008.

These households also had much more experience in conducting otor in other soums. Many of the households who wintered in Kherlen, for example, had never conducted otor in another soum. The wealthy herders still in the north, however, knew that there were other means besides contracts to secure campsite access. In Norovlin soum, the herder who had arranged a verbal contract via the Bayankhutag soum governor stayed in the soum until August by giving livestock as *gar tsailgax*. In Bayan-Adarga herders paid 150,000 MNT to the bag darga to continue the contract through spring and several head of stock (possibly 20 sheep) to the soum governor to extend that contract to Naadam or July. Through these strategic practices, these households were capable of extending the contract or securing access through these means precluding their need to return home. To better understand how households navigated this year I turn to household migration profiles.

## Understanding Mobility

In this section I present qualitative and quantitative data on household mobility over the course of 2007-2008 preceding, during, and following the zud. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data sheds light on different sorts of dynamics in the formation of household-herd migrations. In the first section, I present qualitative data in the form of household profiles.

Then I compare these profiles to statistical data on the entire sample of 68 households. In many ways the qualitative data shed light on why we see the patterns we do in the quantitative data. Vice versa, the quantitative data demonstrate that the experiences of these profiled households, while not reducible in some senses, are not entirely specific to these households.

### **Household Profiles**

Below I look at 4 different households' annual migration cycle from July of 2007 until July of 2008. In the appendix I have included 7 other households profiles in order to give the interested reader a broader vision of individual household strategies in the context of disaster. I also use them as representative households of each group in comparisons of statistical data in the next section. These profiles demonstrate the variety of factors that influence migration decisions and the ways that households manage the risks and attempt to mitigate the consequences of hazards like drought. Each of these households formulated what for them, at the time, seemed to be the most optimal decision, but that does not mean that those decisions were the most 'rational', 'efficient', or otherwise best outcome. Some households recognized what turned out to be poor decisions. In most cases, though, what affected their decisions were not the lack of decision-making ability and initiative, but broader factors. For example, as we will see, differences of age, class, gender, and ethnicity have important effects on the decision-making *capacity* of households to move in ways that shield them from livestock mortality risk.

I include the entire annual migration cycle rather than solely the migrations most pertinent to risk avoidance for a number of reasons. The first is that for some households the process of avoiding the possibility of zud began much earlier in the year than for other households. Moreover, the consequences of zud which can affect future migration decisions have reverberating effects in some households but not in others. This time component of disaster and migration is important as it reflects different dimensions of resource access.

Additionally, in each of these profiles I discuss the households involved in great detail so that the reader can acquire a deeper sense of who is capable of avoiding disaster and who is not. This use of qualitative data here is critical. Quantitative data would miss many of the social dynamics upon which herder households depend. Moreover, each profile is accompanied by a map of their migration and settlement. The description in the text adheres to the number scheme in the map so that the reader can follow by referring to the map. I also include a range of quantitative representations of qualitative data including ratings herders made on pasture conditions. Herders rated resources such as campsites, water, pasture, and xujir in a 1 to 5 scale where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent. This is critical because as I will demonstrate, poorer, unconnected herders often find themselves in poor pasture conditions, whereas wealthy

households do not.<sup>213</sup> Each of the migrations are also accompanied with data on numbers and types of households in proximity to the campsite, well distances, and other important variables. Following the profiles I would look more closely at these variables and analyze their importance relative to other more qualitative factors.

### **Batbuyan**

Batbuyan's (28, Khalkha) household in terms of livestock would be considered poor with only 127 head. In the summer of 2008 he and his wife had 80 sheep, 26 goats, 13 horses, 8 cattle, and no camels. His wife is also a teacher at the kindergarten in Undurxaan and her salary (220,000 a month) represents their primary source of income. Their pastoral income was approximately 1,084,000 MNT from July 2007 to July 2008.<sup>214</sup> Except for summers, she spends most of the year in Undurxaan, the aimag center, while Batbuyan commutes back and forth from the countryside in Uguumur by motorcycle. They recently purchased a car with a loan from Xaan Bank so they could more easily drive back and forth from the countryside with their growing family. When in Undurxaan they reside at a large, three room house her father built and still owns, though he is rarely there. At the time of research they had a small boy (2) but since have added a little girl to their household.

Batbuyan comes from a family in transition, many of whom have left the rural life for more urban settings. He is the second youngest of 8 children. Five of the eight children are women. Of his two brothers only one is a herder. His brother Batjargal herds rams and bucks for local households in Uguumur (*xuts uxna xariulax malchin*).<sup>215</sup> Although such work can be lucrative over time, it takes time and energy and is a position generally occupied by a poor household. His parents passed away when Batbuyan was young, leaving the younger children in the hands of older siblings. Without parents and a strong elder brother, his family was ill-positioned to be successful. His parents did not benefit from privatization and consequently left only a few animals for the children. His older siblings married out of the countryside and now live in UB and one even in South Korea. Not only does Batbuyan come from a poor family but he is also poorly positioned to benefit from kin cooperation. Yet, his marriage in 2006 opened up new channels for him.

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<sup>213</sup> However, almost no household would rate a campsite less than 5 because to do so would be an insult to the 'powers' in the land, upon which they depend. Consequently, I only use the data concerning the other 3 resources.

<sup>214</sup> This is disproportionately large for his wealth category – he sold a large number of stock because of the age composition in his herd.

<sup>215</sup> See FAO "Poverty Perception Study" for a good description of *xuts uxna xariulax malchin*.

Batbuyan's father-in-law, Nasanbayar, is a myangat herder and Soumiin *Sain Malchin* or 'Soum Best Herder' award winner. Nasanbayar's brother-in-law, with whom Nasanbayar at times collectively migrates, is also one of the wealthiest men in the *soum*, an *Ulsiin Sain Malchin* (National Best Herder), and is an *axlagch* of one of the cooperative *buleg* in Uguumur. He is profiled in the appendix as well (see 3124 below). His wife's mother is also a locally powerful and respected person – she is the head teacher at the Bayankhutag soum school<sup>216</sup> and a member of the *Irgediin Tuluuluchdiin Xural* (ITX). Batbuyan has been dependent to a certain degree on his parents-in-law. Contrary to customary Mongol practices, Batbuyan received wedding livestock from Nasanbayar – 80 sheep, 60 goats, 26 horses, and 8 cattle – rather than his own relatives. These stock were added to the small herd he inherited from his own parents. Batbuyan, however, has attempted to strike it out on his own, outside his relationship with his father-in-law. Succumbing to dependency on an elder requires a level of deference and submission that he has tried to resist. This is reflected in Batbuyan's migrations and his ultimate decision to join with his father-in-law in Bayan-Adarga soum in the north.

This was also reflected in the 3 interviews I did with Batbuyan. In the first session, conducted in early June, where we took mostly survey data and follow-up questions to the data collected, Batbuyan stressed that he did not cooperate with anyone and that he still camped on his parents' customary campsites. By September of 2008 when we did two follow-up interviews with Batbuyan, his demeanor had changed a great deal. In early July he came to the realization that he needed to join his father-in-law in Bayan-Adarga, and hence moved. Yet, by moving he sacrificed his independence, as limited as it was.

### ***Migration profile***

Until late July of 2007 Batbuyan was at camp near the Kherlen river in the area at the margins of Xaya, described above, and Bulan (1). Xaya, in particular, had suffered significantly in the drought that summer. Many of the more drought tolerant plant species had begun to dominate the landscape including *tsaxildag* or Siberian iris, a plant grazed only by goats. In Xaya, Batbuyan normally camps about 5 km from the river so that his stock can graze their way out to the river in the morning, taking advantage of the *maraa* (soda) in the *dov* (bumpy floodplain feature) and spend the day next to the river before grazing their way back home. This region, even during the drought, was crowded (see 3030 in the appendix who also camps here). The majority of Batbuyan's relatives on both sides of the family were camping in the area (10

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<sup>216</sup> Teacher's are locally powerful people – as education has become increasingly the gateway to success outside the rural economy particularly by entrance to university, teachers' control over grading and pass/fail decisions has enhanced their positions within local hierarchies (both rural and urban).



households), along with approximately 24 other local households by his estimation. A number of non-local households had also summered in Xaya. In late June and early July, in order to fatten his stock, he had taken his stock on a continuous short otor east down the river and then southward towards the foothills near a region called Bayan-Erxtii, a prominent *shutdeg* (or *taxilga*) *uul*.

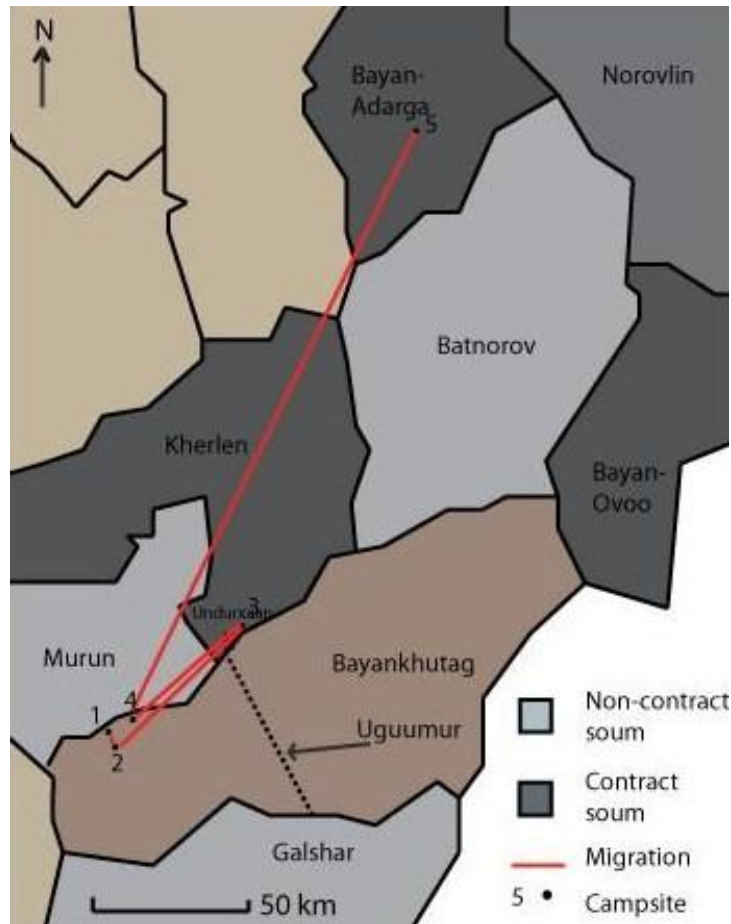


Figure 9.9. Batbuyan's annual migration route.

In late July he made an early moved by truck and camel cart to his customary *namarjaa*, which is also in Xaya but further south past the main road (2). His father-in-law came out and moved his family's belongings by truck as Batbuyan drove (*tuux*) his and his mother's stock to the new site. Xaya along the river was overcrowded and the drought had decimated local forage. Rather than *tsaxildag*, his *namarjaa* was dominated by *ulun* and *looli* – plants of decent value for all species of livestock. He was still approximately 5 km from the river but in an ecologically different landscape that, although much drier and higher in elevation, was less crowded.

The forage cover was sufficient enough that Batbuyan stayed at his *namarjaa* until November. However, as winter approached the surrounding pasturage diminished and his



livestock were not fattening well. He visited his customary *uvuljuu* on the south-side of Ix Bayan Uul, a few kilometers away, and decided that the surrounding pasture *daats* or capacity was not significant enough to surpass snowfall, and even if little snow fell, the distance of the site from water would have been too taxing on his stock. His older brother Nergui, with whom he rarely cooperates, was considering a move to Kherlen *soum* on the east side of Undurxaan. Nergui had already dispersed the rams and buck goats he was charged with herding in early October to their respective owners for the breeding season and consequently was not herding them at the time they left. Consequently, he and his brother Batbuyan were able to cooperate. The *soum* governors, with the requests initiated by local myangat, established winter otor contracts for Bayankhtuag herders to move to Kherlen *soum* for the winter. Nergui had gone to scout a campsite on a trip to Undurxaan and Batbuyan went along with him. Batbuyan wanted to move a little closer to Undurxaan to make the commute easier so he could see his child and wife who were living in the aimag center. They selected a site belonging to an acquaintance of his wife approximately 20 kilometers to the east of Undurxaan, almost 80 kilometers from his *namarjaa*. They moved via his father's-in-law truck and cooperated driving the stock for several days. They only made two stops during that time, a fast move with a full *ger*. They selected a site that was 4 and a half km from a local well and they brought two large salt blocks with them. He had to use much of his November sales income to cover the cost of the move.

Before they moved they consulted with a lama in Undurxaan concerning the location of the move. Batbuyan was very anxious about leaving his *tursun nutag* and was particularly worried whether this new *nutag* will satisfy his livestock. The lama he consulted instructed him that since everyone else was moving it would be wise for him to do so as well. He read the necessary astrological signs and instructed Batbuyan on the exact day and time to move to make the *nuudel* a successful one. The campsite they had selected was dominated by *looli*, a forage species Batbuyan prefers and knows well. His livestock were well adapted to this species as it dominates 3 of his 4 campsites.

In late November, along with a number of households from Uguumur he and his older brother Nergui moved via truck and camel cart to Kherlen *soum*, driving their stock separately (3). His father-in-law had gone much further north and by early December had moved on to Batnorov *soum* with Uusuu, a herder from Uguumur and old friend who was camping with relatives there. In late December his father-in-law had already moved on to Bayan-Adarga and would not return to Uguumur until after I had left the field in December of 2008. While in Kherlen, Batbuyan lost 12 sheep and 11 goats, approximately 14 per cent mortality rate. He bought no hay, no *xiiveg*, or any other kind of supplementary feed because he had already used

his sales income to pay for transportation, salt blocks, and other expenses. His brother, with whom he rarely cooperates, moved north again in late January without Batbuyan as he wanted to remain close to Undurxaan and near households of people he at least was familiar with. Regardless, 11 of his horses were stolen in late January after his brother left. He also made no distress sales of livestock having already sold 4 sheep and 4 goats in November.

Unable to move again without help Batbuyan would remain in Kherlen for the rest of the winter until birthing began. In early March he moved back to his xavarjaa along the river near Bulan, east of Xaya (4). He had only been using this campsite for two years, having used other campsites in years past. He selected this campsite because of the high quantity of *ders* or feather-grass that could protect his stock against the wind. Even though he brought a fence with him, *ders* can protect stock while out at pasture, an invaluable resource when storms can strike without much warning. After the birthing, he exchanged lambs with his older brother Nergui who had also returned from up north. Nergui would not be collecting rams and buck goats from local households since most had left on *otor* to the north. Batbuyan would watch his brother's lambs until late May when he began planning a possible move north, foregoing his independence, to join his father-in-law.

Before leaving, Batbuyan and his wife again consulted the lama. They were especially concerned since their move to Kherlen did not go very well having lost more livestock than normal. They were extremely concerned about whether their livestock would be well matched to Bayan-Adarga's local forages, what Batbuyan generally called *tsetseg* or 'flowers' because he could not recognize some of them, and with the powers in the earth. The lama requested that they bring several rocks from Bayan-Adarga and he would read them for signs about the lands' 'powers' and suitability.

Batbuyan had a number of other worries about moving north. Moving there to camp with his father was a big move both in terms of physical, geographical distance and in social terms. The implication of moving north was that in effect he would become his father-in-law's client herder, somewhat similar to a hired herder. However, he would be charged with more than just looking after stock but also maintaining the ger. His mother-in-law and wife both lived in Undurxaan and, consequently, he would have to do most of the household tasks in combination with herding tasks. For example, when I visited him in October of 2008, he was tasked with milking the cows, cooking the food, cleaning, and herding duties. There were benefits to cooperating like this with his father. He could obtain more free time as he could alternate his time in the countryside with being in Undurxaan since his father-in-law had hired herders as well. Yet, he would remain under the authority of his father-in-law. This was reflected in the change in

Batbuyan's demeanor between our visits. When we met with him in Xaya it was difficult to take an interview from him because he kept joking, making funny voices, and we could not stop laughing. When we visited him in the summer and then again in the fall, in the presence of his father-in-law, his demeanor had changed to quiet and reserved. In his absence, though, he once again became more effusive. When we went outside to milk the cows, he was excited that he did not have to do the work because my assistant was there to do it for him.<sup>217</sup>

Seeing this contrast, it was clear his decision to move north was not one entered into lightly. Despite these implications, Batbuyan moved 155 kilometers north in late June to his father-in-law's campsite in Bayan-Adarga along the Shuusiin river. His father-in-law helped him move via truck and wagon. He remained with his father moving down through Batnorov and into Bayankhutag by the time I left the field. Maintaining this kind of mobility, regardless of the political implications, may lead to a much more beneficial outcome the next time he faces a *zud*.

*Table 9.1. Statistical summary of Batbuyan's household.*

Ex ante Herd Size	Ex post Herd Size	Mortality Rate	Major Moves	Total Distance	Average Distance	Soums Accessed
147	127	14%	4	315	79	2

### **Battogtokh**

Battogtokh (53, Khalkha) is married with 3 children, one of whom actively herds alongside him. At his campsite reside his elderly uncle and one much older, unmarried brother who herd cooperatively even though they own herds separately. He currently owns 204 head of stock. Although he is an *aldartai uyaach* (famous horse trainer), Battogtokh, of late, procures little income from the sale of horses and prize winnings. In the last few years he has had little luck in racing and has increasingly lost his edge in training. His wife is mentally disabled and, incapable of other work, retains a subsidy from the government each month to assist the family. Although she can do basic household duties, she is unable to do anything more than basic labor.<sup>218</sup> To make matters worse, Battogtokh has serious arthritis in his feet and has trouble

<sup>217</sup> My assistant and Batbuyan grew up together in Xaya and know each very well. Assuming the milking duties, a ubiquitously feminine task in rural Mongolia, was unquestioned and she was more than happy to do it, partly because it meant we could have hot milk with honey for breakfast instead of tea. For Batbuyan, he was happy to be relieved of what to most Mongol men would be a demeaning task. I discuss the gendered nature of work in chapter 4 and its role in maintaining disciplinary regimes within labor relations between employers and employees.

<sup>218</sup> I was unable to acquire data such as kinship genealogy from his wife; however, his daughter was extremely helpful and knowledgeable about kin relations.

walking at times. For herding labor and work around the campsite he is largely dependent on his 18 year old son and 14 year old daughter. He currently owns 40 sheep, 84 goats, 59 horses, and 20 cattle and garnered 326,000 MNT in income from pastoral activities. Battogtokh's household income would have been higher if they had not lost 76 goats in the last year to *zud* and disease. The year was so difficult he had to sell his car and now relies on his motorcycle to go into town. He goes into town rarely unless his daughter is at school. His daughter's education has been an important priority and he utilizes proceeds from horse sales to pay for her education at the boarding high school in Undurkhaan, which is typically reserved only for those who can afford it and usually for residents of Undurkhaan itself. Occasionally, he receives additional help from his brother or other distant relatives in Ulaanbaatar.

Battogtokh was born in Xalzan Soum in Sukhbaatar aimag and moved to Khentii in 1976 to work as a cattle herder for the *fermiin sangiin aj axui* or farm collective in present-day Kherlen soum. In 1990 he followed his older brother (who is now 71) to Uguumur who came to work as a contract herder for Temtsel negdel in Bayankhutag soum. In that same year he married his wife who was born in Undurkhaan but whose family and relatives originate from Murun, Umnudelger, and Delgerkhaan soums to the northwest and west. After herding for 2 and a half years as a contract sheep herder for Temtsel and then *Bayan Kompani*, Battogtokh pooled his vouchers with his older brother and uncle acquiring animals through the livestock privatization. In 1995 he separated from his older brother and uncle by requesting his *xuvi* even though he continued to live with them as a *khot ail*. He received 30 sheep, 10 goats, 1 horse, and 3 cattle – his first private livestock.

Beside his uncle and older brother, the majority of Battogtokh's relatives live elsewhere outside the rural pastoral economy. Most live in the capital Ulaanbaatar; some even live abroad in the UK and US as students and undocumented workers. His siblings are all retired and live on pensions held over from the socialist period. His wife's relatives live for the most part in Undurkhaan but they have limited contact with them. A few relatives still herd livestock in distant soums. On the whole his kin connections are limited to the families of his *khot ail*.

### ***Migration Profile***

In a normal year Battogtokh only moves twice a year from one customary campsite to another. Even in 07-08 when drought and *zud* were threatening the herding economy of the bag, Battogtokh was limited to his two customary moves.

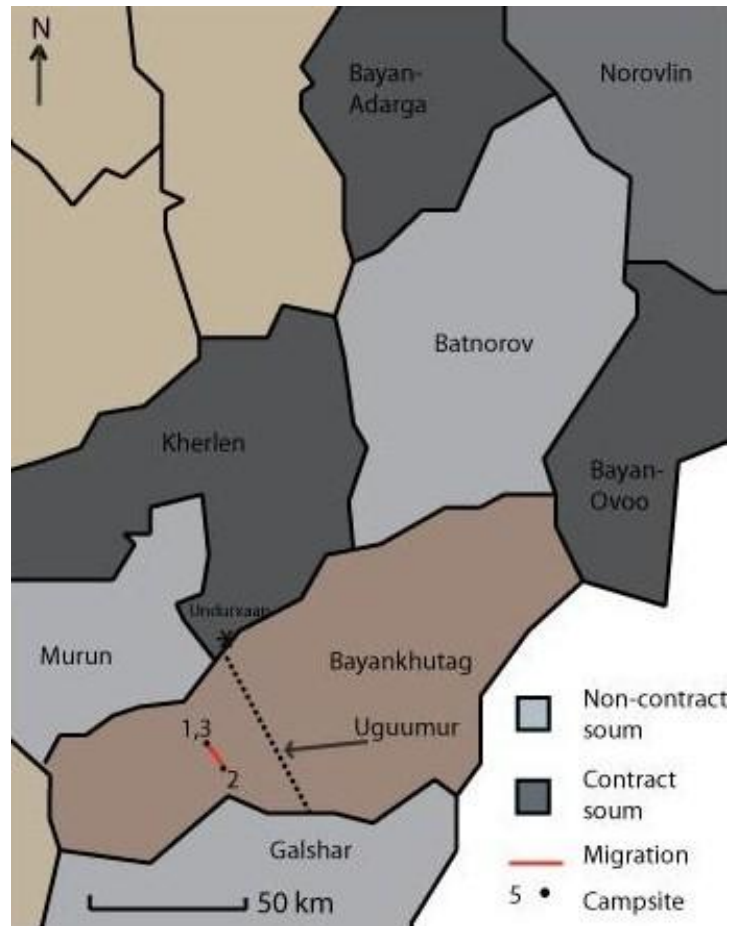


Figure 9.10 Battogtokh's annual household and herd migration route.

From July of 2007 until the beginning of December in 2007, Battogtokh and his family were settled in Uguumur near the bag center (1). They were settled as a khot ail with their relatives, Battogtokh's uncle and older brother, Bayantsamba. In December, Battogtokh moved by car and camel wagon with his family and xot ail to Tsantii Xooloi (2) roughly 2.5 kilometers to the south down the long valley that splits the bag in two until it reaches the salt-water lake at Tsaidam. Their campsite was a kilometer from the nearest well. At the time little snow had fallen and he worried that his stock might not have enough water. However, by mid-December sufficient snow had arrived, which was both a blessing and a curse. His stock now had enough water from snowmelt but forage was lacking. Due to the drought and the lack of available pasturage he bought approximately 20 bags of *xiveg*, 80 bales of hay, and 30 dozen eggs to supplement his stock's feed. He also visited the soum center to pick up government emergency hay and 1000 MNT for gas money reimbursement. During his stay, 3 horses were stolen, probably from one of the households from Galshar. He did not inform the police. By the end of February he had lost only 3 sheep and 1 cow, but also 41 goats. Goats, like cattle are more

susceptible to zud (16 % loss in 2008 versus 10% for sheep across the soum). This represented a major cut in his cashmere income. Battogtokh and his relatives stayed at Tsantii Xooloi until April after birthing and cashmere combing was finished. By spring though, a trickle of local households started to come back from otor to the north.

In late April they moved the 2.5 kilometers back to Uguumur a few hundred yards from their campsite the previous summer. They travelled by his uncle's camel wagons and carts as Battogtokh had to sell his car to make a series of payments to his daughter's school, for food, and for some of the feed supplies they used in winter. Battogtokh would stay in Uguumur until the following winter, after I had left the field. During that time households came and went; most of the households were local ones from Uguumur although a few Galshar households, including some wealthy ones, pass through on their way back south. When he arrived at Uguumur, however, he immediately lost 35 of the 50 kids that were born a month earlier. They had developed *tsetseg* (goat pox) disease and died. He was lucky not to lose them all. In May he went with many of the other members of the bag to make offerings to Erxtii Xairxan mountain hoping that his bad fortunes of the previous year would end and a good summer of rain and good pasture would follow. In late May he lost 10 more goats in a sudden spring storm.

When I asked Battogtokh why he did not move out of the soum or at least go on *otor* he stated that his children were at school and his uncle and older brother are simply too old to be of much help in moving. He could not afford hiring a truck to move and was afraid that by moving to a strange place he would be vulnerable to a host of problems. He had no relatives to cooperate with and few households with which he is a friendly acquaintance. He could not take the animals a far distance because of his disability; there is simply no one to drive the livestock where they would need to go. He decided that Uguumur was as good a place as any and that moving in the middle of the winter would be, as I so often heard, *demii* or pointless. His site was close to a well and *xujir*, and if he needed he could supplement feed with hay. However, hay and other feeds are minimal in their effect; stock that are not adapted to digesting feed will not benefit greatly from it. He also thought the grass was 'not bad' when he moved, *borog uvs* (dried grass), *taana* (wild leek), and *agi* (*Artemisia frigida*) of sufficient height – not too degraded despite the drought. But with minimal snowfall it covered the available grass.

*Table 9.2. Statistical summary Battogtokh's household herd and migration data.*

Ex ante Herd Size	Ex post Herd Size	Mortality Rate	Major Moves	Total Distance	Average Distance	Soums Accessed
261	204	15%	2	5	2.5	0

## **Munkhbaatar**

Munkhbaatar (38, Bayad) and his wife (34, Uriankhai) are new herders in Bayankhutag, having moved to Uguumur from Bayanmunkh *soum* in 2004. They are of the Bayad ethnic group, a small minority from the western border of Mongolia, predominating in Zavxan and Uvs *aimag*. They married in 1993 after meeting in UB and currently have 3 children all of whom are under 18 and in school. Munkhbaatar works during the downtimes of the year as a private taxi driver in Undurxaan, driving people around town and making trips between Undurxaan and UB as private transport, a common mode that I used when public buses were not available. When there is space, he also transports packages and goods for people in a large sedan-style car. Since he works a considerable portion of the year in Undurxaan and his kids go to school there, he owns a *xashaa* and house in the provincial capital. Even though he makes a decent living from his driving, he also owns 430 sheep, 160 goats, 12 horses, 13 cattle, and 4 camels. He is able to do this because he cooperates with his mother, his older brother, and her hired herder. In the last year he made 7,069,000 MNT from pastoral activities. Even so, like most households, he takes out periodic loans from the bank in order to smooth his income. In 07-08 he took out approximately 5 loans at 500,000 MNT each to pay for basic needs.

Munkhbaatar was originally born in Uvs *aimag*. His family moved to Undurxaan in 1979 and shortly thereafter began work as herders in Bayanmunkh *soum* for Munkh-Orgil *negdel*. Several of his relatives also moved. He started working for the *negdel* in 1988 and in 1990 became a contract herder. Because he did not married before privatization, he had no animals of his own. He also received no animals from privatization. His first herd came in 1993 when he married his wife whom he met while driving to UB. His parents gave him 50 sheep, 50 goats, 20 horses, and 20 cattle as his *xuvi*. For most of the year he left his herds with his mother and father in Bayanmunkh while he pursued odd jobs elsewhere in Undurxaan and for a time in UB. In 1996 he bought 6 mares to add to his horse herd. As his herds grew he spent more and more time in the countryside. He now has a schedule where he spends spring, part of the summer, and the beginning of the winter in the countryside. In the spring he helps with birthing and basic herding duties. In the summer he comes to take the animals on *otor* around the *soum* and elsewhere. In winter he comes out to prepare their *uvuljuu*. Whenever the households (his and his mother's) need to move, he comes out with his car and moves them. They still maintain ties with their kin in Bayanmunkh and often move there during the year. One of the two *uvuljuu* they use is in

Bayanmunkh near the border with Bayankhutag on the far western border. For the most part, he, his mother and brother coordinate all activities together.<sup>219</sup>

### ***Migration Profile***

Munkhbaatar's household is by far the most mobile of any household I interviewed. When we met to discuss his migrations over the course of the year we were sitting in his camouflage camping tent at his otor campsite in Xayalaga where he had settled, cooking by gas stove, and sleeping on the bare ground rather than in his ger, reflecting the flexible nature of his mobile strategies.<sup>220</sup> In the interview, he stated that he simply could not count the numbers of times he and his family had moved. He reasoned they may have made 30-40 moves that year, most of them relatively short. His philosophy of migration management is more akin to a classical idea of a 'nomad' or in Mongolian a 'nuudelchin'; as he states, to be a good herder one '*belcheer dagax yustoi*' or 'must follow the pasture'.

Moreover, he interprets customary property regimes differently than most other herders. As he argues, if someone is not presently occupying a campsite, anyone can use it.<sup>221</sup> Clearly, he uses such claims to legitimate his strategy of hyper-mobility. However, he also says that regardless of what he personally thinks he respects the claims of others by avoiding customary campsites in other soums.

There is no foundation for cooperation with local households. So many animals, how can one increase their herds. Plus, how do you move and settle on someone else's nutag together. This gets you expelled. I go where there are open spaces in the margins (on the borders). There no one, neither household nor creature will settle. There are few resources and little water. So you don't go to a household's spring campsite, you move across the land! If one stays on a household's winter campsite or spring campsite they will be really nasty.

This is important because he spent most of the year outside of Bayankhutag and has spent the better part of two years on otor avoiding his customary campsites to allow the nutag to *sergeex* or

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<sup>219</sup> His brother is not married. I point this out because cooperating with a sibling usually implies additional labor from their household, but his older brother still lives with their mother. Moreover, his lack of a family also means that he is limited in his ability to utilize the authoritative powers typically granted to an ax.

<sup>220</sup> Munkhbaatar employs a range of interesting strategies including using a bicycle during the good seasons to herd his goats and sheep. One other household also did this, but out of lack of horses rather than out of a desire for innovation. His tactic of straddling between rural and urban through taxi driving was also different from other households in that he explicitly expressed how taxi driving supports his pastoral activities rather than how he is hedging against possible failure as other households attempt to do. To some extent, as will be discussed in the following chapter, his minority status allows him a range of maneuverability that is simply not available to majority Khalkha and even to a certain extent the Uriankhai and Durvud.

<sup>221</sup> Munkhbaatar's ideas represent a contingent within the community that expresses a more liberal, open access rights regime that is part of the local discourse of rights amongst herders.



revive.<sup>222</sup> He and his khot ail could be said to be almost permanently on continuous otor. Outside of winter, they rarely stay on a single campsite for more than month and sometimes for as little as a day or two. Most households when they settle for such a short time are driving livestock to another campsite, a transitory phase in 'nuudel'. Munkhbaatar, by contrast, is constantly in that transitory phase. Nevertheless, he attempts to avert institutional monitoring and enforcement by travelling alone. He argues that by travelling as a group, most households create problems where they could be avoided. He argued one must travel alone and avoid other households as much as possible.

Going by one ger is easy (on one's mind). There is no one pushing or pulling at your back. Also, when it becomes day and you have to pack everything up and go, it is really easy. Plus, if you are going by a small ger every 3 or 4 miles, it is really easy.

Moving consistently also helps deter threats because he rarely poses as a threat to others. His great flexibility in movement without a wide kin network or labor pool sets his household and his mother's strategies apart from other similar households. He overcomes his lack of kin and available labor by 'straddling', using his taxi income to support his pastoral activities. He uses this income to hire help for moves.

Because he moved so often I have included in the map only those settlements of a month or more.<sup>223</sup> In between each of these moves he moved a number of times.

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<sup>222</sup> *Sergeex* also refers to depositing of buuts and utilizing pasture in a way that increases forage composition and grazing footprint.

<sup>223</sup> If we recalled from chapter 7, continuous long otor requires multiple small moves that make up a much larger migration. I have removed these very small moves because it would have become too cumbersome.

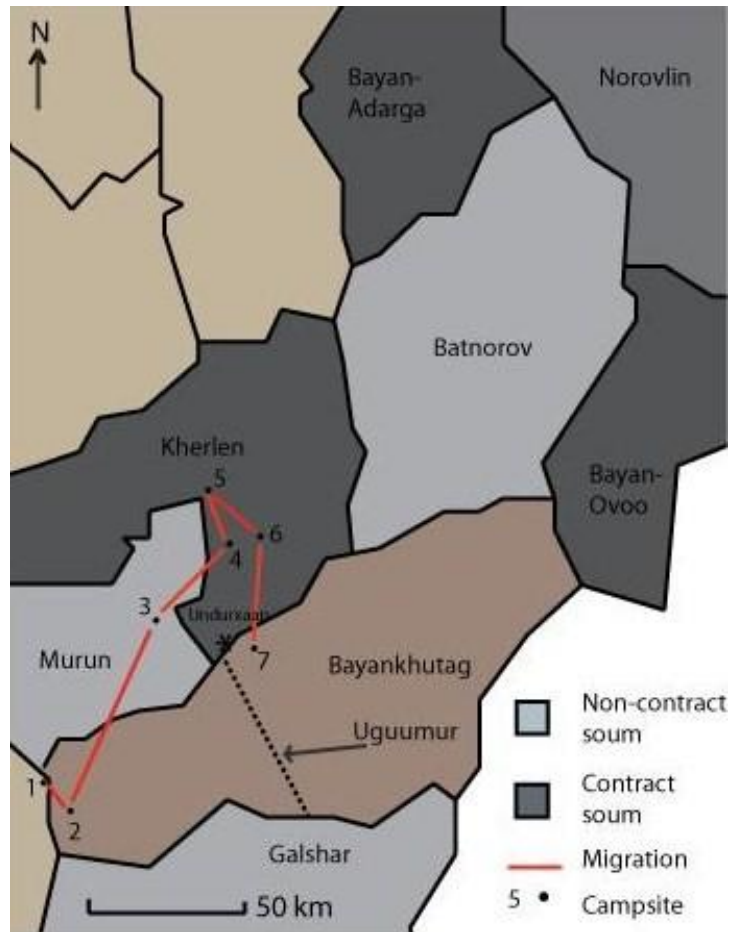


Figure 9.11 Munkhbaatar's annual household and herd migrations.

In July of 2007, Munkhbaatar and his relatives were at their customary xavarjaa in Munkhbaatar soum on the western border of Bayankhutag north of the Kherlen river (1). That month they made a series of moves bringing them to settle in Goliin Eree in western Uguumur approximately 5 kilometers away but totaling 20 kilometers of travel (2). They moved via his friend's truck and his taxi. The site was approximately 3 kilometers away from the river and was dominated by *shirxeg*. They had plentiful access to *maraa* but they bring blocks of *xujir* with them wherever they move so they do not worry about settling in proximity to a source. Because he was still so close to the border with Munkhbaatar soum, 2 other relatives were within 5 kilometers of his camp. There were only a few other Uguumur households nearby. Most had settled further north along the river.

In September, after staying a month in Goliin Eree, he and his khot ail began moving again but this time towards Murun soum to the north. Again they made a series of moves, possibly 3 or 4 he said, for a total of 50 kilometers before settling near Xux Undur mountain in the northeast of Murun (3). He moves so often he says that sometimes he does not know where he

is or what soum he is in. The campsite was again marked by the dominance of shirxeg and borogo. He was within 3 kilometers of a stream that runs south to the Kherlen river out of the mountains. With roughly 5 households within 5 kilometers of his campsite, the area was not overcrowded. He stayed at Xux Undur about month.

In November his *khot ail* moved to Xerlen *soum* eventually settling after a series of moves 32 kilometers away, in early December, at Baruun Bulag, which as the name suggests was west of a local spring (4). He decided they would *uvuljix* or winter at this site.<sup>224</sup> They went by his brother's new flatbed truck and his taxi. They brought with them from the *aimag* center, 10 bags of *xiiveg*, 50 bales of hay and other supplements to prepare for the winter. The campsite they selected, however, became increasingly crowded as households from other soums including Bayankhutag moved into the area on the winter *otor* contract, which he never signed. There were approximately 9 households within 5 kilometers, a high density for winter. Nevertheless, they stayed at this site for quite some time. In January he picked up government assistance hay and gave it to his animals. However, contrary to almost every other household, he stated that his animals digested the feed well. This may be because he obtained the feed from the *aimag* center rather than the soum center which came from the National Emergency Fodder Fund.

In March before the birthing season began his *khot ail* moved 30 kilometers directly to another campsite in Xerlen soum at *Ferm* or the 'farm' (5), a settlement that used to be the administrative center of the provincial *sanjiin aj axuin negdel* or agricultural collective that is now a ghost town and ruinous testament to the socialist past. His *khot ail* settled a couple kilometers away from the settlement tucked in a little site located in the mountains. He stated that he tries to minimize movement in winter and spring and consequently he only moved once during this time to *Ferm*. He moved via his brother's truck and his car again as per usual. They were located only a kilometer from a local well and 2 kilometers from a local spring, a beneficial arrangement considering households split their herds into multiple herds during this time.

In May they moved from *Ferm* back towards Baruun Bulag but this time settling on the eastern side of the spring called Zuun Bulag (6). They made a direct 30 kilometer move to the campsite again via the same mode of transport. The area was highly populated with 10-15 households spread out across a 10 kilometer field, a dense grouping for the spring time which requires sufficient space for the separate herds.

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<sup>224</sup> His customary *uvuljuu* is in fact in Bayankhutag even though he is originally from Bayanmunkh soum. His father's campsite from the *engdel* period was technically located in Bayankhutag although no one knew this. He said that the maps were so bad that they did not know exactly where the soum boundaries actually lie. With new satellite maps, it is clear, he says, that his *uvuljuu* is actually in Bayankhutag.



Figure 9.12. Munkhbaatar's summer otor tent at campsite 7. (Photo taken by author)

Only 3 weeks later in June they began moving southward away from Zuun bulag back towards Bayankhutag. After making 4-5 moves they settled, by July, in Xayalaga where I found them in the otor camping tent (7). On his way to Xayalaga he had first settled somewhat further south towards the foothills of the second bag. There, in a situation he called ‘*aixtar*’ or scary, he camped on a local household’s *namarjaa* or fall campsite. The ‘*ezen*’ visited the site and not recognizing Munkhbaatar inquired as to who he was and what he was doing there. Munkhbaatar was forced to move after the campsite *ezen* informed the second bag governor that a ‘*gadnii*’ or foreign household was staying on his campsite. Without much recourse, Munkhbaatar moved. After a series of moves he eventually came to Xayalaga where I interviewed him. From his tent (see photo above) the area seemed like a vast field of mushroom caps – there were so many households in the area we both stood up and counted. He said he only knew of one Bayankhutag household out of the 23 *ger* we saw. Although the pasture was greening (*nogoolox*) nicely, the frustration of herd mixing was constantly a threat. They stayed in various campsites in Xayalaga for a time before eventually moving back to *Ferm* in Xerlen in September.

Table 9.3. Statistical summary of Munkhbaatar’s household herd and migration data.

Ex ante Herd Size	Ex post Herd Size	Mortality Rate	Major Moves	Total Distance	Average Distance	Soums Accessed
615	616	0%	5	122	24.4	3

## Gansukh

Gansukh (26, Khalkha) and his wife (22, Khalkha), born in Umnudelger soum in the north of the province, were married in 2003 and have one child. They own one ger and live all year in the countryside with his father and kin group, rarely visiting Undurxaan except to buy goods, visit the bank, doctor office, or conduct other official business. They so rarely visit Undurxaan or even the soum center that he does not even own a motorcycle despite owning over 1,516 head of livestock. He currently owns approximately 1,000 sheep, 400 goats, 80 horses, 30 cattle and 6 camels. In the last year he garnered 5,106,000 MNT in income from pastoral activities. On average this is low for his wealth category, but his father, upon whom he greatly depends, was the highest producing herder in the sample earning 27,689,000 MNT in the previous year. Unlike many of their age, Gansukh and his wife have a bank account at Xaan Bank in Undurxaan and Bayankhutag. He has recently won awards such as *Soumiin Sain Malchin* or Soum Best Herder and *Myangat Malchin* – prestigious awards that are generally not earned until much later in life.

Gansukh is the second oldest of 7 children, and is the only one of his sibling that actively continues to herd. His younger siblings are all in school. He left school at 12 to become a herder with his father. When he married his wife in 2003, he received his *xuvi* which was much larger than any transaction I recorded. He acquired 500 sheep, 200 goats, 50 horses 25 cattle, and 5 camels that year. Since that time his herds have nearly doubled. He has done this by actively herding with and benefitting from his father. In order to understand more about Gansukh and his migration it is best to look specifically at his father.

His father (51), Lkhavgadorj, an *Aimgiin Sain Malchin* or *aimag* best herder, and his mother (48) were married in 1982 and moved to Temtsel after privatization. Lkhavgadorj worked as a financial accountant in the negdel in Batnorov soum and his wife who graduated from one of the technical colleges in UB with a degree in agricultural engineering also worked in the negdel administration. Because they were not herders in the socialist period they officially had no animals of their own and received none from privatization.<sup>225</sup> However, both his wife and he had put livestock (*taviul mal*) with each of their parents. He acquired additional stock as a *xuvi* from his father (Gansukh's grandfather) who died in 1995. In 1996 shortly thereafter, Lkhavgadorj decided to move to Bayankhutag. He moved to Bayankhutag because his wife is originally from the soum while he is originally from Batnorov. Yet, they did not move to her birth place or *tursun nutag* but rather to the very far west in Uguumur where the Bayan mountains are located. As

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<sup>225</sup> They could have received animals from privatization but only after herders received their rightful portion. These aspects of privatization are described in Goldstein and Beall (1994).

described in chapter 5, the mountains had long been famous in local folk beliefs as a *bayajuulax uul* or ‘enriching mountain’ and in Lkhavgadorj’s case it seems it has helped. After he moved in 1996 he bought 100 sheep to add to his herd from a local herder in Bayankhutag. Currently, he owns 1,570 sheep, 550 goats, 180 horses, 48 cattle and 10 camels for a total head of 2,358.<sup>226</sup>

Lkhavgadorj, however, it seems, had additional help in becoming wealthy quite fast. He is locally perceived to be a former livestock thief, although I never attempted to question him about this. Several people told me stories about how he ‘probably’ stole livestock from them in the mid-1990s. An official told me that he was, in fact, arrested in the late 1990s for horse theft, but was never prosecuted or sentenced; although, several herders claimed that he spent time in prison. Livestock theft is a common occurrence and many households experience it at some or another or even participate in it themselves. Moreover, members of one kin group seem to blame members of other kin groups for theft problems, but little ever comes of it. Theft is something to be avoided, but if one takes part in it, the perspective changes. Lkhavgadorj’s possible participation in livestock theft could help explain his meteoric increase in livestock as the lack of culling pressure on productive females could allow much faster rates of herd growth. Regardless, he is now one of the wealthiest herders in the bag.

Lkhavgadorj also owns the Taij Trade Company, a meat and livestock trade company that primarily buys from herders to sell to the national meat reserve, but also at times sells to other traders and buyers in Undurxaan. Four years ago he tried to open a glove-making factory in Undurxaan, but the business failed. He is also the head of a cooperative, Gurvan Bayan Buleg, that consists of 9 households almost entirely of his own herders and kin. They received a tractor in 2006 and now cut hay and grow crops for household consumption and for the market. He has received the maximum number of possession contracts and has IBLI insurance for his livestock. Lkhavgadorj, who has won numerous medals including the *Soumiin Avarga Malchin* (soul best herder), *Aimgiin Sain Malchin* (provincial best herder), *Altan Gadas* (Golden Spike), and *Aldartai Uyaach* (Famous horse-trainer) is also politically active attending the *malchdiin zuvluguu* (herder council) meetings at every level – *soum*, *aimag*, and the national *Myangat Malchdiin Zuvluguu* where all the *myangat malchin* in the country gather to discuss pastoral development with members of parliament. He has run for a seat on the *Irgediin Tuluugchdiin Xural* twice and lost both times. He is the largest patron of the Bayankhutag *soum naadam* and is a well known *uyaach* or horse trainer for *xyazaalan* or three year-old geldings. Most of his relatives still live in Batnorov where he has done *otor* in the past. The majority of his children now live in UB. His eldest daughter lives in Korea where she is working on a master’s degree in agricultural

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<sup>226</sup> I have found documents where his herd total was reported as much higher than this.

engineering. The two youngest attend boarding school in Undurxaan. Interestingly, he refuses to live in the aimag center and, consequently, lives year round with his livestock in the countryside where he can sometimes be seen checking on his stock in his Toyota Landcruiser.

Gansukh lives with his father for the entire year except when he goes on continuous *otor*. He and his father also cooperate with Lkhavgadorj's two younger brothers and his brother-in-law. They occupy territory together and migrate collectively. In addition, his father typically has 1-2 *tuslax malchin* or hired herders for additional labor at any given time. But because his father decides nearly everything Gansukh's migration profile must be examined mostly from his father's perspective. His father makes most decisions, even when Gansukh separates from his father to go on *otor*.

### ***Migration Profile***

Gansukh and his *buleg* are highly mobile and use a number of different *otor* techniques. Moreover, they have considerable experience in doing *otor* outside their *soum*. In 2001 they bought a *saravch*, and by proxy, a campsite in Umnudelger to the north where his wife originated from. For two years he remained there with a section of his father's animals. Since 2003 they have kept small sections of their herds with his *xadam* or in-laws. In 2000 and 2004 they went on *otor* themselves in Kherlen *soum* to the north. Such mobility is made easier by his father's armada of trucks and wagons which he uses during the summer months as a contract buyer for the National Meat Reserve. In the winter of 2007 and 2008, Gansukh and his *buleg* were again very mobile. Lkhavgadorj prefers, he says, to enter into friendly relations with other herders, especially when he is on *otor*. He said even if it costs him he is willing to give large *xandiv* if it means that relations will be harmonious. Since in other *soums* there are much fewer *myangat* herders, he is easily noticed. Local households generally as a rule dislike the presence of wealthy herders and will *xuux* or try to expel them. By exchanging animals for access to campsites, he avoids this problem.

Before moving they always consult the astrological charts. While I was visiting his father, he explained to me that one cannot move on *shinii zurgaa* (new six) or *shinii doloo* (new seven) but only on *shinii naim* (new eight). *Shinii* refers to the new moon and the number refers to the number of days since the last new moon. So, *shinii naiman* is the eighth day after the new moon. Eight, being a prosperous number, ensures greater success in the move. Lastly, Lkhavgadorj always hires drovers for his moves and never conducts them himself. Gansukh, though, always physically migrates with the livestock overseeing the hired help with his uncle Todbayar.

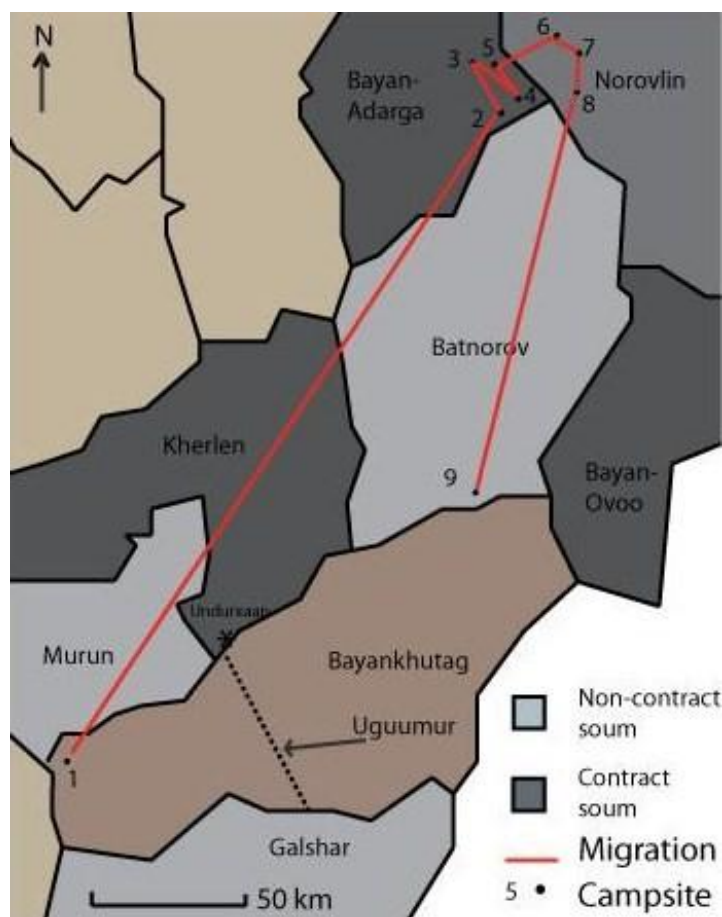


Figure 9.13. Gansukh's annual household and herd migrations.

In July of 2007 Gansukh and his father were camped in the far west of the bag at their namarjaa in eastern Ergen Burgas just past Tuxum (1). Here they tended to one section of the small stock herd and the horse and cattle herds. The majority of their small stock though had left on otor with his uncle Todbayar and his father's herder Lxavgatseren. They conducted a long continuous satellite otor along the river all the way to Xayalaga, about 65 kilometers away. Back at their namarjaa there were no other households around, largely because the forage was so poor. They only stayed here for 20 days before moving on.

In August, well ahead of the otor contract agreements and just after the issuance of togtool they began their migration northward to Bayan-Adarga soum in a region called Sholoomiin nuur (2). His father later approached the soum governor in Undurxaan at the provincial meeting where governors met to form the contract. He asked the Bayankhutag soum governor to arrange an agreement with the Bayan-Adarga governor. According to Togtool 43, the provincial governor had already made the recommendation that Bayankhutag send up to 60,000 head of livestock to Bayan-Adarga, but the agreement would not take place until later in October. A verbal agreement was reached that there would be a formal agreement and Lkhavgadorj,



Gansukh, and others in the group would be added to the list. In return, as a *xandiv*, he gave an undisclosed amount of cash to both the soum governor and bag darga. Before moving the 245 kilometers, Lkhavgadorj arranged to stay on a campsite of a horse-racing acquaintance from Bayan-Adarga. He arranged to give him a *xandiv* of livestock. While at Sholoomiin nuur, Gansukh took the small stock on otor twice up and down the valley near the lake. His father said that although the livestock were not familiar with the forage they had arrived earlier enough for them to adapt prior to the onset of stressful winter conditions. He argued that unfamiliar forage was only important if the animals are already stressed.

In October, they moved 25 kilometers away to Dund Bulag in Bayan-Adarga (3). Todbayar and Lkhavgatseren stayed behind at Sholoomiin nuur while Gansukh moved with his father. While there, Gansukh took the small stock again on one short otor. After breeding, they moved 15 kilometers from Dund Bulag to Saixnii Gol (4). Again they went by themselves. From here Gansukh moved without his father in December to Munx-Orgil about 25 kilometers away (5). While there, he moved 3 times on short continuous otor near an area called Uvuv Xovd, an uncommon practice in the middle of winter. With their large herds, providing the animals extensive grazing is paramount. Forage, however, was plenty and the snow was not insurmountable. While there he only lost two adult goats and only had to buy 10 bags of xiveg to supplement his animals feed. They did not use any hay. His father's herder and brother stayed at Saixnii Gol until February.

In February they had to move again. His fathers' herder's son was watering the sheep at a spring near Saixnii Gol when a local man approached the boy on horseback. The man, clearly drunk, yelled at the boy that they must leave 'his homeland' and that they were destroying the pasture. The boy said nothing in return. Inebriated and angry, the man began whipping the boy with an urga, a cattle whip, and then he punched him. Lkhavgadorj was in the aimag center at the time while Gansukh was in Munx-Orgil. His brother called down to him and told him what happen. He immediately went to the aimag police who came up with him to Bayan-Adarga to investigate. The bag darga and soum governor had already been informed. They found the man at his home and arrested him. Lkhavgadorj said that the man had visited several times before trying to expel him and his herds. The man was fined livestock for his transgression.<sup>227</sup> Although the February move coincides with this event, he did not move away because of this; rather, he moved because the pasture conditions were worsening. He used the situation though to justify getting access to Norovlin soum. He contacted the Bayankhutag soum governor, an old friend of the

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<sup>227</sup> This is an historical form of punishment.

Norovlin soum governor from the negdel period when they both were veterinarians, and arranged a spring otor contract for Norovlin.

Following the contract, Muxerdene, his father, uncle, and herders moved 25 kilometers away to Norovlin soum (6). Here in a region called Tsagaan Xutul they settled the main camp. They arranged use of the site with the customary ezen giving him livestock and cash. Lkhavgadorj's herder went on a few kilometers away in Togoot. Shortly thereafter, Gansukh took a section of small-stock on otor 8 kilometers distance to an area called Uldiin Gol Tolgoi where he did 2 short otors by himself before settling on a campsite for the birthing season (7). He arranged the main campsite with the ezen giving him animals in compensation. He stayed here until May.

In May he met up again with his father in an area 10 km south called Tuliin Tolgoi (8). However, they settled on opposite sides of the valley in order to *saaxlax*. Gansukh was about 2 kilometers away in Tsogtiin tolgoi while his father stayed on the main site in Tuliin Tolgoi. During that time Gansukh went on otor by himself while his father stayed behind with a newly hired herder from Bayan-Adarga. His father had arranged use of the xavarjaa with the ezen as he normally does by giving animals.

In July when I met with Gansukh's father he said that he was planning to go farther north to Dadal soum to a specific location he had scouted but since he heard it was raining in Bayankhutag they were planning on returning. However, when he attended the provincial Malchdiin Zvuluguu Chuulgan he told the aimag governor, who had raised the issue, he would not move until after August 22 when he would settle on his fall otor site. He said whatever arrangements need to be made, must be made, but he would not move. The contracts were over and the verbal agreement he had arranged with the Norovlin soum governor was nearing its end. By August he had moved to Batnorov soum and gradually worked his way down to the border with Bayankhutag (9). He told me he would sit next to the border until they kicked him out. While there he stayed on a friend's campsite. They grew up in Batnorov together as children. He gave his friend a generous xandiv of horses. By October Gansukh and his buleg were back in Bayankhutag.

*Table 9.4. Statistical summary of Gansukh's household herd and migration data.*

Ex ante Herd Size	Ex post Herd Size	Mortality Rate	Major Moves	Total Distance	Average Distance	Soums Accessed
1526	1516	0%	8	393	49	3

### **Analysis of Profiles**

These profiles tell us a number of things about how households make migration decisions, the extenuating circumstances that shape those decisions, and the way households attempt to manipulate those conditions in ways that favor their mobile strategies. Understanding how households came to these decisions is an important part of understanding the results of those decisions.

#### ***Batbuyan***

In the case of Batbuyan, it is evidently clear that kinship in particular plays a critical role in formulating his migration decisions. The loss of Batbuyan's parents, the lack of elders amongst his kin, and his and his brother's mutual poverty provides little facilitation for effective movement and implementation of a territorial strategy through campsite claims. Because he has no 'bone' relatives with which to coordinate, he was squeezed out by the overcrowding from other territorial groups to less beneficial grazing lands. Additionally, he was not able to access all four season campsites. It was only by foregoing his independence and forfeiting a considerable amount of dignity by apprenticing his father-in-law that he was able to access the mobile resources necessary to moving his herds. In exchange for this kind of risk management, Batbuyan, being a young non-lineal male relative, was positioned in a way that he took on *geriin ajil* and basic herding duties. Unlike hired herders who benefit in similar ways, he is not constrained by an employment relationship and contract stipulations. Nevertheless, through his father-in-law's wealth, social connections to local officials and fellow cooperative groups, he was also able to obtain permission from local authorities under the *otor* contract.

It is interesting also to note the way in which deeply held beliefs in the spiritual ecology of the land played a role in his decision making. Forage growth is not just a product of biological processes but is an outcome of the very spirits which make up a particular *nutag*. Clearly, northern khangai landscapes have significantly different forage profiles from the Uguumur steppe; however, in his terms this is not a simply reflection of ecological dynamics but is rooted in the very character of a place. Appeasing the spirits through ritual is one way in which herding households interact with the 'lively' elements that comprise these landscapes. But spirits also interact with herders and their herds. Through snow, wind, rain, dust, and forage spirits can wreak havoc upon animals and their masters. Leaving one's *nutag* and moving out of the very personalized patron-client relationship that households develop with their mountains of worship presents clear risks. The lama's ability to 'read' the character of the land and its spirits through rocks is a critical resource in formulating such decisions.

Batbuyan's moves were also a result of his poverty. Because neither he nor his parents benefitted from privatization he has had to build a herd from his wedding *xuvi*. Moreover, as I described in chapter 3, his small herd presents a number of problems. Because of the reproductive capacity of his herd and the impact of any source of loss, including sales, will have on his herd, he is extremely reluctant to draw down his assets even as a means of risk management. Consequently, he is deeply limited in his options. However, given that his wife provides a large supplementary income and he has in effect become a client to his father-in-law, he has mitigate a number of problems he would have faced otherwise.

### ***Battogtokh***

Battogtokh's emigration to Bayankhutag with his elderly uncle means there is little labor to draw on in moving his herds. Because neither he nor his wife are from Bayankhutag he has little basis for cooperation.<sup>228</sup> His and his wife's health problems have been especially debilitating and have seriously affected his ability to draw an income from horse-racing. At his age and with his disability he has no opportunity to find employment as a hired herder. Moreover, his daughter was accepted to the elite partially-private high school in Undurxaan. A good portion of his income is directed at paying her tuition and boarding fees. When I visited them in their ger, they had no floor, lacked foodstuffs, were unwashed, and their clothes were ripped and in tatters. Scenes of this kind of poverty are not rare in this region of Khentii but they are uncommon and shocked my field assistants. Having sold off his car to pay for school fees and with no labor, movement itself has become "demii" or pointless. Such destitution and lack have rendered a mobile livelihood nigh impossible for Battogtokh. His reservation and reluctance during the interviews felt like resignation. Facing the prospect of exit from the pastoral economy is very real and without additional assistance or a sudden change in his personal health or fortune, it is quite possible, he stated, that they would move to Undurxaan and collect disability and welfare payments while he searched for odd jobs.

### ***Munkhbaatar***

Munkhbaatar is in some ways an anomaly. His kin group is small and he lacks effective social space for cooperation with other local households. On the other hand, Munkhbaatar has effectively mobilized his family and his secondary income source in ways that make him capable of managing a pastoral lifeway. Yet, it is through his interpretation of customary Mongolian mobility practices and property regimes that he has carved out a highly special niche. As I

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<sup>228</sup> Recall how another herder explained the lack of cooperation: "*undes baixgui*." In other words, "there is no foundation" for cooperation amongst kin.

discussed in chapters 4 and 5, within Mongolian property regimes the rights of ezen are recognized above all others. In contrast, Munkhbaatar draws on older frames for understanding rights to campsites and pasture. Reflecting regulations set out in the Khalkha Jirum, his strategy is an opportunistic one. He even calls himself a *nuudelchin* or nomad in contrast to *malchin* or herder. Most would consider his strategy very risky and many see it as an improper (inappropriate) method of using resources. In part his strategy is manageable because he is Bayad, a minority group of which he is the only representative in Bayankhutag. Because he has no possibility for cooperation with Khalkha or even Uriankhai or Durvud households, his kin are extremely tight knit and highly motivated. He is also quite invisible. He and his family do not interact with other ethnic groups in the countryside or in community events like Naadam. Coupled with his migration strategy of ‘moving in the margins’, he has found a way to manipulate contemporary institutional configurations to his benefit.

### ***Gansukh***

Gansukh has little choice in his migrations but benefits greatly from going “under his father’s wing.” Surely his father’s wealth, generated from investments outside of herding, livestock theft, and strict management of the labor available to him, was the key to such success. Yet, these benefits do come at a cost. Gansukh makes few decisions though he benefits greatly from them. As long as his father remains active in herding, Gansukh will be subject to his will. His younger brothers, if they choose to take up herding, will also be subject to their father’s desires. Yet, if his little brothers continue herding, over time he will gain increasing independence from his father so that as time moves on, he will develop his own *buleg* or take over after his father’s retirement. Currently, though, Gansukh is one of the wealthiest herders in the bag and he has not even reached 30; consequently, there is little independence would do for him that submitting to his father would not. The benefits he has gained also depend on his father’s ability to manipulate exchange and gifting with other households. This kind of engagement requires not only an excess of livestock but a deep sense of moral codes and customary campsite claims. His ability to *gar tsailgax*, i.e. strategically using customary principles of hospitality, present *xandiv* (donations) and *beleg* (gifts), and arrange for campsite use proved vital to their very mobile strategy.

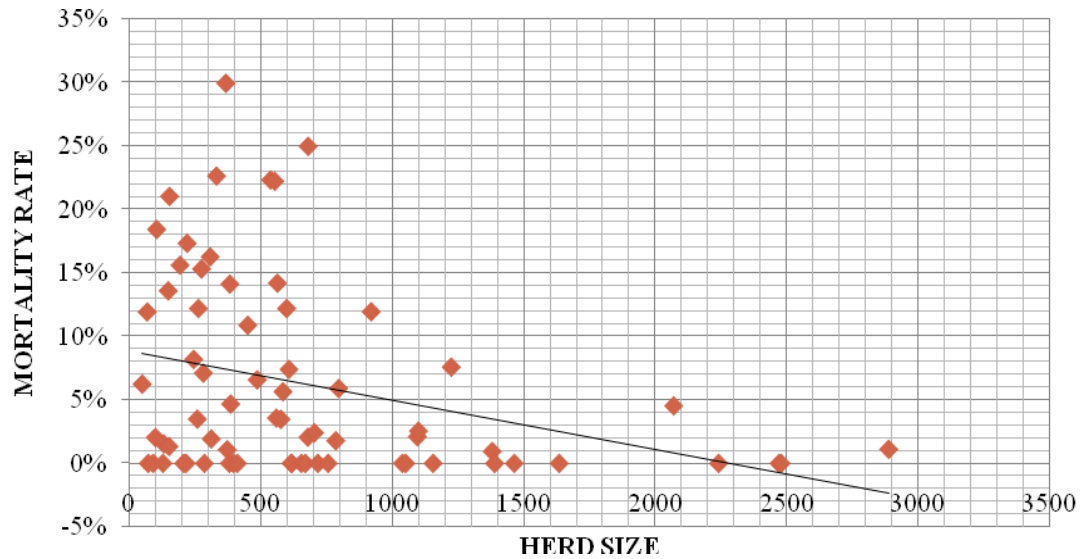
Clearly, the ability to move and the strategies that households develop cannot be understood outside the dynamic meanings of kinship, ethnicity, property, and religious faith and the material exigencies of one’s position in society. But these profiles also are not effective in demonstrating broad regularities and patterns. In the following section, I explore quantitative data on the sample population at large and amongst the ten profiled households.

## Statistical Comparison of Households

In this section I compare the households profiled above and in the appendix with the sample population as a whole. I do this for several reasons. In the first graph we see the distribution of losses across the population. As I stated in chapter 3 a number of scholarly works argue that large herds in and of themselves are an important form of self-insurance as they shield pastoral households from various sources of livestock mortality risk (Barrett and McPeak; Lybbert et al 2004). If we look at Figure 9.14, this is quite evident it seems. Households with larger herds suffered disproportionately lower rates of herd loss. Moreover, it is also clear the after such calamities, even in cases where the wealthy lost a greater percentage or simply higher numbers of stock, the wealthy are more aptly positioned to recover from catastrophic herd loss. Clearly there is a correlation between herd size (x axis) with livestock mortality rate (y axis); but this correlation is not very significant ( $r=.35$ ).<sup>229</sup> This is largely because the minimum mortality rate of 0 is very close to the average of 7 and the high rates of loss seemed to be lumpy in the middle category of herders. Additionally, in the poorer half of households (0 to 500 head), the variation in mortality rates is wide, ranging from 30% at the highest to 0%. What explains this wide variation in mortality rates as the households become poorer? Why are high rates of loss clumped in the poor to middle range? And why are rates seemingly lower amongst the very poor and even some of the poor?

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<sup>229</sup> Again I use total herd size without regard to species. The rationale behind this is based largely on Mongolian logics. Moreover, the traditional categories of herd size and wealth are based on total animals regardless of species. Conversion to a standard stock unit, however, does not change the shape of the distribution or the correlation in any significant way.



*Figure 9.14. Comparison of household herd size to household zud-based livestock mortality rate. (Data gathered from household surveys)*

We see this elsewhere. In Table 9.5 below I have gathered the ex ante and ex post herd sizes, mortality rates, ages, and primary social attributes of the households profiled and amongst the various wealth categories. We can see that, on average, the middle wealth group suffered the greatest average mortality (24%). Of the profiled households, the middle group also suffered the worst. The poorest two groups, in fact, suffered a lower average rate of loss than even the wealthy category. Does this mean that it also pays to be poor?

*Table 9.5. Comparison of wealth category averages with profiled households. (Numbered households can be found in Appendix B).*

Wealth Category	Profiled Household	Age	Herd Size Pre-zud	Herd Size Post Zud	Herd Mortality Rate	Primary Social Attributes
0-99		<b>50</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>8 %</b>	
100-199		<b>41</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>13 %</b>	
	Batbuyan	28	147	127	14 %	Son-in-law
	3051	57	362	152	3 %	Small kin group
200-499		<b>36</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>24 %</b>	
	Battogtokh	53	261	204	15 %	Small kin group
	3062	25	326	241	23 %	No kin; New
	3065	27	372	363	1 %	Son
	3092	37	537	413	22 %	No kin
	3030	29	553	430	22 %	Step-brother; Co-op
500-999		<b>43</b>	<b>658</b>	<b>557</b>	<b>19 %</b>	
	Munkhbaatar	38	615	616	0 %	No kin; New
1000+		<b>43</b>	<b>1646</b>	<b>1448</b>	<b>5 %</b>	
	Gansukh	26	1526	1516	0 %	Son; Co-op
	3124	57	2042	1877	5 %	Patron; Co-op

Clearly, the answer is no. There are also high rates of loss amongst the poor, but the variation is less wide. In looking at the profiled households, I divided each household into different kinds of social attributes, focusing largely on social relationships to other households. In Figure 9.15 below I examine the connections between social relations and vulnerability to herd loss. The sampled households were classified according to one to two social attributes in the following list.<sup>230</sup> ‘Outside’ is defined as someone who has recently emigrated to Bayankhutag and become a soum citizen. ‘Limited kin’ refers to a household that has fewer than two kin in the bag and ‘wide kin’ refers a household with five or more related households. ‘Part-time’ is defined as a part-time laborer and ‘hired herder’ is a full-time herder. ‘Clients’ are unrelated juniors to a ‘patron’ which is defined as a senior with two or more client or hired-herder households under him. ‘Co-op’ includes formal cooperative members. Son includes sons who cooperate, as distinct

<sup>230</sup> These were social attributes that appeared important in the data and in observation. Herders themselves also recognize this. Some households qualified for more than one attribute while others only had one attribute. I did classify some household for more than one attribute, but only the two primary ones. I regard primary as being critical enough to effect day- to-day household operation. Some households for instance may do occasional part-time work that are also cooperative members and have limited kin. In this case, for example, being a coop member and having limited kin networks are significantly more important socially than occasional part-time work.



households, with their fathers. Included in the graph are households with mortality rates above 10% and households with rates below 5%. In-between households have these and other social attributes and represent a largely mixed group. These rates are significant because under five per cent is under the soum average annual mortality rate and does not represent a significant loss. Over ten per cent, however, is a significant loss that can seriously affect the future viability of a herd, particularly for the poor and very poor.

The middle households tend to be made up of households with few to no kin while the wealthy and the poorest tend to have a greater range of social relationships. The relationship of these attributes to mortality rates can be seen in Figure 9.15. Here I have compared households of each attribute with mortality rates above 10% and below 5%. As we see in the chart, outsider (6) and those with limited or no kin (13) are disproportionately likely to suffer high mortality rates. Only in a few cases (3) did households in these categories suffer lower than five per cent loss rates. Additionally, only a few households from the part-time hires (2), hired herders (1), sons (1), wide-kin (1), and cooperative (2) categories suffered such losses. Hired-herders (4), sons (2), those with access to wide-kin networks (16), clients (10), patrons (10), and cooperative members (12) overwhelmingly suffered low mortality rates. In these cases, many of these households are poor or very poor with small herds.

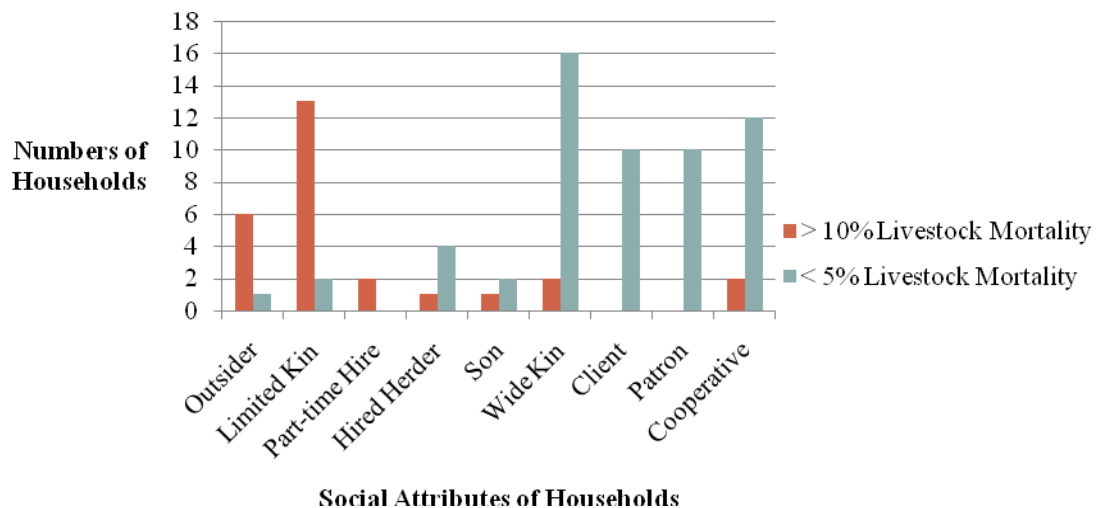


Figure 9.15. Comparison of zud-based livestock mortality rates based on social attributes of households.

Client and hired herding households, although they have low mortality rates, are predominantly poor. Outsiders and those with limited kin are also predominantly poor but with high mortality rates. Clearly, the social connections clients and hired herders have with their patrons or employers enables them to mitigate the potential for facing zud unlike those who are

outsiders or from limited kin groups. Yet, these two groups tend to remain poor. This is largely because they are caught in different kinds of traps. Those who are outsiders or from limited kin groups are caught in a poverty trap largely determined by their lack of social connection and wealth which exposes them to greater chance for facing *zud*. Those who are socially connected through clientage and employment though are caught in a trap that prevents them from building a viable herd. As I discussed in chapter 3, the poor and very poor even when we remove the effect of *zud* mortality risk from their herd growth rate are likely to suffer a negative or zero rate of herd growth. Moreover, hired herding households in particular, as I discuss in chapter 4, are remunerated in such a way that they are largely prevented by their employer from building up successful and sustainable herd size. Clearly, social ‘capital’ can be both negative and positive in its effect on livelihood sustainability and can only be assessed through qualitative methodology.

Those households involved in cooperative groups, with wide kin networks, and acting as patrons or sons of patrons experienced very low mortality rates. The translation of wealth, labor, and social privilege into effective mobile land use practices is exemplified most clearly through a quantitative analysis of the households profiled above and in the appendix. In follow-up interviews with the 34 households from which the profiles were selected, I delved deeper into the impact of wealth, broad access to entitlements, and social privilege on resource use. In the Table 9.6 below, it is clear that wealthier households moved by truck while poorer households moved by wagons. They are also capable of accessing a wide range of campsites. The wealthy stayed on their own customary campsites, campsites of people they knew, unclaimed or vacant campsites, and open steppe. Although this is a function of greater mobility, it also implies greater ability to manipulate property regimes and mobilize certain kinds of technology. For example, staying on the open steppe requires building corrals, windbreaks, and make-shift shelters. They are also more likely to know and recognize the other campsites *ezen* because of their wide social networks and are more capable of paying for well use and often do so. The poorer a household is the more likely they are to either remain on their customary campsites or, when they do not have them, to settle only on a new campsite.

*Table 9.6. Comparison of wealth category averages with profiled households. (Numbered households can be found in Appendix B).*

Category	Household	Customary Campsite	Known Ezen	Unknown Ezen	Transacted	New Campsite	Transport
100-200	Batbuyan	0	0	0	0	All	Wagon
	3051	2	0	0	0	0	Wagon
200-500	Battogtokh	2	0	3	0	0	Wagon/ Relative's Truck
	3062	0	0	0	0	All	Wagon
	3065	3	0	0	0	1	Truck
	3092	4	3	0	0	0	Truck Rental
	3030	2	3	0	0	0	Wagon/ Relative's Truck
500-1000	Munkhbaatar	1	0	4	0	1	Truck Rental
1000+	Gansukh	1	1	2	3	3	Truck/Wagon
	3124	1	3	4	2	1	Truck/Wagon

From the data in Table 9.7, it is clear that wealthy households are more mobile, at greater distances and with greater average distance of moves. For instance, the two wealthiest households profiled each moved an average of 49 and 46 kilometers on average for an annual total of 393 and 367 respectively. They have better transport and a greater range of transport options. As other chapters have pointed out, they are also more likely to hire labor and call on junior households for cooperation. The two very wealthy households both conducted collective migration. They place stock with other households and send hired households on various kinds of otor for longer periods and more frequently than poorer households. They also make a greater number of otor migrations despite having higher rates of campsite possession contracts. For example, Gansukh made 15 short otor migrations, more than all the profiled households poorer than him combined. The wealthy also scout pastures and campsites before moving. They make collective migration to a greater degree, provide xandiv to various officials and campsite ezed, and are more willing and capable of transacting with campsite ezed for use of their campsites. The two wealthiest households here provided a total of 6 xandiv to bag and soum governors and 5 to campsite ezen. Lastly, wealthy households are more likely to go on otor to other soums. These ‘capabilities’ translate in material ways.

The poor migrate individually when they are not socially connected to wealthy households and are unable to scout pastures; consequently, they must opportunistically move whilst searching for a suitable pasture. They conduct few short otor, visit fewer soums, and are limited in their capacity to go on collective migration. They do not have the resources to pay xandiv, transact for campsites, or form otor contracts. The lack of ‘capabilities’ and other ‘endowments’, similar to wealthy households, also translate in material ways.

*Table 9.7. Comparison of profiled households. Numbered households can be found in Appendix B.*

Household	Major Moves	Total Distance	Average Distance	Short Otor #/ Days	Soums	Scout	Collective/ Individual Migration	Xandiv	Placed Stock
Batbuyan	4	315	79	1/20	2	0	I	0	--
3051	7	36	5	5/11	0	0	I	0	Y
Battogtokh	2	5	2.5	0/0	0	0	I	0	--
3062	4	9	9	1/14	0	0	I	0	--
3065	3	108	36	3/11	1	Y	C	1	--
3092	7	87	12	1/14	0	0	I	0	--
3030	4	75	19	0/0	0	0	I	0	--
Munkhbaatar	5	122	24.4	3/13	3	0	I	0	--
Gansukh	8	393	49	15/12	3	Y	C	4	Y
3124	8	367	46	4/8	3	Y	C	2	--

In Table 9.8 below we can see how these capabilities translate. Wealthy households camp closer to water sources, wells, and xujir deposits (in kilometers). They camp in and pasture their animals in areas with less presence of weeds. They rate pasture quality and water access typically higher than the poor and socially unconnected.<sup>231</sup> The poorer a household is the more likely they camp in and pasture their animals in regions covered with weeds and other inedible or poor forages. They also camp further from wells, xujir, and other resources while camping closer to settlements and rivers. They are also less likely to move to other soums in times of disaster. Consequently, the poorer a household is the more likely they are to suffer from greater rates of livestock mortality

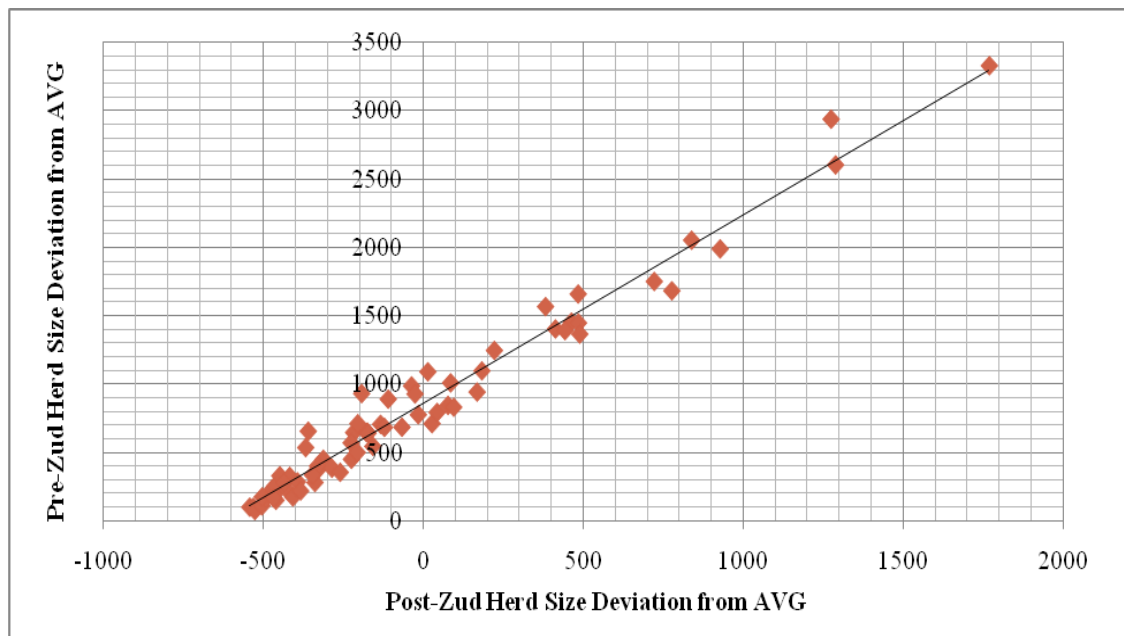
<sup>231</sup> Pasture ratings: (1) Very Poor – highly grazed, unpreferred forage species, weeds, (2) Poor - grazed, unpreferred forage species, (3) Fair – lightly grazed, diverse mix of forage, weeds, (4) ungrazed, diverse mix, some weeds, and (5) Excellent – ungrazed, preferred forage species dominant, no weeds. Water ratings: (1) Very poor – difficult access, *shand*, or black water (2) Poor – difficult access, hand well (3) Fair – fair access, natural source, non-blackwater, (4) Good – motorized well, water with salt or soda (5) Excellent – plentiful, *saadgui* (no barriers).

*Table 9.8. Comparison of profiled households. Numbered households can be found in Appendix B.*

Household	Water Distance	Well distance	Xujir Distance	Weeds	Pasture Rating	Water Rating
Batbuyan	.78	2.5	1.36	Y	3.2	4.4
3051	NA	1.5	2	Y	3	5
Battogtokh	1.5	4.5	NA	N	2.4	2.6
3062	NA	2	1.2	Y	3.25	3
3065	1	.275	.34	N	2.7	4
3092	NA	2.1	NA	Y	2.1	4.1
3030	NA	.7	2	Y	2.2	4.4
Munkhbaatar	NA	.83	NA	N	3.4	4.4
Gansukh	1.3	NA	1	N	5	4
3124	1	1	.8	N	4.75	4.9

## **Conclusion**

Although it is clear from the profiles that each household encounters a diverse set of problems and develops different strategies for overcoming these problems or simply submitting to them, it is clear in the statistical data that there are broad patterns across the sample population which demonstrate the cumulative effect of various factors and conditions on household migration. Moreover, it is clear that these current conditions, including the combined effect of socio-political, economic, and ecological variables, operate in such a way as to foster growing and increasingly entrenched socio-economic differentiation within Uguumur. Although other forms of difference are critical in understanding the political economy of rural society, there is clearly an emergent class dynamic evolving that poses serious ramifications for the future of pastoralism in Uguumur and Mongolia more generally.



*Figure 9.16. Changes in household livestock wealth relative to sample averages pre-disaster and post-disaster. Although there is a slight non-linear relationship in the middle wealth category, linear trend here demonstrates the stability of wealth in disaster.*

Drought and other disasters have been shown to have an important impact on the distribution of wealth in pastoral societies. At times, disasters can serve as a kind of leveling mechanism whereas in others it is part of the double crunch. In Figure 9.16 above, I have charted each household's position within the community relative to the average household herd size prior to the zud of 2007-2008 and after. It is clear that with the exception of a few cases that disaster has little to no impact on the distribution of wealth in society. Most households maintained their positions whether as wealthy households or as poor ones. What difference we can see would actually support the conclusion that zud actually made that distribution more skewed. Although it is somewhat difficult to assess in this graph, in general the wealthy have actually become wealthier and the poor have become poorer. At the beginning of chapter 3, I presented a graph (Figure 3.2) which shows the herd growth rates during this time period, including all sources of loss such as sales, consumption, and gifting. The average growth rates for the very poor was -11%, the poor -21%, the middle -4%, the wealthy -2%, and for the very wealthy +9%. Even subtracting other sources of loss, the very poor and the poor would still have suffered negative herd growth rates on average meaning that zud in these contexts only contributes to the grist mill of poverty in rural Uguumur.

## **Chapter 10 Conclusion: Pastoralism and Vulnerability in a Neo-Liberal Age**

### **Introduction**

In the aftermath of the global financial meltdown in 2008, brought about through loose regulation, corporate greed, severe forms of risk-taking, and willful ignorance, states around the world have taken to restructuring budgets and bailing out massive investment firms and banking institutions, the very culprits at the heart of the debacle. They have done and are doing so on the backs of the poor under the guise of requisite austerity measures and the rolling back of the state. In the United States calls to repeal health care reform, restructure entitlements like Medicaid, Medicare, Social security, and other critical social programs have been matched elsewhere, including Mongolia which has seen its own share of financial shocks and fluctuating mineral prices. These kinds of self-imposed structural adjustment programs undertaken with glee by pro-market diehards have further globalized a neo-liberal perception of political and economic organization that believes not only in the invisible-hand of the market but the place of that hand across society.

Pastoral regions of the world will not be left out of this moral and ethical struggle. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed pastoralists become increasingly integrated into states and markets, albeit in marginalized ways, this new century, particularly in Mongolia, pastoralists are being thrust onto bare life. This dissertation represents a partial window into the first salvo of this movement. The post-socialist moment was one of great jubilation both for those who suffered under authoritarian rule and those who sought its demise. It was also a moment when, at the demise of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's great social experiment, a new social experiment could be thrust upon individuals, communities, and states. In this dissertation I have described how this shock therapy did or did not benefit all its patients. In this conclusion I will try to review this argument and then attempt to offer possible pathways for future 'development' in Mongolia that, while balancing reform with practicality, moves beyond (or rather away from) neo-liberal notions of self and society.

### **A Political Ecology of Disaster in Uguumur: Summary**

In this dissertation I have tried to accomplish three goals: (1) demonstrate that the capacity of individual households to navigate the social and political landscape of southern and central Khentii has a critical impact on their ability to manage and mitigate the risk of *zud*, (2) demonstrate that the constraints on this capacity are differentially distributed and (2) describe

how this distribution can be traced to contemporary transformations in rural social relations and institutions, rooted in the historical experience of the post-socialist ‘transition’ and neo-liberal policy-making. In doing this, this work makes important contributions to anthropological understandings of the connections between neoliberal forms of governance and the production of hazards, vulnerability, and disaster,

For the first and the second goals, I have done this by exploring what people do in the context of disaster. As this dissertation has shown, differential mobility practices are strongly correlated to zud-based livestock mortality rates. Some households are clearly able to move great distances in shorter time spans, thereby escaping the possibility of facing zud while others are not. Those who are well-positioned to benefit from current configurations of resource management and are capable of mobilizing their resources, fair much better. Other households, because of the lack of positive social connections, political empowerment, economic and other assets, are relegated to confronting disaster.

For the third, I have described how these trajectories, dependent as they are on a mobile livelihood, are deeply rooted in shifts in property, territoriality, governance and administrative rule. I have done this by examining how, in the space created by decollectivization and decentralization, new modes of power and domination have emerged in ways that have deeply impacted resource access. In particular, I have tried to show how overlapping hierarchies of authority have intersected with the dense and complex mix of various claims, rights, and obligations to critical resources like campsites. Moreover, by seeing these institutional transformations as ‘work’ and the outcomes of a “politics of mutual recognition” I have also sought to show how these actors are engaged in shaping and reshaping the social and political landscape to their ends. Below I unite the various chapters in order to demonstrate further how I have accomplished these goals.

### **Kin and Community**

In the wholesale economic involution spurred by decollectivization and administrative decentralization, kinship dynamics emerged not only as the functional apparatus of territorial governance but more generally as the basic fabric for rural life. The moral economies of kinship and the inherent distribution of power amongst *ax-duu* and within households became the generative habitus of social intercourse on the steppe. Although I countered notions of the *khot ail*, it is clear from other work (Bold 1996; Fernandez-Gimenez 1997; Humphrey and Sneath 1999), that in the immediate years following livestock privatization, these social forms, as they rely on kin modes of mutual aid, respect, and obligation, proved critical in the sharing of labor, the securing of resources, and management of a temperamental environment. Uguumur has been



no different. In interviews and conversations, it is clear that although kin dynamics are shifting in many ways, they have proved to be the most significant form of social organization in the context of pastoralism.

In many ways, though, this kind of intensified kin interaction has also simultaneously fragmented the rural community of Uguumur. As Sneath points out (1999), with the loss of the socialist collectives, households and khot ail become increasingly atomized. The absence of technologies such as transport and hay provision, due to dramatic decreases in economies of scale, left households unable to muster the wide cooperation necessary to undertake huge ventures. In social terms, I would add, since the collectives were a social community as much as an economic unit, the people of Uguumur have largely become segregated along kin lines. Although these do not equate to an emergent clan system, it has, as I describe in this work, created a scenario in which kin groups are largely antagonistic or, at a minimum, socially uninvested in their neighbors and the broader community. As kinship has become the central focus of rural social organization, other differences have come to the fore as well.

In chapter 4 I outlined how kin cooperate and the ways such cooperation depends on distributions of power along gender and age distinctions. In particular, I highlighted how the post-socialist experience has elevated the social position of rural senior men in ways that have not only benefitted them as wealthy herd-owners but also their kin groups as central actors in ‘making the hands unite’. I also described how the increased wealth within kin groups and the emergence of a poor underclass of pastoral ‘laborers’ has shifted kin cooperation from economic exigencies like labor provision to more extensive forms of cooperation focused largely on territorial control. In the place of kin cooperation, hired herding and share herding have become critical resources for both labor provision as well as opportunistic use of rangeland and the management of risk. This transformation from kin to contract has altered the meaning and value of labor, which has important implications for emergent framings of poverty and ‘deserved-ness’ and the ways in which herds can be acquired. Those without livestock must, instead of working through a moral economy of mutual aid as members of a community, submit to employment and domination in order to become viable pastoral households. That transformation in ethics poses a significant barrier not only to livestock for the poorest households but also their ability to access resources in ways that elevate their livelihoods so that they can escape poverty.

### **Property, Governance, and Territory**

The collapse of state-party rule and the ensuing years of massive reform in resource management and property rights have also had a vast impact on rural society. In fact, these transformations were critical in creating the very conditions that spurred the intensification of kin

cooperation. As a number of authors have pointed out, the policies undertaken by the Mongol state in effect created an open access resource regime where “nothing belonged to no one.” The fiscal centralization of state tax policy left *soum* governments, marginalized as they were doing socialism, without a revenue base from which to foster and support critical activities of governing. Administrative authorities such as the *soum* governor were given vast authorities but no financial or administrative support to enact anything of importance for the pastoral economy, including the management of natural resources. In its place, herders for the most part have created a hierarchy of rights and duties through a micro-politics of institution-building. Rather than a concerted or intentional effort, this process has occurred through an ad hoc bricolage of dispute, claims, and mutual recognition. In chapter 5 and 6 I lay out how this process has unfolded in Uguumur in recent years and in chapter 7 I show how these transformations have impacted the movement of households in the landscape.

Current property regimes in Uguumur are largely founded on a belief in ‘mastery’ in which rights to campsite resources are built up through use, transferred through patrilineal inheritance, and negotiated through a process of recognition and exchange with powers in the land. Rather than emerging from a ‘moral economy of the steppe’ whereby flexible access to campsites is primary, I have shown how situated logics of right and exclusivity are privileged over the need for mutual exchange in times of distress. I show how these rights are defended through *xuux* and in ways that depend greatly on labor and collective organization through kin. Lastly, I describe how households enter in various kinds of exchange with other households, governors, and administrative to broaden their access to and claims over campsites and land.

As I discuss in chapters 8 and 9 this emergent property regime has a critical impact on who can access what, when, and where. Claims and defense of campsites require considerable investment in time, resources, and social capital in ways that the poor and/or socially unconnected are effectively barred from achieving. Moreover, as exchange in rights to campsites becomes increasingly dependent on the provision of livestock or cash, the participation of poor and even middle wealth households in a mobile livelihood becomes increasingly threatened. The campsite leasing program has in effect formalized these rights and provided space for conceptualizing private exchanges in campsites in ways previously ‘unthinkable’. Formal exclusion of households, not just from private access but from the process of private access through the cooperative program, further marginalizes the poorest members and effects what Harvey (1989), following Marx’s concept of primitive accumulation, calls “accumulation by dispossession.” Moreover, land privatization in rural settlements and towns has only exacerbated this problem by providing a conceptual basis for thinking “privately” about land.

Rural governance has also become a site for drastic transformations as *soum* governors have become autocrats, citizens representative council have become effectively removed and distant from the process of resource management, local ministry extension agents are given impossible workloads, and *bag* governors are shouldered with responsibilities that are severely outsized by the territory in which they are supposed to govern. Patron-client politics that often have little to do with policy or policy-making and more to do with loyalty and political advancement are severely entrenched not only in the working of the ‘system’ but also in how people think about governing and the operation of government at the local level. As I show in chapter 6, wealthy herders have seized opportunities for engaging in these networks by converting their wealth into political capital both locally amongst their ‘clients’ but also within the party system by supporting candidates elsewhere. As citizens representative councils become shouldered with increasing responsibilities in resource management such as through cooperative groups and new land reforms, wealthy herders will have, as they have already had in many respects, significant space in which to foster policies in ways that benefit not only their herd management and resource use strategies but also their particular vision for the organization of local governance.

The principle example for this kind of governance is the *otor* contract. As I discussed in chapter 8, patron-clientage, strategic gifting, and significant space for the deployment of multiple, sometimes contradictory notions of ‘law’ and ‘legality’ in *otor* contracting have privileged the sorts of citizen-state interaction that promote certain economic classes over others. As *otor* contracts have transformed from an across-the-board mobilization of herds and households in the socialist era to an unevenly applied, negotiable, purchasable state resource, these kinds of services have demarcated the line between success and failure in hazardous conditions.

The importance of wealth and social networks in this kind of ‘institutional work’, as I describe in chapter 6, has become territorialized most egregiously through cooperative development and possession leasing. As community-based resource management programs have become the vehicle for enacting new modalities of property exemplified by the leasing program they have also added additional material incentives for continued and entrenched forms of territorial control by kin groups. Well and campsite leasing tie these collectivities to land not only through increased sense of ownership but also through a synergy with particular kinds of resource use strategies in which not possessed lands become a heavily utilized ‘open access resource’ and possessed territories become ‘reserves’. As these territories form central nodes from which wealthy and large kin groups radiate out furthering their extensive resource use strategies, other households become increasingly marginalized. In particular, as large kin groups control and

defend their possession leases through various of monitoring and enforcement while on otors in other lands, those who are left behind to face *zud* are limited in the space they can utilize. These kinds of social and territorial exclusions leave those from smaller kin groups in vulnerable positions.

### **Market integration**

Co-emerging with these transformations in kinship, community, property, and governance has been the increasing integration of rural Mongolian households in regional, national, and transnational markets for livestock products. The growing importance of cashmere, meat, and other pastoral products have tied households into a system of production that is largely geared towards regional and international markets where they have become vulnerable to vagaries in price and demand. In addition as I showed in chapter 3, household consumption patterns have become highly dependent on outside goods and services from food to clothing to schooling. As income from pastoral activities becomes concentrated in the springtime during cashmere sales and during late fall for meat sales and as consumption pressures are spread throughout the year, households have become increasingly dependent on loans and other financial services for which they must offer collateral. Without risk minimization from other sources, these households are tied into potentially dangerous cycles of debt. As I showed in chapter 3 these pressures affect households differently. Wealthy households or those with supplementary or off-setting income are able to weather the pressures these needs put on their herds. The poor and middle classes of herders, who do not have excess herd growth or supplemental income, are in contrast deeply exposed to a downward spiral of disinvestment.

These pressures have serious impacts on mobility and doubly expose the poor to serious consequences. First of all, life itself has become highly dependent on markets. Resources needed for migration such as coal, firewood, dung, fuel, labor, and transport are largely acquired either through local markets or via cash transactions. The influence of marketization and monetization on resources like campsites has shifted the ways in which many people think about land and its value(s). Moreover, as I have shown in chapters 3 and 10, the combined effect of market integration and disaster have serious implications for socio-economic differentiation. The wealthy are able to effectively withdraw and engage livestock product markets at their will and evade disaster and the deleterious consequences of facing *zud*. The poor however, are able to do neither and are often forced by necessity to engage the market when times are tough and have little recourse for escaping the disastrous impacts of *zud*. This double crunch has become a grist mill for the production of wealth and poverty in rural Mongolia.

### **Mobility, Disaster, and Development**

In the last chapter I have attempted to show what households actually do in the context of disaster and how the broader institutional and social landscape impacts not only their decision-making processes but also how those decisions are implemented. Clearly, these decisions and the behaviors associated with them are deeply bound up in the transformative dynamic described here. These are the two sides of the coin in the production of *zud* and the differentiation of winners and losers. In the last periods of major *zud*, it is clear that there are serious consequences in ignoring the historical, root causes of disaster as well as the experience of households embroiled in them; not only for those rural poor but also for Mongolia itself. Ulaanbaatar is literally overflowing with ger ghettos that now stretch beyond the immediate hills and have now begun the ascent up the surrounding mountainsides. With the growing drain of city services, the capital cannot handle in-coming migrants. The massive hit the national GDP sustained in the last few *zud* is itself a threat not just to herders but the nation. As the countryside drains of labor, the impetus of voters and concerned groups to support rural development is waning. To recall Mongolia's socialist past, I rephrase Lenin's famous question "what is to be done."

In the next section I look at pastoralism elsewhere, comparing the transformations described in this dissertation to those witnessed in other arid regions. Finally, I will suggest alternative pathways for alleviating the suffering of the vast masses of the vulnerable poor in the rural countryside and creating sustainable and workable solutions to the problems that plague communities like Uguumur.

### **Pastoralism in 'The Age of the Market'**

Beyond the Mongol steppe, many of the dynamics witnessed in Uguumur have antecedents in other pastoral regions of the globe. Population growth, privatization of rangeland (Galaty 1994; Lesorogol 2005), wage labor (Little 1985; Sikana and Kerven 1990; Speling 1987; Turner 1999), commoditization of livestock markets (Little 1992; Zaal 1999), landscape fragmentation by roads and borders (Galvin 2009; Kreutzmann 2003), urbanization, and other development activities, the ascendancy of farm agriculture over pastoral production (Benjaminsen and Ba 2009; Moritz 2001), expanding conservation initiatives (Brockington and Homewood 1999; Igoe 1999; Saberwal 1998), state encroachment (Azarya 1996), political encapsulation (Meir 1988; Shahrani 1979), the 'developmentalization' of pastoral livelihoods (Chatty 1996; Fratkin 1990) and the consequences these dynamics have on the social lives and communities of pastoralists appear with some regularity in many regions around the world from the Horn of Africa to the Sahel, from the plains of India to the transhumant herders of the Andes, and from the Arctic to the drylands and deserts of southern Africa. In some of these regions, famine, conflict

(McCabe 2005; Thebaud and Batterbury 2001), and even civil war (Little 2003), and the precipitous effects of these forces, have become all too frequent realities in arid lands. As Mongolian herders would say, these are the some of the consequences of living in the *zax zeeliin uye* or the age of the market in which the idea of market-oriented development, neo-liberal citizenship regimes, and state retreat represent evolutionary progress.

### **Development as Transformation**

Many of these problems are rooted in a long history of development intervention and vast institutional transformations that may be market-minded but are also largely implicated in state-based strategies. In many states, pastoralists belong to minority groups and their pursuit of a mobile livelihood puts them at odds with state-based social control which is rooted in sedentary forms of centralized power (Azarya 1996; Meir 1988). In the 1960s thru the 1970s, following the collapse of colonial rule in Africa, India, and elsewhere, pastoralism emerged as a significant problem of development. How to bring unruly pastoralists under state-control and fit them, and the products of their livelihoods, into the broader economy became central priorities in the post-colonial period. Following Hardins 'tragedy of the commons', interventions in many regions, particularly in Africa, became centered around the transformation (or evolution) of 'traditional' pastoral lifeways, from those founded on inherently unproductive customary resource management regimes to highly productive, efficient, technically sound western ranching schemes rooted in private land tenure and market driven production. At the heart of these paradigms were state-based strategies of sedentarization and development-led efforts rendering pastoralists suitable for the emergence of national 'economies' (Fratkin and Rother 2005). Even in socialist countries, similar logics ruled.

These strategies received significant justification from scientific narratives and donor-supported technical experts. Sandford (1983) argued that the main stream view in pastoral development activities was that most pastoral regions were becoming desertified and that this process was spurred on by over-grazing, over-population, and outmoded traditions. The solution was the introduction of private tenure regimes and the insertion of scientific range management in local institutional dynamics. Supported by multilaterals like the World Bank and institutions sponsored by former colonial and global powers like the US, UK, and others, these interventions required massive, society wide transformations in local institutions, beliefs, and practices and became heavily dependent on so-called 'technical experts' (Fratkin 1997). This kind of top-down, largely state-based but development coordinated programming was based on an externally-driven, Keynesian style interventionism in which behavioral and institutional rationalization through management science were keys to progress (Escobar 1994).

As scores of anthropologists and other social scientists, particularly in the 1980s, bore witness to the effects of these development projects, it became abundantly clear that not only were these projects failing to deliver, in many cases they were also causing or worsening the very problems they sought to alleviate. For example, privatization programs decreased herd mobility in many areas thereby increasing the vulnerability of pastoralists to drought and other risks (Fratkin 1997; Niamir-Fuller 1999). Overall, increasing poverty (Baxter and Hogg 1990; Hogg 1996; Little 1992; White 1997), malnutrition (Sellen 2003), and outmigration (Anderson and Broch-Due 1999) clearly demonstrated that interventions were failing. As Little et al (2008) point out, east Africa is littered with the detritus of failed projects. Inspired by work in political economy, anthropologists and others unveiled the ways in which many of these projects failed to alleviate poverty or prevent degradation.

Moreover, many of these initiatives were founded on narratives of pastoralist-induced desertification and over-population that increasingly came under the scrutiny of grounded analyses that argued otherwise. Misunderstandings of arid land ecologies have drastically impacted development activities (Behnke et al 1993; Scoones 1994). Hardin's tragedy model is founded on the idea that resources are finite, stable, and degradable. In commons systems where actors are self-interested and rules of use are absent, overtime users will significantly degrade the resource producing the so-called tragedy. In rangeland science, grassland ecologies were assumed to be steady state systems in which resources, though minimal, are stable and degradable. However, contradictory understandings of grassland ecology demonstrate that these environments are not stable but are rather extremely variable both geographically and temporally (Westoby 1989). The stochastic dynamics of forage biomass in these rangelands are in fact dependent on rainfall and not on forage use. In other words, since rainfall is highly variable both geographically and temporally in arid lands, so too is forage biomass (i.e. grass). Consequently, arid rangelands are not easily degradable and are, in fact, remarkably resilient. The consequences of these understandings are critical for shifting pastoral development away from older, inflexible models of land tenure and management. The ramifications for ignoring it are quite significant.

### **Neo-liberalism and the Local**

Pastoral development for much of the last fifty years has been founded in a paradigm quite similar to Harvey's notion of Fordism in which rationalization, efficiency, and replication on a mass scale undergirded capitalist production. Technical expertise rooted in western science was privileged over customary forms of tenure and indigenous stores of knowledge (Arce and Long 1999). In development beyond pastoralism, the promotion of very narrow visions of social evolution based on private tenure and market integration were replicated all over the world

through structural adjustment programs and massive infrastructure projects. Yet, as backlash against this kind of intervention spread through dissent both amongst affected communities, scholars and activists on the ground, and from actors within the development machinery itself, it was clear that this kind of intercession had fundamental flaws. In reaction, new models, strategies, and priorities emerged that privileged geographic and social difference, community-specificity, local indigenous knowledge, and even forms of self-rule through decentralization and devolution of state administrative power (Chambers and Conway 1992). This transformation in many ways is eerily similar to the post-fordist transition that Harvey describes for the industrial production in the United States. The turn to the small-scale, the 'local', community-based, and indigenous gained significant steam in the late 1980s, through the 1990s, and has remained orthodox in the new millennium particularly as such discourses have found a number of synergies with neo-liberal ideologies.

Despite calls for the abandonment of pastoralism (Steen 1994) and other dramatic measures, these new alternatives became increasingly integrated into pastoral development initiatives. Coupled with this movement has been an additional stream of thought emerging from advances in ecology and micro-economics. Recalling earlier work in the ecological anthropology of pastoralism, notions of environmental risk and vulnerability have become central to understanding these very localities and in particular the micro-dynamics of poverty (Bollig 2006; Bollig and Goebel 1997; Dercon 1998; Little et al 2001; Lybbert et al 2004; McCabe 1997; McCarthy et al 1999; McCarthy et al 2004; McPeak 2005a, 2005b; McPeak and Barret 2001; Smith et al 2001; White 1997). Scholars and development practitioners have focused on the way communities, households, and individuals attempt to manage risk, delineating the rational justifications for common property systems, withdrawal from markets, and other behaviors previously assumed to be highly suspect 'cultural' backwardness.

Stemming from these various trajectories of dissent and knowledge production, I argue, following Fratkin (1997), there has largely been two dominant frameworks in pastoral development since the early 1990s: (1) a focus on local, community-driven development and (2) financial approaches focused on the micro-dynamics of poverty.<sup>232</sup> This is not to say that technical projects such as veterinary extension and breed improvement are no longer central initiatives, but they have increasingly been incorporated into community-based initiatives (see Catley 2007). Community-based initiatives are important counters to centralized state control over resource management and devolve rights and administrative authority to local level actors in

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<sup>232</sup> This is not to say these kinds of programs were non-existent prior to the 1990s but that they became central to development practice during this time.



ways that are presupposed to attend to local priorities and values. This kind of empowerment is, on the surface, a critical departure from earlier efforts and, in theory, gives voice to the marginal and previously politically dispossessed. Fratkin (1997), for instance, discusses the semi-success of pastoral associations in West Africa where user groups have effectively garnered political roles in policy-making processes, resource management, and development activities. The provision of financial services to the poor can also serve as effective tools in mitigating the disastrous effects of income and asset shocks and poverty traps which are so evident amongst pastoral populations. Additionally, these kinds of services also allow local ‘beneficiaries’ to choose whether to participate, at least in theory. But as has become apparent over the last twenty years each of these has significant downsides.

As I have explored in other chapters, community-based resource management programs have increasingly become appropriated into state-based strategies of neo-liberal governance and strategic absence (Brosius et al 2005). In the place of state institutions and strong administrative power, development institutions have promoted community development interventions as critical tools for local management of resources; yet, as is all too often the case, local institutions present a number of equity and capacity issues. As I have shown in this dissertation, the local community-based programs in Uguumur have disproportionately favored some over others and, for the most part, knowingly. In other cases, and other regions of Mongolia, many community-based institutions do not have the capacity, either administratively or fiscally, to deal with the volume of work necessary to carry out management functions. Bayankhutag, for instance, is incapable of raising enough tax revenues to cover the cost of fully exercising its authorities; moreover, revenue from the central state is dedicated largely to urban activities and, in agriculture, to large-scale farming. Without sufficient revenue, the ‘local’ cannot manage, creating in effect an open range system. For many of the much larger community-based projects in Mongolia such as the Pasture User Group system, some soums are finding it difficult to maintain sufficient funds to cover the costs of monitoring and organizing. Turner (1999) and Benjaminsen (1997) find similar problems amongst community efforts in West Africa.

In other cases, community-institutions can be swallowed by their own success as NGOs or donors seek to ‘scale-up’ or integrate with other programs, often sabotage what minimal success there has been achieved (Igoe 2003). Others point out that many of these projects are still largely directed, manipulated, or are primarily initiated from the outside and have little sustainability over the long run. Others criticize these programs for being too small to bring about any sort real social change. In Mongolia, this has been one of the greatest critiques of IFAD’s

herder groups (Binzwanger-Mkhize 2009). They have little benefit except for the small pool of group members and do little to change current forms of marginalization.

The provision of financial services is a critical tool in poverty alleviation. As Coppock (1993) points out, “banking livestock capital is a keystone intervention for managing the system out of famine, poverty, and increasing risk of environmental degradation.” Savings, credit, insurance, and other instruments can serve critical roles in mediating the kinds of micro-economic problems the poor face. But as the development machinery seeks to expand and replicate its self-described ‘proofs of concept’ and self-evaluated successes, the supplementary role these kinds of services offer have to an extent been watered down. Moreover, microfinance institutions have been haunted by their own success as they have been appropriated by for-profit institutions. Transformations away from cooperative savings initiatives and local ‘credit union’ type services, ventures into market-based financial systems have drawn many of the poor into increasing inflexible, high-interest pools of debt.

A number of critics have argued that many of these services seek to financialize poverty itself by enticing the poor with fast cash, reducing the role of other moral economies which do a great deal more than provide ‘credit’, and introducing risk (of default) that is more severe than through other channels. In Mongolia, a number of households I met who were not included in the sample had to forfeit a good portion of animals to pay back a loan they took out to pay for foodstuffs. Loans from Khaan bank are generally easy to come by, but the risk of non-payment for poor households can be great. Additionally, the focus on market-based mechanisms as a safety-net embroils the alleviation of poverty in the vagaries of the marketplace, rendering states less responsible for the care of their own citizens and exposing the poor to the potentially dramatic undulations of financial systems. Similar to calls for the privatization of Medicare, social security, and other state-based safety nets in the United States and other western nations mirror what has been de rigueur in the developing world. With banks failing across the globe and in Mongolia itself, the logic of expanded financial services must be questioned, particularly in the context of safety nets. When the Mongolian Anod bank fell under in 2008, mostly to administrative malfeasance, large numbers of urban poor lost all their savings.

Insurance has also become an important financial service for the poor and programs specifically targeted to pastoralists do have some measure of success. However, the extent to which these actually alleviate the conditions of the poorest members of society is questionable. Among the households I interviewed, only households in the wealthy and very wealthy category purchases insurance. In other areas of the country it seems that middle category households are the primary purchasers of insurance. This could be critical, because as I have shown, in Uguumur

these households are the most likely to suffer the highest rates of loss, but they are not exposed to the ‘double crunch’ like the poor. Coupled with savings and credit, insurance could be an important innovation in rural development in Mongolia. But much remains to be seen. For instance, few herders actually purchase the insurance as a percentage of the population and the sustainability of the program might not be a complete guarantee.

The critical problem, and one faced by herders discussed here, is that financial services, including insurance, do not alleviate the underlying causes of poverty. If income shocks were all that kept people poor, then a broader safety net should serve effectively; yet, even where safety nets exist, the poor are still present, particular where those safety nets are market-based. Financial services do not address the underlying problems for why people are *made* and *kept* poor in the first place.

In Mongolia and in other areas of the pastoral world, community-based approaches and the expansion of financial services in many ways retain significant features of their predecessors. They are both largely inorganic, top-down, and deeply embedded in development and donor practices. Consequently, they are both rendered as apolitical, deculturized, technical frameworks for social change in the same way early periods of development saw full-scale privatization and structural adjustment (Ferguson 1994). In the hands of development practitioners the underlying rationales are translated in western, rational choice economics whether as collective action a la Olson (1971) and other neo-institutionalists or through the micro-economics of assets, incomes, and shocks (Barret and Carter 2003; Moser 2004). In working through alignments of incentives, these projects appeal to narrow visions of radical forms of individualism and largely ignore questions of power, culture, and history and the prime root causes of poverty. As such they have become vital tools of what Foucault (1990) calls governmentality. In neo-liberal formations, the rationales that inform these projects and paradigms, has at its center the critical place of market-based life, individual responsibility and self-discipline, and the necessary requirement of ‘productivity’. Community-based organizations serve to create greater space for the fluid operation of markets, devolve responsibility away from the central state to the smallest unit as possible, enlist communities in their own discipline, and foster faster, more flexible, efficient forms of governance a la post-fordism. The financialization of poverty shifts responsibility for ‘social security’ to the poor themselves, enlisting them in their own self-disciplined safety net, and exposing them to the invisible, but most efficient, flexible hand of the marketplace.

### **Alternatives**

The disappointing aspect of the programs I have just discussed is that they are potentially effective tools at the right time and in the right place given what people themselves want. And,

unfortunately, in many aspects, there are “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” dynamics embedded in the very nature of intervention itself. But, surely some downsides are unavoidable and alternatives can be offered. Community-based programs, given the inherent nature of most human communities, will exhibit the very social differences we see in them. Increasingly, community-based initiatives are taking into consideration various forms of difference such as gender; although, in many cases, other forms of difference such as class seem ignored (Sharma 2006). In pastoral communities like Uguumur, many of the problems associated with the cooperatives could have been avoided if more attention had been paid to the distribution of power in society.<sup>233</sup> Clearly, altering the inherent distribution of power in a community requires some top-down pressure and intercession. On the other hand, greater attempts at formulating more grassroot driven development, which is to some extent a contradiction, could be more sustainable but again it raises the potential for local co-option. In the next section, focusing specifically on Mongolia, I look at potential pathways for the future and ask “what is to be done”?

## **Visions of the Future**

Since 2002, on the national level, there has been no effective change in the poverty level in Mongolia which hovers at 36 per cent (UNDP 2008). Between 2002 and 2008, before the global financial meltdown, poverty increased in rural areas from 43 percent of the population to 50 percent (SDA 2010). Although some of this can be attributed to the effect of the 2008-2009 economic downturn, this was also during the greatest economic boom in Mongolia’s history and even for the pastoral economy itself. Such massive discrepancies call into question development policy both at the national level and amongst donors themselves, all of which claim in project documents, pamphlets, and in press releases great triumphs in reducing poverty through effective initiatives. From the central government there has been a clear neglect of the livestock economy with only 1.5 % of the national budget being directed towards its development while large-scale farming receives 3.4 times that much investment, though it only makes up roughly ten per cent of agriculture’s contribution to GNP (NSO 2008). Yet, the livestock economy makes up over twenty percent and employs approximately forty percent of the national workforce. Since that time over 2000 herder cooperatives have been founded through twelve donor programs and hundreds of millions in donor aid through the World Bank’s Sustainable Livelihoods Project, massive initiatives from

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<sup>233</sup> As mining becomes increasingly important, the government may become more interested in asserting itself at the local level in order to minimize negative impact of non-mining activities on mining-based sources of revenue. In that case, community-based programs will face increasing competition for authority. Strengthening them will have to deal simultaneously with the need to create wealth, as a function of increasing power and clout in the face of government, and issues of distribution.

UNDP, IFAD, FAO, USAID, GTZ, SDA, and JICA, and hundreds of smaller NGOs has not only not made a dent in poverty, but have claimed success while it has significantly increased.

In such contexts, what is to be done? This question is becoming even more critical as the spectre of climate change haunts the steppe. Mean annual temperatures have risen one degree in the last sixty-five years alone and summer temperatures nearly 5 degrees in the last 25 years (Batima et al 2009). Precipitation has decreased by 12.5 per cent and with high summer temperatures evapotranspiration rates have risen from 7.3 percent to 12 per cent reducing the impact of what little rain falls.<sup>234</sup> Although rates of pastureland degradation range from 4% to 90%, there are clear signs of desertification, most of which is largely climate-induced. Herders themselves speak of great changes in local ecology. Elders recall times when grass would reach a meter in the summer and now even in the best areas, grass barely reaches to their knees. Such drops in the productivity of rangelands speak to the dire future of steppe pastoralism in Mongolia if nothing is done to help those who depend on the rain to adapt.

A number of scholars from other regions of the world have offered what I view as critical lessons for Mongolia in fostering socially and environmentally sustainable pathways for pastoral development. By far the largest collective voice argues that development programs and policies must retain or improve flexible patterns of mobility as a resource use technique and risk management strategy (Little et al 2008; Niamir-Fuller 1999). Unless program policies are an attempt to dismantle an entire pastoral lifeway in variable ecologies in favor of other lifeways, mobility must take primary place as a metric for success or failure.<sup>235</sup> Such calls are not limited to tenure and resource management policy. Development activities in marketing, financial services, infrastructure development, and basic livelihood activities must also take into account how these interventions impact household mobility. If they do not retain or improve household capacity to mobilize, the long history of development in pastoral regions has demonstrated that the outcome will, for the most, be dire. In addition, however, thinking about mobility must also be transformed. As the wealthy households described in this dissertation demonstrated: mobility pays! It is a profitable, productive, and *sustainable* resource use technique under appropriate management systems.

In addition to mobility support, there are a series of important improvements that are largely incorporated into development discourse but given short shrift in practice: (1) grassroots mobilization, (2) equity and the promotion of safety nets, and (3) sustainable resource use.

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<sup>234</sup> There are a number of other works that examine climate change over a much longer duration. See Angerer et al (2009) for some of this work.

<sup>235</sup> In other ecologies, such as the forest-steppe or taiga other policies may be better suited.

Increasing mobilization of grassroots organization, despite the problems with community-based initiatives, must be part of the solution, many argue (Fratkin 1997). For pastoral groups, there are clear barriers that must be overcome in mobilizing grassroots initiatives including inherent tendencies for economic differentiation, geographic remoteness, and lack of economies of scale. For example, in a region like Uguumur, households are so dispersed throughout the landscape that social contact is highly limited and the vast distances needed to travel in order to support and maintain a grassroots community-based movement is highly difficult. It is in such conditions, though, that development assistance can be of help. The only issue there, is encouraging development ‘donors’ to relinquish control over project design but still provide monetary assistance. Equity and pro-poor distribution through safety nets and risk management mechanisms must be incorporated. Sustainable resource use through effective institutions for monitoring and enforcement and the fostering of social sustainability and program maintenance after implementation units leave are critical elements. These must be considered in a matrix style evaluation in which each of these efforts is measured against the other rather than independently as they so often are. Lastly, to counteract the significant marginalization of pastoralists in Mongolia and elsewhere, political empowerment and legal recognition of commons rights are critical to poverty alleviation and fostering endogenous forms of development (Homann et al 2008; Little et al 2008).

### **Pastoral Development in Mongolia**

A number of project paradigms have been introduced in Mongolia, really too many to count. However, a number of programs have either become increasingly popularized in Mongolia for their purported ‘successes’ or have gotten good press. In some cases, these ‘success’ have been implemented in other countries. For instance, the community-based programs discussed here have been very influential in USAID land reform interventions in Afghanistan and the livestock-based index insurance program is being considered in other regions as well like Kenya.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> One might ask of this dissertation, “who are the vulnerable, what are their characteristics, and how do we target them?” However, I feel that this to some extent misses the point – one elaborated in this dissertation and most recently by Nelson and Finan (2009). The vulnerable are not the source of vulnerability; rather, as this work has tried to make clear, it is the structural inequalities and institutionalized distribution of resources that makes people vulnerable. In other words, the vulnerable are the symptom not the disease. To alter the conditions of vulnerability, reform must be targeted at the various institutional scales that formulate the ‘root causes’ (Wisner et al 2004). ‘Targeting’ in this sense can sound too much like the ‘war on poverty’ in the US where increasingly more refined measures of the poor themselves did little to improve their conditions. Rather, wide safety nets like social security, Medicare, and Medicaid and broad structural reforms in the credit industry and the development of Federal Reserve proved significantly more beneficial to the poor and vulnerable than any kind of targeted assistance.

Two highly popular programs that have received significant press are the restocking program by IFAD (Swiss 2007) and the Swiss Development Agency's 'cash-for-herders' program. In the restocking program, livestock are purchased from wealthy households and are given to the poor. In other similar programs the poor are required to provide community labor or some other service in order to qualify for livestock. Similar programs, although supported by some (Morton et al 2002), have not seen great success elsewhere (Anderson 1999). Rather than try to understand why the wealthy still have stock and why the poor households do not, these programs presume that providing 'assets' will buffer households against loss and provide them a base from which to build a herd. Finding intellectual support from asset-based approaches (Moser 2004), these programs are lauded as 'successful' although there is no data to support how those households fared over time.

The cash-for-herders program operates under a similar logic but with the idea that cash provision, because it is fungible, allows for a more flexible array of investments. Herders must qualify for the program by creating plans for investment after which they received 200,000 MNT, a minimal sum. The program is considered successful because participants diversify out of the pastoral economy and migrate to settlements. Clearly, this is partly due to the fact that the program weeds out 'failures' prior to giving the cash and thereby creating greater space for success. Yet, the flexibility for households and decentralization of decision-making over project monies is certainly a boon and to be promoted.

Each of these programs, however, have similar problems. For the restocking program, one of the issues I would raise concerns the fact there is simply no equivalent for restocking in herding communities. In the research presented here, and in discussions with herders elsewhere, an ethic of restocking without labor provision is absent. *Maljuulax*, discussed in chapter 4, is not the kind of benevolent gifting that restocking programs present themselves as. Losing stock means that herder has insufficient ability to manage stock in the first place. Restocking through employment is difficult and grueling work and only those who are truly capable and driven will succeed. Those who receive stock in such ways are considered worthy and gain access to critical forms of social capital. Restocking to households who lack that social capital and recognition by the broader community will not fair so well. More importantly, neither of these programs alleviates core causes of poverty. Asset provision does not mitigate the absence of a broader set of entitlements that make assets productive. Moreover both of these programs subsidize what should be government responsibility for citizen welfare particularly in the context of disaster and when that government is experiencing massive tax revenue boons from mining.

Micro-finance initiatives, largely through the private sector but supported through development institutions with a focus on market-based approaches to poverty alleviation, have become deeply embedded in the rural economy across the country. In every soum and provincial center there is at least one *Khaan Bank* and in larger settlements *Khas*, *Mongol Post*, and *Golomt* banks. All of these offer short and long-term savings accounts, business loans, payday loans, and in the case of *Khaan*, herder loans. In chapter 3 I showed that a huge percentage of the sample take out loans mostly to smooth their lumpy income streams and purchase basic goods, foodstuffs, and to pay for school fees and medicine. But the risk of default from *zud* which turns a double crunch into a triple crunch, exposure to fluctuating product prices particularly cashmere, and the exposure to global financial downturns make loans anything but a risk-free intervention. Although coupling with insurance might alleviate some of these issues (and turn three crunches into two), the financialization of the rural economy has introduced a variety of new risks. Moreover, like the programs discussed above, micro-finance does not fully alleviate the core problems of entitlements, resource access, and property rights which are at the heart of the poverty grist mill. Moreover, what microfinance's impact on household mobility might be has not been evaluated but there are suggestions that it can play a better role in improving mobility.

The majority of development activity in rural Mongolia involves livelihood activities such as small-scale farming and other forms of economic diversification as well as infrastructural investments. The largest program to date, the World Bank's Sustainable Livelihoods Program, also considered a success does not have a singular focus but has developed a range of activities and services depending on community needs including well-building, educational programs, veterinary care improvement, support of weather reporting, hospital and administrative building repairs, wage support for local doctors and nurses, and educational support. IFAD's Rural Poverty Reduction Program operates along similar rationales supporting a hodge podge of local development projects and infrastructure activities. In Bayankhutag RPRP built a ten-bed up-to-date clinic with pay support for two doctors and several nurses. In other soums they have helped build small dairy processing centers, veterinary clinics, and other small, locally based efforts. These projects are on the whole successful as they provide much needed services to local communities. Although they have helped improve local lives and alleviate the conditions of poverty, it cannot be avoided that during these massive yet highly atomized investments poverty worsened. This raises important questions about the nature of poverty and the applicability of these measures to that very nature. Moreover, as state revenue has soared, the state has not assumed responsibility for providing these services which should be under its purview.



What the state has undertaken have been a number of large-scale, sometimes hairbrained, attempts at developing the rural countryside. The most notorious are the *nogoon xerem* or green wall of trees that was supposed to stretch across the entire length of Mongolia from east to west but now is barely visible. The goal was to thwart the advancing desert, which oddly was blamed on herder-induced overgrazing. In addition, the state has attempted cloud-seeding, but this has limited effect and herders claimed that this practice robs other areas of rain and does not increased total rainfall. Other efforts have been equally as large scale but more effective. The new highway has significantly aided rural households in eastern provinces. Driving from Undurxaan to Ulaanbaatar once took an entire day but can now be done, safely, in 5-6 hours. State-led well repairs have also been quite welcomed and successful; although in many soums this has been done largely with development assistance. The primary activities, however, have been largely institutional with the campsite leasing program and other legal procedures discussed in this dissertation.

Increasingly, the primary vehicle for rural development assistance has been through community-based programs; most of which have a large resource management component. According to a recent SDA (2010:33) report since 1999, Mongolia has become a *de facto* testing ground for community-based rangeland management.” These have come, for the most part, in three distinct packages: (1) capacity-building projects through the World Bank that enrolled local herders in pasture management planning, (2) small herder cooperative groups localized around and campsites as described in chapter 6, and (3) larger-scale pasture user groups within whole soums or bags. The first brand has largely met with failure because it provides so few benefits for a considerable effort on the part of herders. The inability to achieve consensus and the lack of will has also affected its success. The second sort has been significantly evaluated here, showing serious equity issues and no real capacity to institutionalize resource or risk management on a large scale. The third kind has been much more successful, although the successes have largely been limited to khangai and more well-endowed areas that have less variability in forage coverage and are more responsive to these sorts of management regimes. However in the steppe, desert steppe, and desert regions, these programs have been stymied by a major mismatch between ecological scales and social ones as well as the huge investment herders must make in travel.

In addition to the equity issues are legal ones. These groups are most often registered simply as NGOs, economic cooperatives, or not at all. Of the small number that are still operating, over seventy percent are in the latter category. In a recent evaluation Binswanger-Mkhize (2009) points out that in all these systems there are serious equity issues and improper

mechanisms for dispute resolution. Even in successful programs the benefits tend to flow up in ways that support those with greatest degree of control over resources already. These wealthy herders and kin groups use their herds and social connections as leverage in community decisions. Moreover, there is also no research on the impact these groups have had on mobility patterns. Considering the last zud struck many of the regions where these programs are still operating, it would be interesting to know how these programs affected the distribution of loss amongst participating households.

The single greatest problem from the perspective of this research is that these groups do not assist or promote a certain kind of mobility. Inter-soum grazing as this research has shown is the single most critical variable in mitigating the impact of zud. By simply leaving hazardous conditions, households can avoid them. As my survey of the history of pastoral migrations in Mongolia has shown, these kinds of long-distance migrations have long been critical techniques for minimizing loss. Because these programs only regulate intra-soum grazing, they have little impact on facilitating otor and zud mitigation. Consequently, I would argue they will not seriously contribute to alleviating the production of poverty in rural Mongolia. Moreover, there is a glaring mismatch in scale that probably cannot be solved solely by local communities, though they can play a part. The state must effectively arrange otor contracts, maintain otor reserves, and provide some kind of mobile assistance. In this context, there are a number of ways community-based programs can be mobilized. For instance, a common otor fund and motor pool could be maintained in order to move the poorest households. The state already pays huge amounts to deliver hay in the depth of winter and usually has little impact on mitigating loss. The focus needs to move more towards prevention and ex ante mitigation rather than the current emergency management system which is primarily geared towards managing conditions while losses are occurring. There is also little framework, outside of insurance, for ex post recovery. Both communities and the state can play a greater role in what is now dealt with only by individual households.

This is a space in which I think herders can counter the ‘neo-liberalization’ of these projects. I would argue that a place to start is to focus on “co”-forms of development practice; whether envisioned as co-management or combined forms of social protection that enroll communities, individuals, and the state in particular mixes that retain the state’s responsibility for the care of its citizens through safety nets and broad-scale resource management while fostering equality, accountability, and responsiveness at all levels. For example, in the realm of financial services, safety nets must be a combined initiative between the government, communities, and financial markets. In project design, those that focus on financial markets receive excessive

attention. Mongolia I would argue is ahead of many nations where pastoralism is practiced. Mongols benefit from social welfare, disability payments, and child payments. This is one of the reasons that loans have been largely successful without overwhelming repercussions for individuals who default. But other kinds of community-based safety nets need to be a part of the mix.

As I discussed above, community-based natural resource management programs must have equity mechanisms built into them. If some are going to benefit from a program, off-setting redistribution must happen elsewhere. For example, it would be naïve to think that CBNRM programs can be arranged so that all equally benefit from pasture use, much less agree on what ‘equally’ even means. Yet, surely some benefit more than others. Community disaster migration funds or requiring voluntary mobility assistance on the part of the wealthy for poor households could redistribute benefits in ways that mitigate disaster risk and the poverty crunch without penalizing wealthy herders’ use of pasture or other resources. Coupled with state assistance these problems be could significantly minimized.

In terms of resource management, community-based intra-unit grazing must be coupled and integrated with state institutions at larger scales. Efforts to combine administrative units like soum and even aimag do not solve this problem, although appropriate institutional coordination between respective administrative units would achieve similar effects. The campsite leasing program also needs to be made open to all by allowing households to register at bag meetings and pay rates according to their current herd size. And since it is already occurring, over time, intra-soum, lease exchanges need to be set up so that households that are already selling and buying campsites can do so knowing the value of their campsite. These exchanges need to be limited to herding residents and with the stipulation that the campsite be utilized for animal husbandry purposes only.

This raises an important, on-going discussion concerning the current state of law in rural resource management and the legal issues surrounding CBNRM and leasing. A number of scholars and development practitioners have called for legal reforms in order to increase tenure security and empower local communities. For instance, Fernandez-Gimenez has long supported strong tenure rights such as through campsite leases and Enkhamgalan at CPR has long pushed for such reforms including well leasing. Others are pushing for greater extension of these rights and even promoting pasture leasing. Yet, the extent that secure tenure through leases will alleviate many of the problems in the countryside is yet to be seen. Considering they minimize movement potential rather than increase it points to the possibility that they do not. For example, leasing may have little impact on poverty dynamics because, as data presented here show, they

may in fact simply formalize exclusions that were already taking place. And the effect they have on local environments is largely unknown. Binzwanger (2009) and other development affiliates have also called for legal recognition of CBNRM groups beyond registration as NGOs. The formal institutionalization of these groups however raises the question of the difference between them and local administrations. What would the effect of these reforms be on dissent?

In most of these cases what herders request is left out. Including herders' voices in a serious and equitable way would be a greater step in developing pathways. Although personally I would argue that, contrary to current laws circulating around parliament, pasture must not be privatized in all areas nor leased, this is something that should be decided at the local level and not by the national government nor by development institutions and their think-tank allies. Herders should be allowed to vote on whether reserve pastures or pastures in general should be legally open for leasing. Because such movements would have massive impacts on communities and households, herders must be involved in the decision-making process in a formal way.

### **Conclusion: What is to be done?**

In Lenin's (1905) famous "What is to be done"? the communist poses a dichotomy between revolution and reform. The social democrats on the one hand are more interested in reform, tinkering with the capitalist machine and alleviating its effects. In contrast, following Marx more closely, he proposes revolution, the complete destruction of the apparatus of capitalist domination. In thinking about pastoral development, an evidently 'reformist' mindset dominates. If our goals are the alleviation of poverty and suffering and the equitable distribution of both resources and dignity, one must ask, what works? Clearly, decades of pastoral development have, for the many, brought little succor or true elevation in livelihood. Mongolia itself and the former socialist states stand as monuments to another massive social experiment. Even in western ranching systems, which appear on economic terms and at the surface as 'successful', are some of the most inefficient, wasteful, and environmentally degrading agricultural practices in the world. Clearly, this does not work either.

True reform can be achieved in two primary ways: (1) political empowerment and (2) a radical shift in moral economies. For the former, I refer to the empowerment of both herding communities themselves and their poorest and most marginal members. Currently, in Mongolia, there is no overarching union or representative organization for herders although this existed during socialism. The current herders union is a largely defunct NGO with only partial participation from elderly, former negdel technicians and economists and has no effective ties in rural areas. A national union of herders should be organized as the best means for rural citizens to press their causes in the halls of power. There are sufficient numbers of very wealthy herders who

instead of looking for local political offices could serve in such a capacity. This kind of empowerment will garner significant bargaining power. For the latter I address new moral economies at various levels including state and community. I argue in conclusion that although I would err on the side of a reformist, I do argue that we need revolutionary thinking that moves away from neo-liberal moralities that privilege radical individualism above community, efficiencies above equity, and productivity over sustainability.

## **APPENDIX A: Acronyms**

ADB – Asian Development Bank

CPR – Center for Poverty Research

IFAD – International Fund for Agricultural Development

IMH – Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology

ITX – *Irgediin Tuluugchdiin Xural* or ‘Citizens’ Representative Council’

JICA – Japan International Cooperation Agency

MoA – former Ministry of Agriculture

MoF – Ministry of Finance

MoFA – former Ministry of Food and Agriculture (changed in 2008)

MoFALI – Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Light Industry (consolidated in 2008)

MoNE – Ministry of Nature and the Environment

MPRP – Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (now the Mongolian People’s Party)

NEMA – National Emergency Management Agency

NMR – National Meat Reserve

PIU – project implementation unit

PMMC – pasture management and monitoring committee

RPRP – Rural Poverty Reduction Program

SDA – Swiss Development Agency

SLP – Sustainable Livelihoods Project

UIX – *Ulsiin Ix Xural* or ‘National Assembly’

UNDP – United Nations Development Program

UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund

WB – World Bank

## APPENDIX B: Glossary of Mongolian terms

*ail* - household

*aimag* - province

*argal* - dung

*ax-duu* – senior-junior relations; *ax* - lit: ‘older brother or male relative’

*axlagch* – senior or leader

*bag* – district, the smallest administrative unit (not an official territorial unit)

*belcheer* - pasture

*buleg* – group or gang

*buuts* – crushed dung found on winter and spring campsites, lit: ‘droppings’

*chadal* – power, ability, effectiveness, force

*darga* – governor, leader

*deej* – first portion

*ders* – feather grass

*ezen* – master or lord; also, ‘possessor’

*ger* – felt tent or yurt

*geree* - contract

*govi* – desert

*malchin* – livestock herder, lit: ‘one who lives by livestock’

*maraa* – soda deposits

*myangat* (malchin) – owner of more than one thousand head of livestock

*namarjaa* – fall campsite

*negdel* – socialist collective, similar territorially to soum

*nutag* – campsite, natal territory, homeland

*nuudel* - migration

*otor* – non-customary migration

*soum* – county, smallest territorial administrative unit

*togtool* – order or imposition

*tuux* – to drive (livestock or households)

*uvuljuu* – winter campsite

*xavarjaa* – spring campsite

*xot ail* – household and livestock encampment

*xuduu* – countryside

*xujir* – salt lick

*xuvi* – share, portion, or inheritance

*xuux* – to expel (livestock or households)

*zud* – winter disaster where conditions prevent livestock from grazing

*zuslan* – summer campsite



## APPENDIX C: Additional materials

### Additional Figures

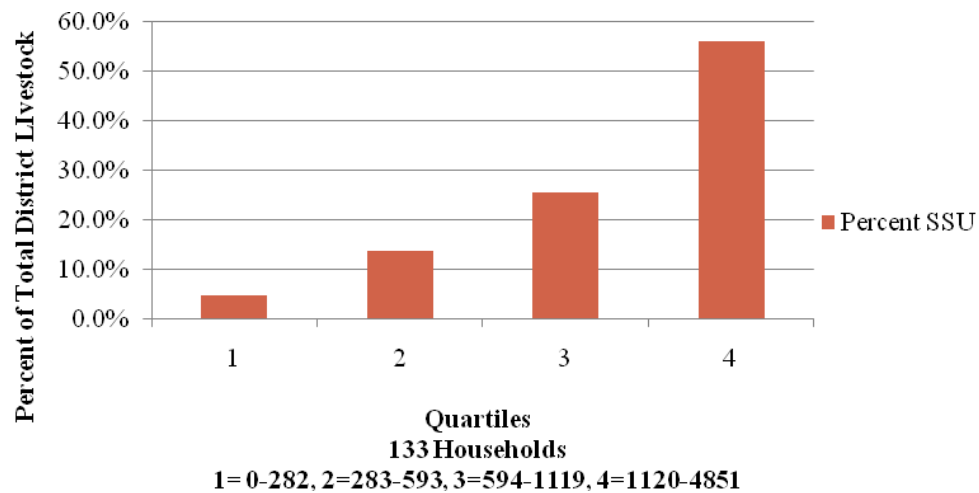


Figure A.1. Percentage of District SSU by Wealth Quartiles.

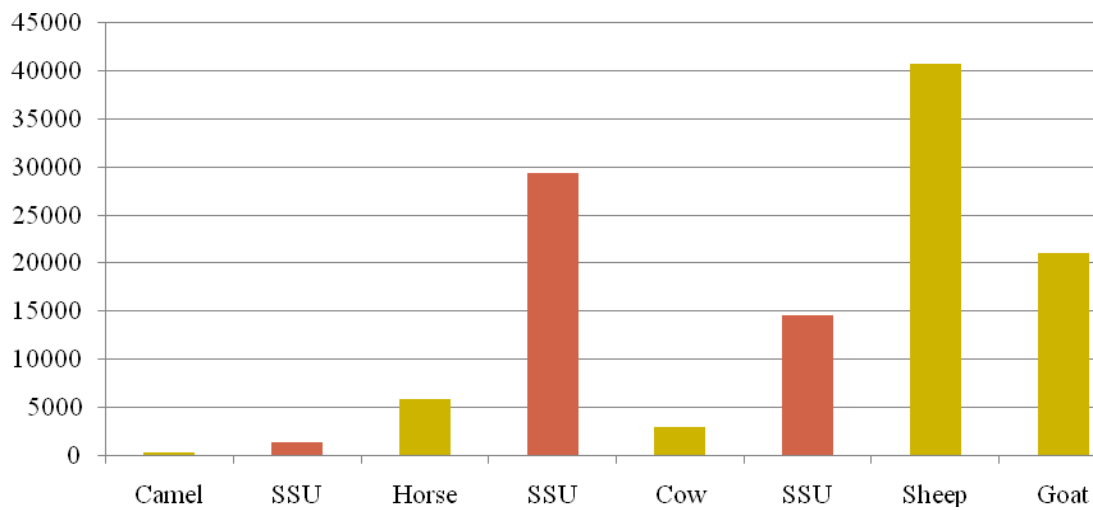


Figure A.2. District herd composition and total. SSU are provided for camel, horse, and cow.

## **Additional Household Profiles**

### *Galxuu*

Galxuu and his wife (both 27, Khalkha) were married in 2005 and have two young boys. They live in the countryside all year long on his father's campsites. They are, as is customary for a son's household, clients of his father. Compared to many other young households they are doing quite well. In 2005 when they married, they received 100 sheep, 20 goats, 20 horses, and 3 cows from his father (*xuvi*), a few cows from her father, and horses from his uncle Batdalai. By 2007 they had increased their herds to 200 sheep, 40 goats, 20 horses, and 10 cows for a total herd of 363 head of livestock. Their income from pastoral activities in the July 07-July 08 period was 1,372,000 MNT. Galxuu expressed a disdain for goats and said that his income would be higher if they were to concentrate on goats but the environmental implications of over-grazing from goat-rearing was too costly. Nevertheless they are still reliant like most households to a degree on cashmere income. They took a loan out from Xaan bank in 2007 for 500,000 MNT to pay for everyday living expenses and used cashmere income to pay it back.

Galxuu comes from a large kin group.<sup>237</sup> His father, Sodnompil, has 8 brothers and sisters, 6 of whom are herding in Uguumur. His father is the second oldest male and, along with his father's older brother, exerts a level of authority over other members of the kin group. His father's two youngest brothers cooperate with him in the operation and maintenance of a hand-well. His father makes most decisions regarding timing of pastoral activities including migration. Clearly, his father exercises greater authority over his decisions than his uncles, but according to *ax-duu* principles he is still to a degree subject to their influence. The kin group also has connections in Murun soum. His fathers' hired herders and mother's relatives come from Murun soum. Galxuu's elder sister also currently lives in Murun as a herder with her husband who is from the soum. They actively maintain these connections. Their Murun relatives in the summer settle on the opposite side of the river from his father and other relatives. At some point he will take over day to day management of his family's herds and will eventually, along with his 2 other siblings, inherit his father's stock. His siblings however do not intend to take up herding and will therefore inherit fewer animals. His two little brothers and sister are at college in UB. His older sister has married out of the herding economy.

His wife's family is from Tumentsogt soum in Sukhbaatar aimag on the eastern border of Bayankhutag. Her parents still actively herd with her younger siblings. In late 2008, Galxuu, under his father's direction, settled on the far eastern border of Bayankhutag and cooperated with

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<sup>237</sup> This kin group is discussed in detail in chapter 3. I refer to them as 'Xaya' group in reference to their customary territory.

her relatives who were settled just across the border. Beyond this kind of cooperation, the first time it has happened, the two sides do not normally cooperate. She, however, comes from a much poorer herding family while Sodnompil's father is a wealthy myangat. Consequently, there is a foundation or '*undes*' for cooperation as herders say.

Galxuu wants to separate from his father's campsite and branch out on his own but this is a difficult decision. If his herds become too big the decision will be easier to make and his father will be more understanding. Even in the case that he does separate out from his father he will still to a certain extent be submissive to his father's will particularly when it comes to migrations and settlement. Now, his father makes almost all pasturing decisions, little is left to Galxuu to decide. When they plan migrations his father organizes inspection trips with his brothers and sisters to distant camps, leaving Galxuu behind. His father also sends him on small otor throughout the year. Galxuu will take a small ger and travel through the landscape with sheep and goats, spending only one night in a single place, moving on the following day. In early spring during the birthing season, he separates a short distance from his father to divide the herds into lambing ewes and non-lambing ewes and wethers. In the late spring Galxuu is sent about a kilometer away when he and his father split the herds for weaning (*saaxlax*). Galxuu typically takes one section of non-milking ewes, wethers, and weaning lambs at a distance to keep them separated from the milking ewes. They try to maintain this distance at all their campsites between May and October when the herds will be combined again.

#### *Migration Profile*

In July 2007 Galxuu was settled near his father's customary *zuslan* where both his father and his father's herder were also settled. Galxuu was herding a section of his father's stock and his own about half a kilometers distance (1). The campsite was approximately a half kilometer south of the river and was dominated primarily by *tsaxildag* but also *ders* and *tana*. The area is imbued with great quantities of *maraa* so *xujir*, 3 kilometers away, is not necessary. They were located on the far edge of a region populated largely by members of their kin group. He rated the pasture a 3 but overall gave the campsite a 5, following the custom of the other households profiled here.

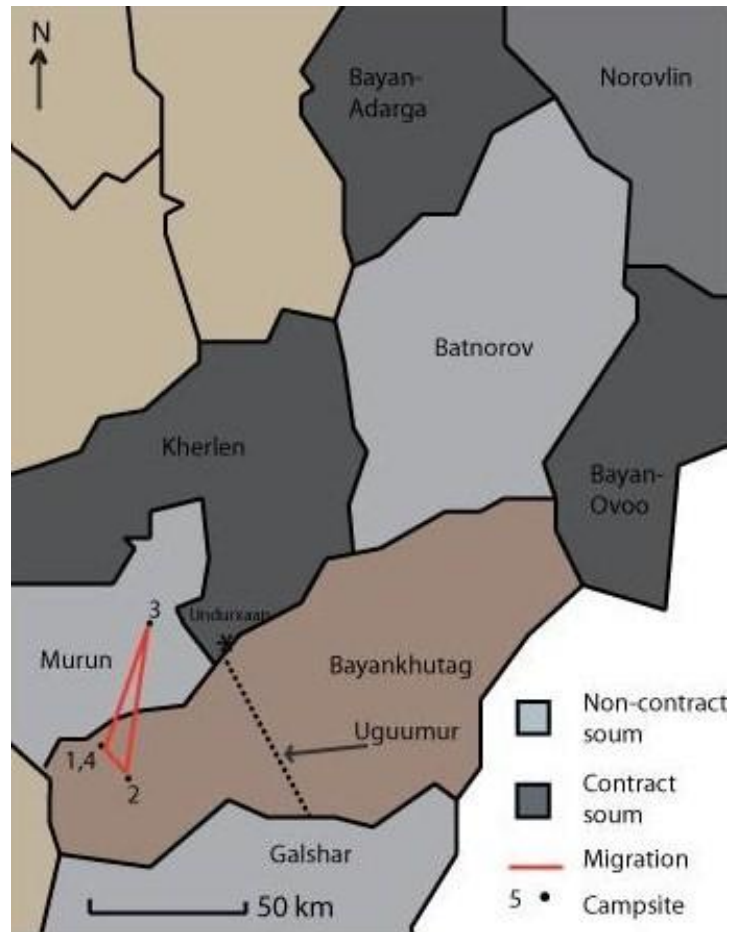


Figure A.5. Galxuu's annual household and herd migration.

Within a 2-10 kilometer distance there were roughly 12 kin households and 2-3 *tanidag* households, most of whom were hired herders. This region known as Xaya is utilized by other non-kin households but Galxuu's kin occupy the entire west side of the area with few to no non-kin households for much of the year. Beyond their campsite to the west the pasture is generally poor and does not improve for a few kilometers along the river Kherlen. Consequently, by packing the area, as discussed in chapter 5, they are able to prevent the settlement of other households. During this time a number of the households from his kin group including Galxuu go on continuous short trips to the east and south in areas of Xaya and thereby broadening their grazing orbits. In late July, he followed the Kherlen river eastward and then south towards Rashaant before returning. Because pasture was so poor due to the drought, his father decided to move the *khot ail* to their customary *namarjaa* 8 kilometers to the south (2). Before moving they recombined the herds and then Galxuu and his father's hired herder drove them to the new campsite. They moved their belongings by his father's truck and his car. They settled next to the well his father operates and maintains in cooperation with two of his younger brothers. The

pasture was primarily *tsaxildag* and *xyalgana*, and *xujir* was within a kilometers distance. Because a number of their fellow kin also moved, the number of households remained 12 kin and 2 *tanidag*. Galxuu continued to conduct periodic short continuous *otor* through the fall, attempting to fatten the livestock for the move north that his father was planning. Right before they moved again in November, Galxuu lost a cow to theft.

In late November after fattening (*targaluulax*) their animals and the end of breeding season they moved north to Murun *soum* crossing the frozen Kherlen with their animals (3). They drove their animals and moved their belongings, minus his father's *tom ger* (big 'tent') by truck and car to his sister and brother-in-law's campsite in northern Murun *soum*. The location they chose, which his father scouted and selected, was only 500 meters from a well and was dominated by *borogo* and *xyalgana*. He only brought 3 bags of *xiiveg* with him and no hay. Other members of his kin group brought hay with them. His father bought blocks of *xujir* from the aimag center and transported them to the campsite.

Galxuu has a number of relatives living in Murun including, most importantly, his older sister and her husband who are active herders. They planned to stay on their spring campsite for the winter. Typically when a household stays on a relative's campsite in another *soum* they have little trouble with the formal authorities. However, they were settled near the spring pastures of several households who informed the local bag governor to their presence. Moreover, eight other households from his kin group came from Uguumur as well. The number of animals must have been several thousand considering the households who moved there which included a number of his uncles all of whom are *myangat malchin*. The bag governor visited Galxuu's father's *ger* and inquired as to their presence. Galxuu's father explained the situation and that they were guests of his sister. Additionally, the hired herders of his oldest uncle were former citizens of another bag in Murun. To prevent *xuux*, he gave the governor an undisclosed amount of cash and a few sheep. Galxuu argued that such a presentation was not a bribe (*xaxuuli* or *avilga*) but rather a thank-you (*xandiv*) for allowing them to stay in the bag.

Galxuu stated that pasture was in fact poor at their *otoriin uvuljuu* and that with so many households there the pasture would easily have become degraded if a large number of his kin had not moved on towards Kherlen *soum* to the east. That winter he only lost 2 cattle and 2 horses. The 2 horses were old and weak and had contracted horse flu. Although loosing 2 cattle is as serious as loosing 10 sheep, cattle are much weaker and vulnerable to *zudarax* or weakening. Part of the reason he lost cattle is because he left them behind in Uguumur with his mother who stays permanently in Xaya by the river at their *xavarjaa*, tending to the cattle. His father commuted back and forth, staying typically with his wife looking after the cattle. When I visited his father

and mother in Xaya in early December 2007, they were there alone with the cattle in what looked like a snow-covered moonscape. Fortunately their *xavarjaa* was situated in a region densely covered with *ders* which maintained the cattle's diet. They also provide hay and other supplements to them through the winter.

In March Galxuu and the others moved back to their *zuslan* along the river in Xaya (4). The river was still frozen enough for the move across. His father left behind a section of stock (*taviul mal*) with his daughter for birthing season in order to ensure greater care per lamb or kid. After birthing season they split up the stock in sections with *er xoni* or wethers with Galxuu and *xurgatai xoni* ('ewes with lambs') with the hired herder. Galxuu took the male small stock on several short *otor* in April and May, but not straying the distances he normally would such as in the summer. The key was to use the short continuous *otor* as a means to invigorate the stock after a rough winter, even though few died. Since the hired herder and Galxuu moved at a distance from his father's campsite, his father had little reason to move and consequently did not move until the following December of 2008 (after the end of research) when they planned an *otor* on the far eastern border of Bayankhutag with Tumentsogt *soum* in Sukhbaatar *aimag*.

Again, Galxuu's father and uncles planned a collective migration. The plan was that his father Sodnompil would stay on the border with Tumentsogt while Galxuu and his wife would camp with her father in Tumentsogt just across the border so they could exploit a larger grazing orbit without the problem of crossing the border. To the west of Sodnompil, his older brother, Galxuu's uncle, would move the rest of the collectivity (described in chapter 5) and settle in a small series of mountain hollows near a well a few kilometers from the base of the great Bayan Khuree mountain. They scouted the area twice, once in mid-summer and then again in early fall. His uncle and the rest of group moved gradually along the Kherlen river before turning south in early November towards the border and just east of the Bayan Khuree. Accordingly to one of his relatives whom I spoke to in December 2008, he and his father moved directly 100 kilometers to the border region and set up camp. She said that the *uvs* or grass was '*saixan shuu*' or really nice.

*Table A.1. Statistical summary of Galkhuu's household herd and migration data.*

Ex ante Herd Size	Ex post Herd Size	Mortality Rate	Major Moves	Total Distance	Average Distance	Soums Accessed
372	363	1%	3	108	36	1

### *Munkhbayar*

Munkhbayar (29, Khalkha) is married with 2 children. His wife and children live in Undurkhaan during the school year, and, although he spent most of his time in the countryside looking after their stock, by the time research was concluding, he had made a partial exit from the pastoral economy as an absentee herd-owner. He has decided to combine his herd with a friend's while they both mutually employ a herder to care for the animals. They make alternating trips via motorcycle to the countryside now to inspect their herds. He did this because his first child has recently started school and does not want to be separated from them. Even though he left school at 14 to take up herding and expressed great interest in the work as a teenager, he now feels little inclination to the herding life and would prefer to settle in town. Consequently, they bought a khashaa in town and set up their ger. Munkhbayar is currently looking for other work in the provincial capital.

He and his wife, who is originally from Bayanmunkh soum to the west, currently own 430 head of stock – 200 sheep, 200 goats, 20 horses and 10 cattle. Most of the herd came as a xuvi from his older brother Nasanbat. This is but a portion of what his herd size was the previous year. He lost over 100 animals during the winter and sold 70 head to purchase their new khashaa. Until the events of the last year, Munkhbayar had increased his herds significantly. In 1999 when he and his wife married, he received 70 sheep, 70 goats, 10 horses, 10 cattle, and 4 camels from his father. His income from pastoral activities reflects this increase. His total pastoral income for the period July 07- July 08 was 5,484,000 MNT, 3 million of which went to the purchase of the khashaa. Even though his income was generally high compared to other households with similar herd size, he 'ate' into his productive capital to purchase the khashaa and was still reliant on a 600,000 loan from the bank to meet daily needs until he could secure payment from cashmere sale. The increase of his herds, according to other locals, was spurred on largely by his participation in livestock theft. As a maliin xulgaich he did not feel the marketing pressures to sell his livestock assets as other household would. Consequently, he was able to better facilitate the natural growth potential of his herds.

Munkhbayar is quite different from other high loss households for a number of reasons. Although his household has increasingly fewer animals, his social connections to a wide kin group distinguish him and his wife from most poor households. He is the youngest sibling in a large kin group that has formally organized itself into a herder group through IFAD's RPR program. His eldest brother is the groups' *axlagch* and Munkhbayar is dependent, to a degree, on him. His eldest sister is married to the wealthiest herder in Uguumur and second wealthiest herder in Bayankhutag. Two of his older brothers are also in the top tier of herd wealth. However,

although Munxbayar is a member of the buleg and cooperates with members of his kin group at times, he has a different father than his older siblings, which coupled with being the youngest puts him at a disadvantage in terms of the benefits he can derive from cooperation. Moreover, he worked for his elder half-brother prior to getting married, received a xuvi from him, and for a time after getting married worked for his eldest half-brother as a hired herder, an uncommon but not altogether rare situation. This kind of relationship represents a major loss of status within the kin group. Moreover, they did not leave on good terms and this has left him out on the margins of his kin group which is dominated by his eldest half-brother.

### *Migration Profile*

Munkhbayar's migration cycle from July 2007 until July 2008 reflects this marginality. Moreover, being so young he has little experience and expertise to draw on and has, for some time he said, been losing interest in a herding livelihood. For example, he rarely checks campsites before moving; even his customary campsite a few kilometers away. Because he knows little about the campsite he is travelling to, including aspects like forage conditions, he does not optimally select the best campsite or the best timing. In general he is also resistant to his half-brother's attempts at domination.



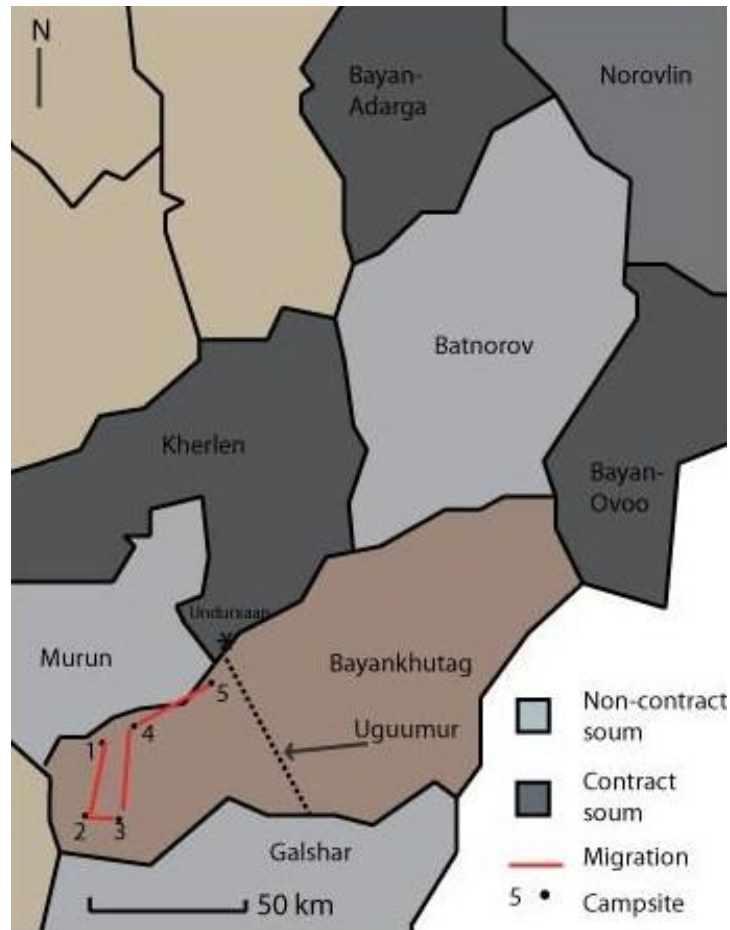


Figure A.6. Munxbayar's annual household and herd migration.

From July 2007 until September 2007, Munkxbaayar and his family were in Xaya on the northern edge of Uguumur near the river (1). This area is where his kin groups' customary *zuslan* or summer campsites are located. Like most years, he was settled in close proximity to his relatives, including his older brother, *myangat*, and Aimgiin Sain Malchin (Provincial Best Herder) Nasanbat. Like many of the households in Xaya, they utilized the water from river rather than a well, watering their livestock twice a day. The primary plant species in the surrounding area was *nugal* and *ulun*. The presence of *nugal*, not a nutritious forage, suggests that the site was not selected because of prime pasturage but because of proximity to water. *Ulu*n, however, is a highly beneficial forage species. The surrounding floodplain landscape is *dovtoi* or 'bumpy' with significant deposits of *maraa* or sodium, which is highly beneficial to livestock for fattening. To the west of his campsite within a 10 kilometer radius were approximately 20 households crowding the 2-5 km wide plain that runs between the river and the foothills. The crowdedness of the area makes herd mixing, or *xonini nair*, a common problem, increasing tensions between household groupings. He rated the quality of the grass as a 4 with the overall rating a 5.

In September he moved south to Sair (2), approximately 20-25 kilometers away in the southwest of the district, in the group's home territory or *nutag*. He moved via camel wagon with his older brother Nasanbat and his former hired herder Tuul (also a sampled household). There were 3 other local households in the vicinity. The move was an *otor* move because it was outside his normal migration circuit even though he does not have a *namarjaa* or fall campsite, where households would normally be moving to at this time. However, his brother has a possession contract for 2 campsites in the vicinity – one *uvuljuu* and one *xavarjaa* – as well as a well possession contract provided through the IFAD RPR Program via the *Soum* administration. He felt that it was a poor choice by his older brother. Although the location is in their customary *nutag*, the region was experiencing a drought and the forage was poor (rated a 1/5). The primary forage species were *xaragana* and *looli*. *Xaragana* is an important woody shrub during times of drought, but for the autumn fattening season it was deficient. Munxbayar confronted water problems as well. Although the well was only 1km away, the water was insufficient especially considering his herds had to wait on his brothers' herds to water. Regardless, he rated the campsite a five.

In October only a month after moving to Sair he migrated by camel wagon on to his customary *uvuljuu* in Shanaga Toirom (3), 5 km away, just south of the well at Rashaant. Typically, he would move with his older brother, other relatives, and members of the cooperative group; however, he complained that his older brother's herds were simply getting too big and they were detrimentally affecting his herds' ability to graze and fatten. Consequently, he fell out with his older brother, opting to move on his own to Shanaga. His brother, however, was planning a move with the cooperative group out of the *soum* to Murun first and then to Kherlen. He asked Munxbayar to stay behind as an *uldsen ail* and use his campsite. For Nasanbat this would work as a deterrent against non-local households from settling. There were also benefits for Munxbayar. His brother allowed him to use his *saravch*, an important resource for protecting stock against the extreme colds of the Mongolian winter. The campsite was protected from wind and snow by the Ashar Mountain and he had access to salt deposits and feather grass (*ders*). So, rather than moving with his older brother and the cooperative group to Murun and Kherlen *soum*, he was resolved to remain in Uguumur despite the *zud* warnings and the winter *otor* contracts that were established to enable movement out.

However, Munxbayar's wife and children would be located in the aimag center where the children attend school. He decided that he would begin alternating between the countryside and the city and so for weeks at a time he left his herds in the control of a hired herder. Although the presence of additional labor in the form of a hired herder is beneficial, the lack of cooperative *ail*

or *saaxalt ail* left Munxbayar and his livestock extremely vulnerable. Moreover the hired herder did not provide additional labor, because Munxbayar himself was absent. Rather, it was replacement labor. Besides a few households from Galshar over 10 km away, there were no other local households in the vicinity.

While Munxbayar was at Shanaga he lost approximately 50 sheep, 50 goats, 13 horses and 1 cow. This is equivalent to 22 % of his total herd. He made little effort to stem the losses. He only bought 5 bags of *xiiveg* and 5 bales of hay – an amount nowhere near what it would take to supplement the lost feed due to drought in the previous summer. The winter situation worsened. Snow fell in late November and early December, freezing by January over drought affected pastures. The increasingly cold temperatures and wind-storms sapped his stock of energy. I asked him in the interview why he did not move. He told me that moving in winter is *demii* or pointless because all of the stock will die. He said that it is best to keep the few animals and let the rest die, otherwise they all will die. Oddly, he claimed that the winter was not terrible and that the main reason he lost so many animals was because of the hired herder who he, in the end, fired. However, regardless of the actions of his hired herder, the damage had been done.

In April Munxbayar moved 20 km to his *xavarjaa* (4) back in Xaya, the same region where his *zuslan* is located. Although he went alone via camel wagon, the area he settled in was crowded as usual with 15 households within 10 kilometers along the flood plain. The site was close to the river and a well. The area was not as well endowed with *maraa* as his *zuslan*. The site was also surrounded with *looli* and *ders*, although not near the quality of a ‘normal’ year. His brother had not returned with the other herding members of his family and the co-op group; they would not return until the summer in late May – early June. Usually by this time in May he would have divided his lambs from ewes for weaning and exchanged with his older brother. However, as he had separated from his older brother he had to accomplish this task alone.

By May Munxbayar was considering moving his herds closer to Undurxaan so that he could be closer to his home there and so his children could come out and visit. He informed his brother who asked him to herd a section of his *taviul mal* including lambs. His brother was anxious to separate his horse and cattle from the sheep and goats. He agreed and moved 30 km away with the help of his brother via truck to the east near Undurxaan in a region called Xayalaga (5). In Xayalaga, *ulun* was the predominant forage species, highly beneficial to sheep and goats. The region is adjacent to the river and landscape is similar to that in Xaya. The pressure from household crowding though is in fact greater with 19 households within 5 kilometers of his campsite. However, by the end of May and beginning of June enough rain had fallen to make initial forage growth plentiful. The campsite he and his brother selected was under 5 kilometers

from Undurxaan; consequently, he spent a considerable amount of time in the provincial capital with his wife and children.

While in Xayalaga, Munxbayar and his wife decided that he would move semi-permanently to Undurxaan. He arranged with a friend of his from his days at the soum school, Munxbat, to mutually hire a herder to watch over their livestock. At the time Munkhbat was herding in the first bag on the eastern side of Bayankhutag near the town of Idermeg on the Batnorov border on the opposite side of the Kherlen river. They arranged to alternate visits to the countryside so that when Munxbat was there, he was in Undurxaan, and when he was in the countryside Munxbat was in Undurxaan. Although Muxbayar had effectively split from his kin and cooperative group, he is still officially a member. With the greater time in Undurxaan he can now look for other work that will help support his half-move out of the countryside.

*Table A.2. Statistical summary of Munkhbayar's household herd and migration data.*

Ex ante Herd Size	Ex post Herd Size	Mortality Rate	Major Moves	Total Distance	Average Distance	Soums Accessed
553	430	22%	4	75	19	0

### *Nergui*

Nergui (57, Khalkha) lives alone with her daughter splitting time between the aimag center where she has a large house and yard and the countryside where her animals are herded by her sons. Her husband died some years ago and responsibility for herding the family stock fell to her second youngest son Usuxbayar, one of her seven children. She still is actively involved in herding the cattle, maintaining the stock, milking and arranging sales of her own animals, although she is highly dependent on the aid of her 3 herding children. Currently, she owns 100 sheep, 20 goats, 20 horses, 10 cattle and 2 camels for a total of 152 head, a drastically reduced herd size from the year before. Although she only lost 10 sheep and goats and 10 horses in the zud (3% mortality), she lost almost all her stock in the May 26 storms that violently swept through Kherlen, Batnorov, and Bayan-Ovoo soums in 2008. She lost 214 sheep and 190 goats or 70% of her livestock. Luckily, she lost no horse or cattle. As will be explained in the following section, the distinction between species mortality rates is due to how she managed the geographic dispersion of her stock. Despite the great loss, the income she reported was from the previous year and reflects a more normal state of affairs rather than the extremely precarious and ultimately dependent state she finds herself in now. Her income for 07-08 period was 2,126,000

MNT. Yet, she had taken out a loan of 3,000,000 from the bank to pay for her childrens' university fee. Without an income from the remainder of her stock, it will be difficult for her to pay this back.

Nergui was born and raised in Galshar soum where she met (at a winter horse race) and married her husband in 1969. A year after they married they received a *xuvi* of 13 sheep, 12 goats, 14 horse, and 5 cattle from his parents. They were employed as herders in Partizan *negdel* in Galshar *soum*, though she had been herding as an employee since 1966 after she left school. Her husband had been herding since the beginning of the *negdel* in 1960. In 1972 they moved to Bayankhutag and joined the Temtsel collective as sheep and horse herders. In the summer she earned additional income milking mares. By the time collective stock were privatized they had 23 sheep, 10 goats, 5 horses, and 3 cattle of their own. From privatization they acquired 81 sheep, 12 goats, 13 horses, 7 cattle, and a camel.

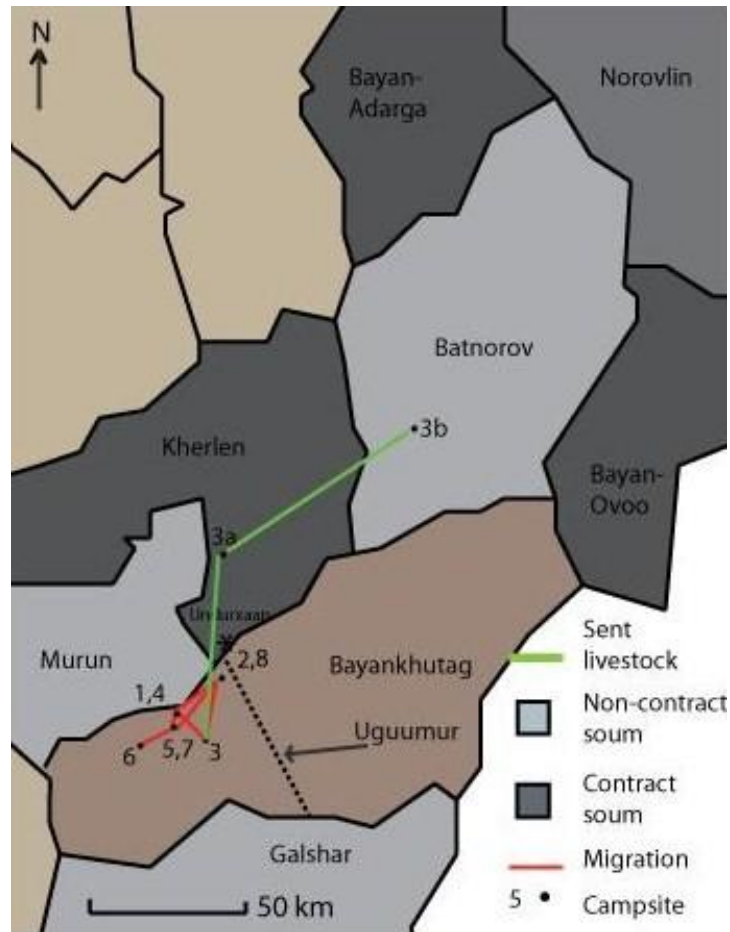
Many of her relatives still live in Galshar. Several of her brothers are already retired living in Galshar, Undurxaan and Bor-Undur, an old, Russian mining settlement and train station in southern Darkhan soum in southwest Xentii. Only one of her nieces and nephews actively herds livestock. They live in the 2<sup>nd</sup> bag. The rest live in Undurxaan and elsewhere working as nurses, carpenters, builders, and in a range of other non-agricultural occupations. Of her children, only 3 are herders. Her eldest son herds independently but at times will cooperate with his mother and younger brother during bad times of the year. Both of these sons are members of a cooperative group. They rarely cooperate with the group which is made up mostly of young intermarried households and one senior non-kin *axlagch*.<sup>238</sup> Her youngest son is a lama at the largest of the monasteries in Undurxaan and is well respected by many of the herders in Bayankhutag who visit him to inquire about the weather, the timing and location of activities such as moves, and personal consultation for naming and other ritual events. One of her daughters married a herder in Batnorov soum to the northeast of Bayankhutag and rarely visits although this past year she placed most of her sheep and goat stock with her. Her two oldest daughters have married and moved to UB rarely visiting the countryside except occasionally during the pleasant summer months. Her youngest daughter as mentioned tends to their house in Undurxaan.

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<sup>238</sup> As was described in chapter 6 and will be discussed below, this newest group formed in response to group formation elsewhere according to its primary founder Xurelbaatar. However, unlike the other groups it is made up mostly of herders related through marriage and are mostly of the same generation, some of whom are classmates. Compared to the other cooperative groups, this group rarely cooperates or organizes pastoral activities.

### *Migration Profile*

In July of 2007, Nergui and her sons, Munxbayar and Usuxbayar, were camped half a kilometer from the river north of a region called Usgun Deeres (1). They were a short distance from their customary *zuslan*. The pasture was primarily *ulun*, *shirxeg*, and *mongol nogoo* and had sufficient *maraa*. Like all of her campsites, there were no relative households camped near her as she has no relatives, beyond her sons, actively herding in Uguumur. That month her older son, Munxbayar, left to go on *otor* in Tsaidam alone, leaving behind his younger brother and mother. In early August Nergui and Usuxbayar moved 6 kilometers from Usugun Deeres to Xayalaga near the *aimag* center (2). The region is normally crowded with households from Bayankhutag as well as from Kherlen to the north and Galshar to the south. She settled with her son 3 kilometers away from the river near a well close to the road leading to the *soum* center. The area was plentiful in *maraa* but the pasture of *adil*, *agi* and *luuli* was extremely drought-affected due to the lack of rain and crowding of households. Consequently, in early September she sent her small stock of sheep and goats north to Batnorov with her daughter and son-in-law, a local herder in that *soum*. This is represented by a green line in the migration map. Her two sons and her son-in-law drove the stock north. Only 10 sheep and goats of her original herd of 500 sheep and goats died during the winter.



*Figure A.7. Nergui's annual household and herd migration. Green represents livestock migration rather than household migration.*

She, however, did not move but stayed in Xayalaga with the large stock, cattle and horses, until November. During this time she moved back and forth as per usual between the aimag center and the countryside. Consequently, she is not always at the campsite. In November she and her son Munxbayar moved to their customary uvuljuu near Uguumur mountain (3). Because the summer and fall had been so difficult due to the drought, Nergui and her son checked the campsite, something she said they never do. Her other son Usuxbayar was not satisfied with the reserve of pasture and went north to Murun with his wife whose relatives were wintering there.

As mentioned before Munxbayar and Usuxbayar are members of a cooperative group. This group is made up mostly of young men of roughly the same age who are related to each other through marriage. Some of them also went to school together. The axlagch Boldbaatar and other members have not been capable of effectively organizing group activities; they have not even obtained possession contracts. Yet, for the winter of 07-08 a couple members of the group went

north to join Xurelbaatar's father, a myangat, in Kherlen soum. Usuxbayar decided not to go but rather chose what his mother said seemed like a less risky option of wintering with his wife's family in Murun soum. That left his older brother Munxbayar with the decision of going north with his father-in-law and brother-in-law, putting himself in a junior position or remaining in Bayankhutag. He stayed in Bayankhutag with his mother.

Nergui kept her cattle and horses in Bayankhutag. She bought 10 bags of *xiiveg* and 100 bales of hay for her stock. They lived on snow rather than well water even though they were within a kilometer of a well. She stated that she didn't think that the winter was terribly harsh in Uguumur but that the grass was very poor. Consequently, she said she thought providing hay would enable her to stem the problems associated with the *zud*. By mid February they had to move again (4). Munxbayar had lost a number of animals and she had already lost 10 horses. They made a 6 km move to the river in February where there was enough *ders* and other forage to help bolster her cattle and remaining horses' health before birthing. Normally this is a very early and very risky move; most households do not move until March after Tsagaan Sar and after warming begins. Moving in the middle of winter with tired, pregnant animals is obviously problematic. However, the campsite near the river was much more suitable to their needs and large stock are less susceptible to exhaustion. They also had better access to *maraa* and *xujir*.

After birthing season they moved 3 kilometers to Bulan where her customary *xavarjaa* and *namarjaa* are located (5). Munxbayar did not join her but her son Usuxbayar had returned from up north and settled nearby. They were still approximately 6 kilometers from the river but were able to use a well at Bulan. The well, however, was 4 kilometers distant and so a week later they moved 4 kilometers to Orosiin Shoroo, southwest of where Bulan and Xaya meet (6). In Bulan and Xaya she said there are too many *ix xonitoi ail*. Here her stock had access to better forage like *xyalgana* and *agi* rather than *luuli* and *ders*, which although a highly beneficial plant does not *mal targaluulax* or *mal nogooluulax* (fatten stock). They also had better access to *maraa*. In May, many of the households from Xaya were returned pushing Nergui's herds into a smaller grazing orbit and occasionally combining in a *xonini nair* or 'sheep party'. In response she moved back to Bulan (7). Her son, Usuxbayar, conducted a 10 day continuous short otor eastward toward Zuun Xayalaga on the eastern side of the road near the aimag center.

On May 26<sup>th</sup> a powerful storm blew through parts of Kherlen, Batnorov and Bayan-Ovoo soums in east central Khentii. Nergui lost roughly 70 per cent of her livestock in that storm. She said, according to her daughter and son-in-law, the storm began as strong winds and then turned to ice, snow and finally freezing rain and wind. Her daughter and husband tried to get the livestock back to the shelters and even tried getting as many in the ger as possible. For those left



outside they covered them with spare and scrap clothing and blankets, anything they could find. But it was mostly in vain. Nergui lost 214 sheep and 190 goats. As she explained the events of that day she was crying. In June her sons went to retrieve what animals remained and return them to Bayankhutag. She met her animals in Zuun Xayalaga 10 kilometers away (8).

*Table A.3. Statistical summary of Nergui's household herd and migration data.*

Ex ante Herd Size	Ex post Herd Size	Zud Mortality Rate	Major Moves	Total Distance	Average Distance	Soums Accessed
362	152	3%	7	36	5	0

### *Buyanjargal*

Buyanjargal (25, Khalkha) and his wife (24, Khalkha) are originally from Galshar soum. They moved to Bayankhutag in 2004 shortly after getting married in 2003 because, as they said, the pasture is bad and becoming desert (*tsuljiljix*?). They did not become citizens until 2006. They have 2 children, one of whom is getting ready for kindergarten. They say they are unlikely to move back because they are much closer to her school in Undurxaan. His older brother moved to Bayankhutag with him and together they have purchased a *xashaa* and house on the western outskirts of Undurxaan near the old airport where their wives also grow vegetables and flowers. Up until this year they both had been living together year round in the countryside. Now because their kids are starting school they have started alternating between the aimag center and the countryside, watching each other's herds.

Buyanjargal and his wife currently own 241 head of stock – 109 sheep, 107 goats, 10 horses, and 15 cattle. Their original herd, which they received at the time of marriage, consisted of 41 sheep, 19 goats, 20 horses, and 3 cattle. In their first year of marriage Buyantogotox made an attempt at hired herding for a *myangat* in Galshar soum, but he only worked one season and instead of stock he requested cash which they used to help them move to Bayankhutag. Since coming to Bayankhutag they have purchased an additional 10 female goats with kids from a local herder they have come to know at around 30,000 MNT apiece. All ten they said have done well and continue to *ishiglex* (to kid). In contrast, they also took out a loan to buy a number of sheep, all of which died during the winter. Their income this year was 1,294,000 MNT from pastoral activities. In the winter of 2007-2008 they lost approximately 23 per cent of their total herd; consequently, this summer they took out a loan of 1,500,000 MNT from Xaan Bank in Undurxaan to buy livestock. At the time I left the field, they had not purchased stock yet, as

finding a trustworthy and dependable seller is difficult. In addition to their own herds, they also herd *taviul mal* for his father and grandmother.

Both Buyanjargal and his wife's families originally come from Galshar soum to the south; however, his wife's family resides almost exclusively in Undurxaan where many are *ajilgui* or unemployed. His wife is the last of 9 children. Her parents were once herders in Partizan *negdel* in Galshar but are now retired and living off their pension. One of her brothers still lives and herds in Galshar and her eldest sister is married to a herder in the 2<sup>nd</sup> bag of Bayankhutag. Buyanjargal is one of five, the rest of whom now live either in Galshar to the south or in Undurxaan. His parents, whose animals he herds, are retired and living in Undurxaan. His oldest sister is a teacher there as well, and her husband farms with their brother on a plot near Undurxaan. He lives with and cooperates with his older brother Khosjargal, whose family also became citizens in 2006. His eldest brother, who is not a citizen, occasionally does otor in Bayankhutag, settling and cooperating his two younger brothers. Overall, Buyanjargal access to his kin group, beyond Khosjargal, is limited.

## Migration Profile

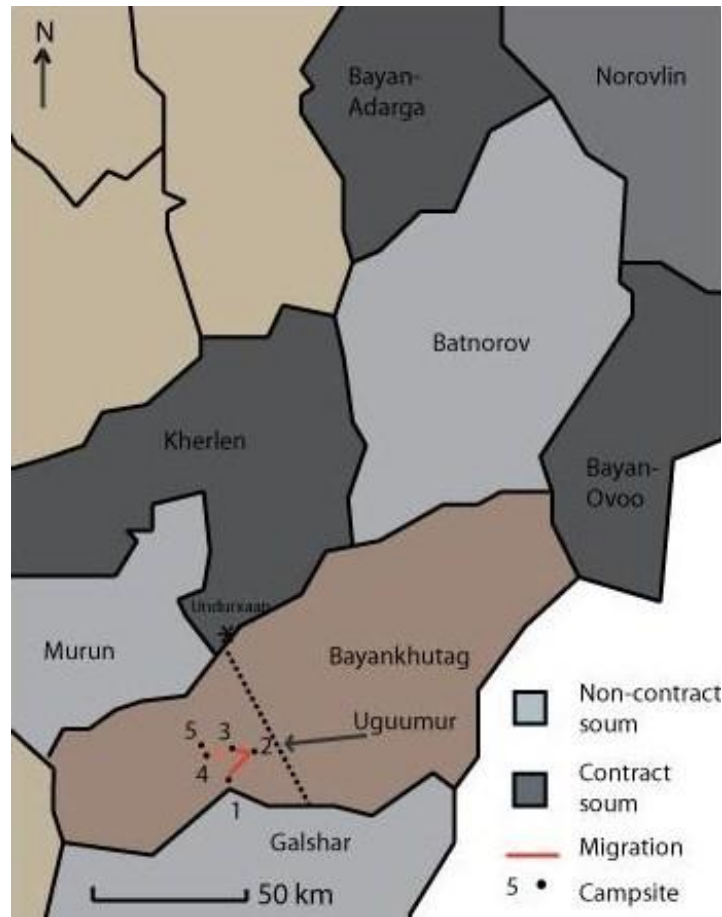


Figure A.8. Buyanjargal's annual household and herd migration.

From July of 2007 until September 2007 Buyanjargal and his family, including his older brother Khosjargal and his family, were in Tsaidam along the salt lake near the border with Galshar soum to the south (1). The area is plentiful in ders and a range of highly palatable forages, as well as a large well and significant deposits of xujir and maraa.<sup>239</sup> The summer of 2007 was a serious drought and Tsaidam, the customary otor region for local herders in the area, was crowded with households from Bayankhutag and from Galshar. The competition around wells was particularly high and Buyanjargal often found himself unable to benefit from the hand-well 2 km from his campsite because being young and originally from Galshar he would have to wait on local households and their big herds. Consequently, his animals began to suffer. Moreover, they lost 7 horses while settled in Tsaidam. He claimed it was local Uguumur households who stole his stock. Whether or not this was an attempt by 3<sup>rd</sup> bag households to *xuux*

<sup>239</sup> The word 'tsaidam' refers to these conditions.

is hard to tell and Buyanjargal was not able to say but he did argue that he often has problems with *xuux* because people do not recognize him and even though he states that he is an official citizen, other herders often do not believe him. While he was settled in Tsaidam, as is typical since coming to Bayankhutag, he had no relatives or *tanidag* households within 10 kilometers with which to cooperate.

In September, he moved with his older brother Khosjargal 4 kilometers via camel wagon train to Byatsxan Bulag to the northeast near the border with the second bag (2). Byatsxan bulag is located in a long running valley that begins at Tsagaan Temeet near the soum center and runs south to Galshar with each side of the valley belonging to different bags; consequently, households from different territorial areas mingle. The area was marked by *umxii uvs*, a drought-resistant forage but only of palatability for camels. They were settled 2 kilometers from a well and 1 kilometer from a xujir deposit. They stayed at Byatsxan Bulag until late November, after most households had already started leaving the local area for winter campsites or new campsites in other regions.

In later November, they moved 2 kilometers west towards Enger Shand where many of the Uriankhai and Durvud minorities spend the winter, most of whom left the soum during that winter (3). Buyanjargal was able to reach an agreement with one of the local Durvud households who planned to go on *otor* to the north. Since the pasture was virtually decimated anyway the risk of overgrazing and degradation was nil to the household leaving. For Buyanjargal he was able to secure access to a *saravch* and campsite with significant *buuts* and fuel dung or *argal*. Around the campsite, the major forage was *looli* and was situated only a kilometer from a hand-well which would be beneficial; yet, it was 3 kilometers from xujir, a problematic distance that was remedied by transporting small blocks to the campsite. Even though the pasture condition was not optimal, he thought the campsite was well suited to cope with the challenges brought by winter. He even rated the forage as a 4, which seems odd considering the opinion of nearly every other herder and my own experience that pasture in Bayankhutag was extremely poor. His oldest brother moved up from Galshar, where conditions were even worse, and camped on the *uvuljuu* with him. His other brother Khosjargal was there as well. Another 7 *tanidag* households on *otor* from Galshar were also settled within 5-10 kilometers.

Over the winter Buyanjargal acquired 15 bags of *xiiveg*, 20 bales of privately purchased hay, government assistance hay, and a range of other supplements including eggs, vegetable peels, and oddly a anti-parasital drug called *ivermektin* (Ivermectin) that herders often use to

‘invigorate’ rams and buck goats during breeding season.<sup>240</sup> He was unable to maintain his herd. They lost 2 sheep, 31 goats, 10 horses, and 7 cattle for a 23 per cent reduction in their size. When we asked how they would rate the ‘zud’ on a scale of 1-5, his wife responded with ‘gaigui’ meaning that it was not difficult. She was reluctant to answer any differently even though I asked again. She said she would give the campsite a 5 overall, reflecting her reluctance to speak poorly of a campsite even if things do not go well. They stayed at the campsite until April, past the birthing season and the first combing of cashmere. Even towards the end things continued to go poorly; they lost 5 lambs and 6 kids to wolves and eagles. Although this is not on the extreme end of losses, it demonstrates that they continued to face threats and pressures beyond the зуд itself.

In April they moved 3 kilometers away by camel train with his two older brothers to a new valley in Suuji. The area was extremely dry upon the arrival but would by May begin to recover from the previous year. The dominant forage species were *zeergene* and *xyalgana*. They were settled approximately 2 kilometers from a hand well, 2 kilometers from xujir and the 3 households spaced themselves out a kilometer in between for *saaxlax*. In May the households would move farther down the valley about 2 km past a ridge that splits the valley in two. While in Suuji they lost 5 sheep, 3 goats, and 7 horses in wind and storms. Several of the sheep and goats died from lightening strikes and the horses, which they never found, either died or were stolen. This accounted for a 5% loss in their herd. By summer a few households began to trickle back into the area, but for the remainder of the summer and fall, after his eldest brother returned to Galshar in July, Buyanjargal and his other brother would be virtually alone in the valley.

*Table A.4. Statistical summary of Buyanjargal’s household herd and migration data.*

Ex ante Herd Size	Ex post Herd Size	Mortality Rate	Major Moves	Total Distance	Average Distance	Soums Accessed
326	241	23%	4	36	9	0

#### *Altangerel*

Altangerel (57, Khalkha) and his wife are currently one of the wealthiest herding households in the soum with 1200 sheep, over 500 goats, 100 horse, 67 cattle, and 10 camels. Two years ago he was awarded *Ulsiin Sain Malchin* or National Best Herder, a prestigious award

<sup>240</sup> Ivermectin destroys parasital worms that can affect fattening and flush during mating season. Fattening or flushing is important in order to induce better ovulation and twinning. However, herders believed the drug, new to them, was some kind of energy booster or steroid which might be a secondary effect of eliminating parasites.

for increasing herd size and quality and for *maljuulax* or restocking poor households. They live most of the year in the countryside but they also own a large house and yard in Undurxaan where their daughter and her children live most of the year. Although he has a truck and car, he recently took out a 3,000,000 MNT loan to buy a car for his daughter since she helps take care of the family motorcycle repair business. His shop is starting to branch out to car and truck repair this year which will require more constant attention. The business makes up a large source of income for Altangerel and his family, but livestock herding is the primary productive activity. Income from pastoral activities last year totaled 9,885,000 MNT, a down year because of the age composition of his small-stock.

Altangerel started herding in 1965 as an employee of Temtsel negdel, but he did not start herding his own private stock until 1978 when he and his wife married. They received 33 sheep and 17 cattle total from both sides, under the limit of 50 private stock. Although the number of his private stock waxed and waned, he said that it was normally around 50 or so and he rarely had to give extra animals over to the negdel. During the negdel period he herded sheep primarily, usually *xurgatai xoni* or lambing sheep. During privatization he acquired 150 sheep and 16 goats. He also obtained a *saravch*. Like many of the older herders, he had built the *saravch* over time on his customary winter *nutag* so that when privatization unfolded rather than opening up *saravch* ownership to auction, the companies restituted the *saravch* and in some cases wells to their former users or even owners.

Altangerel and his wife have 5 children, all sons, of whom only one actively herds livestock. Another son helps from time to time with big moves but works odd jobs and at his father's motorcycle repair shop. The other children are currently attending school, but help during the summer. In the years since privatization he has accumulated a large number of livestock. As his herds have grown, he has satisfied labor needs by hiring herders and cooperating with his brother-in-law and his wife's kin. Not only does he hire for herding labor he hires for most other kinds of work as well including sheep shearing, cashmere combing, driving livestock, and a number of other tasks. Over time he has also acquired a few client households including a former apprentice herder in the negdel, Erdenchuluun, and Batjargal the local ram and buck herder (*xuts uxna xariuulax malchin*). In 2006 they formed a *buleg* or cooperative group. The members of this group consisted primarily of his clients, hired herders, and one of his children. Altangerel also cooperates occasionally with his brother-in-law, the father-in-law of 3056 described above. They use wells together and at times move together; although, they tend to settle at some distance from each other, at least 2 kilometers. In the last 2 years they have moved as a collective. As will be shown below, they made a significant move to Bayan-Adarga soum as a collective. He is also

related by marriage and through his sisters to several of the wealthiest herders in the soum, but, considering the size of herds, he rarely cooperates with them interacting with them instead on holidays and at meetings.

Altangerel's customary campsites are located in the western part of the bag known for its salt licks and salt pans. His customary campsites are located in areas that are ecologically beneficial to livestock but are also prone to drought. In normal years he says he makes many more moves than just to these sites. He frequently conducts short satellite otor. His three sons, when they are not in school, take the animals on short continuous otor around the western regions of the bag, especially along the river, but also into the deep southwest parts of the soum unused by other households. These areas are highly susceptible to drought but in good years have excellent forage although there are too few wells and water sources he says. In 2007 and 2008 his experience with these strategies and moving in general were very useful.

#### *Migration Profile*

In July of 2004 Altangerel was settled near his customary *zuslan* in Ergen burgas in the far west of the bag along the river (1km) and just north of the Bayan mountains near the border with Bayanmunx soum. The area is marked by *xiag*, *mangir* and *agi*, valuable forages especially for sheep and horse. He was settled on the site with his hired herder and his sons. Nearby were 3 local households, one of whom is a member of his cooperative group. Further down the river eastward were more households, 10 local and 10 foreign households. Although the area is typically marked by high value forages, the drought was having a disastrous affect on growth which he rated as a 1 out of 5; consequently, while at Ergen burgas, Altangerel did a series of continuous short otor migrations approximately 2 days in length each. He, his sons, and his hired herder took all his livestock on a continual move attempting to exploit as much pasture as possible.

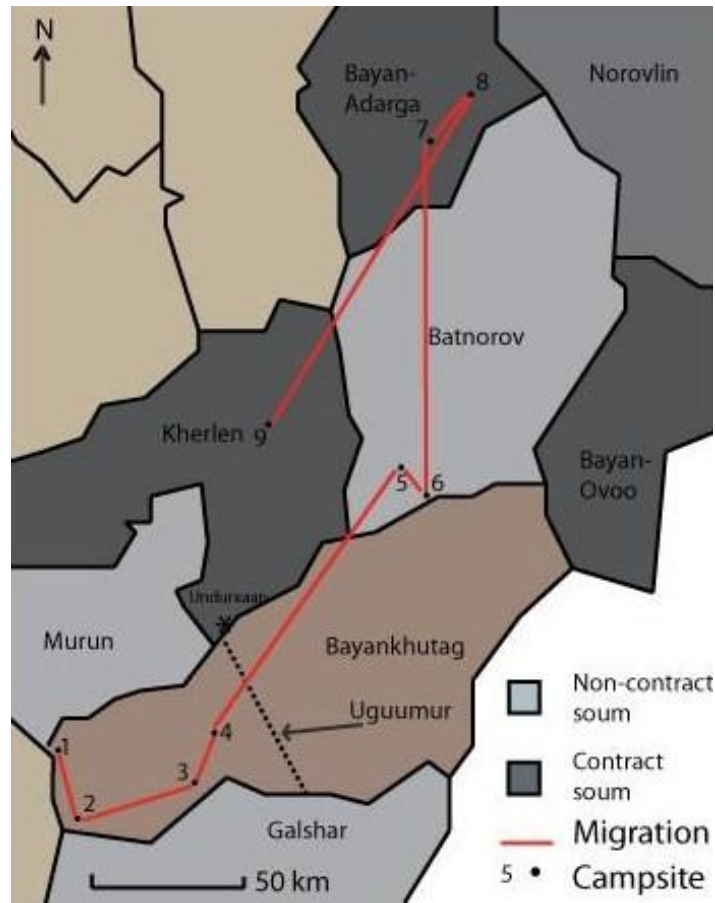


Figure A.9. Altangerel's annual household and herd migration.

In August he moved to Tugrug Tolgoi, 28 km south-east of Ergen burgas, to a dry, gobi-like area with limited access to water (2). He went via trucks and camel carts while his sons and hired herder drove the stock over the landscape. The site was situated near the long-running mountain chain that marks the southern part of the bag with a bulag or spring approximately 1 kilometer away and a salt pan only a couple hundred yards distant. The grass quality was generally good he claimed with *zerleg uvs*, *xyargana* (a shrub), and *agi*. *Xyargana* is a highly valuable, drought resistant shrub that cattle, goats, and camels highly favor. Even though pasturage was satisfactory, access to water proved to be a problem as his herds were simply too many to water at the small spring. Watering the animals took up too much time, distracting the animals from effective grazing and fattening. To help diminish this pressure on the herd he split his herd in half with his hired herder tending to half the stock and his sons the other half. He hoped that this would encourage fattening, but his stock quickly decimated surrounding pasturage increasing the necessary grazing orbit. Couple with the water problem, he had to move.



In September he moved eastward 20 km towards Tsaitai, west of the saltwater lake at Tsaidam (3). The same number of households and methods were involved in the *nuudel*. The area was marked by *yadrilag*, *sos uvs*, and *mangir* (wild onion), forage species beneficial to sheep in particular. The site was 1.5 km from a local spring and near a sizeable salt deposit. Nearby camped 2 related households, 3 acquaintances and 3 foreign households. He moved shortly after to Tsantii Xooloi just south of the *soum* center and north of Tsaidam. He moved with the same households via the same methods. *Zerleg uvs* and *agi* were the dominant forage species, but with little to no rain having fallen in the summer, the quality of the grass quickly faded through fall. His herders conducted several small *otor* moves south down the valley to Tsaidam and up the valley towards Uguumur mountain but the herds were becoming unmanageable. He again split the herd between his herder and his son on campsites 2 kilometers apart. They remained in this configuration until October when they combined the herds again for breeding.

In November, Altangerel met with Erdenchuluun, one of the members of his cooperative group, and discussed the possibility of moving north to Kherlen or to Bayan-Adarga *soum* as a collective group. They scouted different areas of Kherlen and Batnorov *soum* to inspect possible campsite locations: looking at grass height, grass species, proximity to wells, *xujir*, and the presence and number of households. Munkh-khishig decided that he would move to the contracted *soum*, Kherlen, with two of his siblings who are members of the cooperative group and livestock belonging to other members of his family. Altangerel, the group's *axlagch*, decided he would move without a winter *otor* contract to Batnorov *soum* just across the border with his relatives in the cooperative group, including 2 nephews, his sons, his son-in-law, and his hired herder. The only non-kin household in the cooperative group, Batjargal, would move with his little brother Batxuu (3056) who is also profiled in this chapter.

In early December, Altangerel and his group moved approximately 100 kilometers via trucks and camel train to Buyan Uul in southern Batnorov *soum* (5). They collectively drove their stock as a group over a series of several days. They brought via truck *xalx* (wind-block) and *xashaa* (fencing) with them including 5 tons of hay and salt blocks for their stock. They stayed on a customary *nutag*, although they did not know the *ezen*. The site had ample *buuts* and was well-protected from wind and snowfall. However, within a few days the local bag governor visited and told him to move since no contract had been established between Bayankhutag and Batnorov. Consequently, he moved 25 kilometers south towards the Kherlen river where Batnorov borders Bayankhutag *soum* so that he could quickly relocate his campsite on the other side of the river if he was forced to move again (6). However, he did not stay long at this campsite. In two weeks he began moving to Bayan-Adarga (7).

I asked him why he moved so fast to Bayan-Adarga soum. He said his original intention was not to go all the way to Bayan-Adarga. His name is not even on the list of households that signed up for the winter *otor* contract. However, as he said about his campsite in Batnorov:

The grass, initially, was fine. For my group, it was just fine. But just as I got there, a lot of households with livestock came from the north and from the south. In the beginning, the grass really was good. Then all these households came and immediately the grass was gone. So we had to move again.

His brother-in-law Nasanbayar (not a cooperative member), the father-in-law of 3056, had already moved north to Bayan-Adarga a week earlier under the winter *otor* contract established between the two *soum* governors. After speaking with Nasanbayar, Altangerel decided to move the 160 km north to Bayan-Adarga, as well. However, he was not included on the original list of winter *otor* households coming from Bayankhutag. As discussed earlier, after Altangerel arrived in late December with his section (*xeseg*) of the group (*buleg*) and Erdenchuluun with his section arrived in January, local households were pressuring them to move. To get on the list of households permitted to be in the soum and prevent expulsion or theft, the group as a whole was requested to pay, as best I can estimate from the various numbers given, 10 sheep and 10 goats to stay in Bayan-Adarga. The *bagiin darga* also requested 150,000 MNT from the group as a whole. In return they were added to the contract's list of households. Part of the agreement, and included in the official contract, was that the BD would instruct Altangerel's group (including Munkh-khishig and his section) where to settle. Initially, Altangerel's group moved to the site near Shuusiin gol where they were instructed. This was in close proximity to Nasanbayar and another cooperative group from Bayankhutag (3108 discussed below belongs to this group). Eventually though, they would move a number of times around the stream following the valley north and south (8).

As June approached, Altangerel was being pressured by the *bag* governor and the *soum* governor to move out (*xuux*). He refused to go even though he had overstayed the contract period which ended in March. Altangerel contacted the *soum* governor in Bayankhutag to try and encourage the *soum* governor in Bayan-Adarga to extend their stay. The governors discussed the situation and decided that he would bring up the problem with the local ITX which decided that they could stay until *naadam* but then they would make a final decision which more than likely would be that they had to leave. For *naadam*, Altangerel and Nasanbayar gave horses to the soum governor in order to sway his decision (as discussed in chapter 8). Nevertheless, following *naadam* (first week of July), the ITX requested that they leave the soum.

Erdenchuluun had already begun his return in late June. Altangerel and his section (*xeseg*) following the informal, verbal ‘*togtool*’ issued by the ITX, a few weeks later, moved on behind Erdnechuluun, ending up for a time in northern Kherlen *soum* on their way back to Uguumur (9). Nasanbayar and his son-in-law Batxuu moved onward towards Batnorov where a family friend, Uusuu, had been camping with his relatives. The other cooperative group had already moved on to Norovlin *soum* in the east the previous spring.

The campsites where Altangerel settled in Bayan-adarga were marked by good forage with *budargan*, *ulun*, and *agi* dominating. They were never far from water and xujir and during the summer they camped near a well they paid to use. During the winter, Altangerel lost 32 sheep, 37 goat, and 25 cattle, mostly from exhaustion as they moved so frequently. As a percentage of his herd, however, this only accounted for a mortality rate of 4.5 per cent. Moreover, he transported 5 tons of hay and added *xumuul* or wild onion to the feed. The previous year he had also taken out an index insurance policy (IBLI) on cattle and horse with Bodi Daatgal. He received an indemnity payment of 2 million MNT the following July. Although the move north helped Altangerel evade the threat of *zud* and possible disaster, it left him exposed to a different threat. He lost 30 sheep, 24 goats, and 47 horses in the spring storm that hit Khentii on May 26th. Fortunately he was far enough north to escape the brunt of the storm unlike 3051.

*Table A.5. Statistical summary of Altangerel’s household herd and migration data.*

Ex ante Herd Size	Ex post Herd Size	Mortality Rate	Major Moves	Total Distance	Average Distance	Soums Accessed
2042	1877	5%	8	367	46	3

#### *Amarkhuu*

Amarkhuu (32) and his wife (32) were married in 2004 and they have 1 child. Currently, he owns 173 sheep, 180 goat, 40 horses, and 20 cattle. He also provides local healing services as a shaman and bariagch or bone-setter. This occupation is interesting for a member of the Khalkha ethnic group who do not typically subscribe to shamanic belief although elements of shamanism are evidently pervasive in local folk religious practices including mountain worship. From his practice, he retains a secondary but sparse and highly variable income. From his animals he garnered an income of 2,557,000, an average income for the middle income wealth group. He owns a motorcycle, car, and his own ger but lives all year long in the countryside. He depends greatly on loans for meeting daily needs as he tries to refrain from selling stock and instead

generating income from cashmere. Over half his small stock are goats. In a two year period he had taken out 2 separate loans totaling 5,000,000 equaling his yearly income from herd production. Until last year his herds were successfully increasing and he was on the verge of entering the wealthy category of herders. Yet, in the winter of 07-08 he lost 22% of his livestock including 50 sheep, 30, goat, 10 horse, and 30 cattle, all lost to the zud. Moreover, he lost all the lambs and kids in his herd, completely wiping out a generation of stock.

Amarkhuu began his career as herder in 1989 working for Temtsel negdel. As most herders were taking on contract and lease herds in Temtsel, Amarkhuu remained a more typical negdel herding employee earning a wage rather than animals. However, he was not married so he did not have private animals. His parents, originally from Suxbaatar and Bulgan aimag, had died during this period, before he was married and before livestock were privatized, so he received no inheritance. Additionally, his father was an animal technician and his mother a teacher in the soum center so they would have had no livestock or just a few to give anyway. He did not receive his first private herd until 1992 and 1993 when livestock were privatized. His younger brother and sister, who tended dairy cows for the negdel, along with Amarkhuu together received 100 sheep, 80 goats, 21 horses, 40 cattle, and 3 camels.<sup>241</sup> His herd fluctuated for a number of years but he never broke 500 head of stock. In early 2007 in order to build his herd he purchased 280 small stock from a herder in Sukhbaatar aimag. He purchased the goat at 12,000 MNT and sheep at 17,000 MNT. In addition to these animals, he also has been herding his brothers stock for some years now. He also currently keeps 120 sheep and 80 goat for his younger sister who has 2 children but is not married. She lives with them occasionally throughout the year.

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<sup>241</sup> His sister received a majority of the cattle.

### Migration Profile

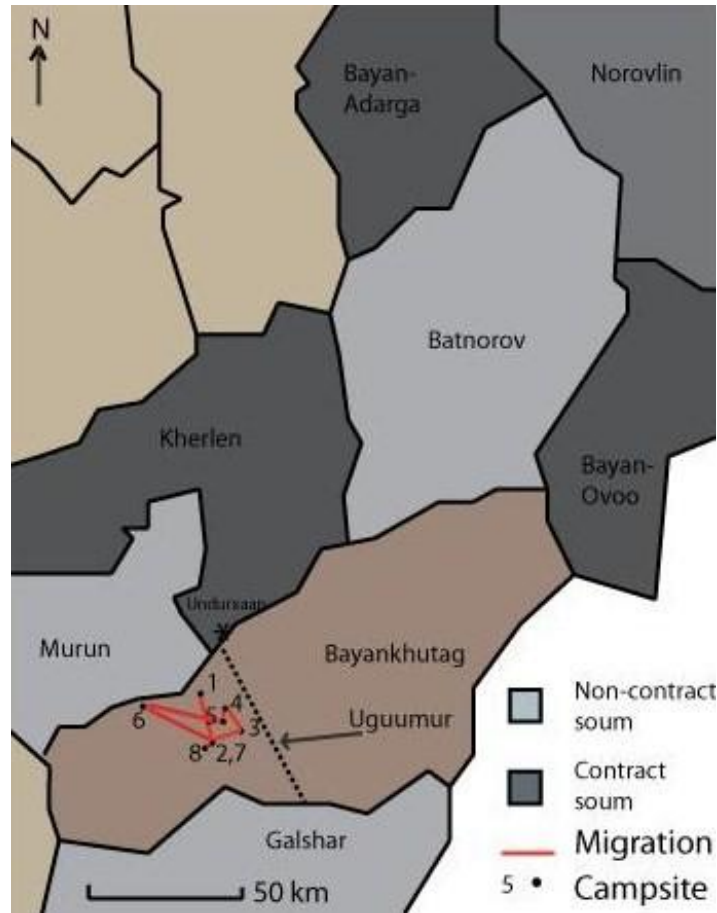


Figure A.10. Amarkhuu's annual household and herd migration.

Amarkhuu's migration profile is not complex as the map demonstrates. Unlike most middle or wealthy households, Amarkhuu did not leave despite the otor contracts. This is interesting because prior to the *zud* he would have been included in the wealthy category of herders having well over 500 head of livestock. However, unlike most of the herders who left the *soum*, Amarkhuu has no herding relatives and does not belong to a cooperative. The only households he cooperates with on a regular basis are one other poor household during the summer and occasionally in the fall and sometimes with local Uriankhai or Durvud households on *otor* near his fall campsite in Suuji. The Uriankhai and Durvud, who subscribe to shamanist sentiments more than Khalkha, are his primary clients.

For all his moves he uses a friend's truck and his own car. He pays the gasoline and is free to use the truck. However, he also has to drive the livestock although his sister occasionally helps with her sons. When they are not available, such as in the winter, balancing these two duties is difficult. Consequently, he depends on help from friends in the *soum* or *aimag* center and

particularly on his wife. So that he is not limited by the availability of xujir, he buys salt blocks for his animals and moves them to each campsite by wagon.

In July of 2007 he was camped (1) near the river on the border of Bulan and Usgun Deerees (1 km). From this campsite he pastured his animals daily in the direction of the river, northward, or, southward, to the well near Uguumur. Since the pasture condition was bad he moved in August 14 kilometers back to Suuji, his customary territory (2) Near his campsite in the wide valley were 4 local households and 4 households from Galshar in the south. One of the households was camped on his *namarjaa* where he was planning on camping. However, he had no means by which to expel them and simply settled across the valley on what he called an 'otor' site.

By September though they had left and so he moved the 5 kilometers to his customary *namarjaa* in *Toiliin shar toblot* (3) The forage was extremely poor though. The primary forage around his site was *xanxuuli*, a kind of tumbleweed that literally migrates across the landscape in the millions at any given time. This is obviously not a forageable plant, although goats are willing. Two of the outside households remained in the area along with three of the locals. By October when he moved 5 kilometers northward to Shar tolgoi there was only 1 local household left and in November there was no one (4). The landscape was empty. He moved to his *uvuljuu* in the mountains 2 kilometers away near Suuji where there was sufficient snowfall to water the animals (5). However, the forage was so poor that he had to move 30 km towards the river again in December.

There snow was plentiful but the *ders* was still available. Although not the best winter forage, *ders* is important at critical times and, foregoing the possibility of leaving the *soum*, *ders* is the best option in *zud* conditions. While there he went on 1 otor for 14 days closer to the river taking his animals across for a short period to Murun soum (6). There were only two other local households near him. They had kept cattle in the *ders* while their small stock and horses were sent on *otor* elsewhere. In January, however, his animals weakened and as the temperature dropped they began to die. Although he bought 30 bags of *xiveg*, 100 bales of hay, and *arbus* or melon, he could not stem the losses. To make matters worse, in February he lost 15 sheep, 15 goat, and 17 horses to theft in one night. In early March before birthing season he drove his stock back 30 kilometers to his *xavarjaa* in Suuji (7). The area was still dominated by *xanxuuli* left over from the previous fall. After cashmere combing and birthing, he moved in May to his *zuslan* a kilometer away where he would stay until I left the field (8).

*Table A.6. Statistical summary of Amarkhuu's household herd and migration data.*

Ex ante Herd Size	Ex post Herd Size	Mortality Rate	Major Moves	Total Distance	Average Distance	Soums Accessed
553	430	22%	4	75	19	0

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- 2006 International Research Grant (\$1,000). University of Kentucky Graduate School
- 2006 Summer Research Grant (\$1,000). University of Kentucky Office of International Affairs
- 2004 International Research Grant (\$800). University of Kentucky Graduate School
- 2003 Departmental Distinction Award. Southern Methodist University Department of Anthropology Thesis: *Political Ecologies of Nomadic Pastoralism: Case studies from Mongolia and Kenya*

#### PAPERS & PRESENTATIONS

- 2011 “*Moral Economies of Exchange: Rethinking Mobility and Settlement in Rural Mongolia.*” Paper presented at the Society for Applied Anthropology Annual Meetings. Invited Panel “*Pastoralism and the Politics of Livelihood: Rural Governance, Resource Management, and Neo-Liberal Development in Arid Lands, Part II,*” Seattle, Washington. March 28-April 2.
- “*Booms and Busts: Asset Dynamics, ‘Natural’ Disaster, and the Politics of Excess in Rural Mongolia.*” Paper presented at the Society for Economic Anthropology Annual Meeting, University of Notre Dame. March 10-12.
- “*Exchanging Mastery: Transformations in Property and Value in Rural Mongolia*” Paper for Dimensions of Political Ecology: Nature/Society Conference. University of Kentucky. February 18-19.
- 2010 “*Governance, Authority, and the Politics of Property in Rural Mongolia.*” Brown Bag Lecture, Department of Anthropology and Program for Development Studies, Emory University. November 23.
- “*Hybrid Governance, Territorial Authority, and the Politics of Access in Rural Mongolia.*” Paper for American Anthropological Association Annual Meetings. Invited Panel: “Hybrid Landscapes: Anthropological Engagements

with Environmental History, Political Ecology, and Science and Technology Studies,” New Orleans, Louisiana, November 16.

*“Risk, Mobility, and the Dynamics of Pastoral Poverty: Examining the Effect of Disaster on Household Herd Loss in Mongolia.”* Poster Presented at the Society of Economic Anthropology Annual Meeting. Tampa, Florida. April 8-10.

*“Of Mountains and Men: Tracking Power, Privilege and Authority in Pastoral Cooperative Development in Mongolia.”* Paper presented at the Society for Applied Anthropology Annual Meetings, Merida, Mexico, March 25.

2009 *“Power, Patronage, and the Post-Socialist State: The Political Ecology of Pastoral Mobility in Mongolia.”* Paper presented at the American Anthropological Association Annual Meetings. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, December 2.

*“Of Mountains and Men: Landscape, Power and Authority in Rural Mongolia.”* Paper presented at the Northeast Association for Asian Studies, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, October 3.

*“Politics and Land-Use Change in a Post-Socialist Environment: The Political Ecology of Pastoral Mobility in Mongolia.”* Paper presented at the Asian Studies on the Pacific Coast Annual Conference, Soka University, Orange County, California, June 18.

*“Mobility and Livelihood Security in the Context of Marketization and Decentralization in Mongolia.”* Workshop entitled “Poverty and Coping in Mongolia: Current Trends and Future Research Needs” in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, March 12-13. Funded by the InterAcademy Panel, Zorig Foundation and the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) Berlin.

2008 *“Going on Otor: Strategies of Mobility in Pastoral Mongolia.”* Featured lecture presented at the American Center for Mongolia Studies, National University of Mongolia in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, November 6.

Invited Guest Panelist and Discussant. International Fund for Agricultural Development’s “Rural Poverty Alleviation Program,” Khentii Aimag Program Conference, August 17.

Presentation of research to County Herders’ Meeting. Bayankhutag soum, Khentii, Mongolia, November 3.

Invited Guest and Discussant. Khentii Province Youth and Women Herders’ Conference. Khentii, Mongolia, May 17.



- 2005      *"Transforming Risk and Landscape in Pastoral Mongolia."* Poster presented at the Society for Economic Anthropology Annual Meeting. Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, April 21-23.
- "Risk Management and Ethno-meteorological Knowledge among Andean Agro-Pastoralists."* GlobalAgRisk, Inc. Lexington, Kentucky.
- "Transforming Risk in Pastoral Mongolia."* Paper presented at the Mongolia Society Meetings in conjunction with the Association for Asian Studies in Chicago, Illinois, March 31-April 3.
- 2004      *"Wealth, Power, and Environmental Knowledge in Rural Mongolia."* Paper presented at the Mongolia Society Meetings in conjunction with the Central Eurasian Studies Conference in Bloomington, Indiana, October 15.

Daniel J. Murphy