

A Condensed History of the Public Administration of Pastoralism in Mongolia

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This essay offers an overview of the history of the Mongolian economic and political system as it relates to the administration of mobile pastoralism, with an emphasis on Mongolia's economic and political structures since independence and the establishment of the socialist People's Republic of Mongolia in 1924. Attention to the history of the region unsettles common discourses that portray herder livelihoods as fixed in time and place and shows how herding has been part of Mongolian governance systems over the course of its long history.

Mongolia is a land-locked, former socialist country situated between Russia and China. It has one of the lowest population densities in the world with two people per square kilometre, with the exception of Ulaanbaatar which has more than 200 people per square kilometre (National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2013, p. 80). In 2012, the population of Mongolia was 2,867,744 and there were 768,263 Mongolian households residing in the country, of which 67 per cent were registered as urban residents and 32 per cent as rural residents. Twenty-seven per cent of Mongolian households were herders in 2012 (National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2013, p. 59). About 39 per cent of the population lived in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar in 2007 (Kamata et al. 2010, p. 1), further exaggerating the contrast between the largest urban center in the country and the rural areas. According to the National Statistical Yearbook for 2012, approximately 46 per cent of the population were inhabitants of Ulaanbaatar in 2012 (p. 80).

Pastureland constitutes approximately 80 per cent of Mongolia's territory and around 1 per cent is arable (Sternberg 2008, p. 1296). Horses, cows and yaks, sheep, cashmere goats, and Bactrian camels are the primary domesticated animals and main sources of wool for the

fibre industry which serves as a major national export and a significant source of cash income for herders (Fox 2015). Income from cashmere sales alone accounts for up to half of the annual cash income for some families (World Bank 2003). Milk and meat are mainstays of the Mongolian diet, with hundreds of varieties of dairy products produced by herder households throughout the country (Batsukh, Altantsetseg, and Enkhtsetseg 2013). Mongolia has a harsh climate and arid environment, with temperatures dropping to -40°C during the coldest period of winter from January to February, and rising to $+40^{\circ}\text{C}$ in some places during the height of summer. Herders have developed specific practices to cope with these fluctuations in weather and the severely cold winter season.

Mongolian-speaking peoples have practiced mobile pastoralism on the Inner Asian steppe for centuries. It is a defining element of the region's socio-political history. At the same time, romantic notions of "nomadism" also have long been part of imaginative accounts of Mongolia's history and society by outsiders. Mongolia is often represented in the international media and popular accounts as an "untamed land" (see for example Becker 2008; Branigan 2014), contributing to the idea of rural pastoralist "nomads" as belonging to a final frontier cut off from modern technology and bureaucratic systems. Within Mongolia, the historical leader Chinggis Khan has re-emerged as a popular figure since the end of socialism. He reigns from a great seated statue in front of the parliamentary building in the central square of Ulaanbaatar, eclipsing the space's former hero, Sukhbaatar, who salutes north to the Russians from atop his rearing horse. The gilded Chinggis faces south to China, guarded on either side by imposing statues of armed mounted guards. His view of the Bogd Khan Uul mountain range has been blocked in recent years by glass-towered hotels and luxury shopping malls, with flickering projections of Bloomberg TV showing advertisements for popular cashmere companies, figures of market data racing across the bottom, and silent interviews of specialists displayed on its side. Across the city, one encounters evidence of

sinophobia in the form of graffiti and the exchange of urban myths (see Billé 2015; Delaplace 2010). Yet the influence of both China and Russia is palpable in material form, with imports from both countries accounting for over 60 per cent of trade. Over 80 per cent of Mongolia's exports went to China in the first half of 2015 (Bank of Mongolia 2015). In this geopolitical squeeze, the Mongolian national identity is expressed in part through attention to cultural heritage based on rural ways of life and notions of purity of cultural form (Bulag 1998; Byambajav 2015; Marsh 2009; Maydar and Rae 2015; Sneath 2010a).

In the portrayal of a timeless nomadism by outsiders, and the popularisation of nomadic cultural heritage within Mongolia, it is easy to lose sight of pastoralism as a livelihood and form of work. The idea that herding is a livelihood, which anyone can pursue or depart from, is often not emphasized in accounts that frame herders as timeless, homogeneous, and fixed in the steppe landscape. Humphrey and Sneath (1999) advocated for the end of the use of the term “nomadism” to refer to Mongolian pastoralists in order to disrupt these powerful associations and to show how government policies have shaped environments and herding livelihoods differently over time. Humphrey and Sneath argue that mobile pastoralist systems in the region of Inner Asia are a specialized form of production that can exist within a variety of political and economic administrative systems, as the history of the region and the differing systems of China, Russia, and Mongolia have demonstrated. They write, “far from being a practice associated with the most backward herders, highly mobile livestock herding is often the basis for the most efficient, wide-ranging, well-coordinated, and specialized production, and that it is compatible with technologically advanced and profit-oriented economic activity” (1999, p. 1). At the same time, they show that mobile pastoralist systems are threatened when mobility is curtailed and related knowledge, relations, and administrative structures that enable mobile systems are disrupted (Humphrey and Sneath 1996a, 1996b, 1999, p. 3), often through state policies that subscribe to myths about

pastoralism as backward and incompatible with modern systems. For example, China has pursued a resettlement policy for herders in Inner Mongolia and Tibet based on a combination of ideas about national development and environmental degradation. Government policies restrict mobility by requiring livestock to graze within enclosures or banning the herding of certain livestock altogether (Cao et al 2013; Williams 1996; Yeh 2003). In addition to direct government policies such as forced settlement, restrictions on grazing territories, burdensome taxes, the location of social resources and infrastructures in urban areas in combination with ideologies about social development also affect the extent to which pastoralists can practice mobile livelihoods.

Early Political Systems and Group Membership

Written records from as early as the 13th century such as *The Secret History of Mongolia*, the 17th century *Altan Tobchi*, as well as records on the jurisdiction of land disputes, bureaucratic reports, and reports from foreign travellers since that time illustrate a long record of administration of pastoralist territories around socio-political units (Atwood 2004, 2012; Bawden 1982, 1984; Humphrey 1995; Sneath 2007). In the 13th century, socio-political groups were organised according to a military-based command system that divided households into *tumens*. Further subdivisions were the “thousand” household unit constituted by smaller groups of a hundred or several hundred. Each household belonged to a unit, which had a specific territorial basis and these units were under the leadership of the Imperial court (Atwood 2012, p. 28; Sneath 2001, 2007). Sneath writes, “in the Chinggisid era the term *ulus* (‘people,’ ‘nation’) meant something very much like patrimony, domain, or appanage...” (2007, p. 168). These territorial units were the basis for systems of taxation and defined pasture use boundaries.

Atwood (2012) has argued that Mongolian society has retained a form of territory-based group membership in larger state systems over the course of its history, reflected also

in the later 16th century socio-territorial units and the administrative structures of the Qing Dynasty until the early 20th century. He supports the view that Mongolian history has been characterised by continuity in social organisation rather than social upheaval and revolutionary changes. Further, Atwood develops the “appanage community” approach to understanding socio-political organisation. He defines an appanage community as a territory with some prescribed boundaries, which was under the jurisdiction of an authority, such as a nobleman. The inhabitants of these territories had certain rights to use the territory’s resources as members of the community based on social position and relation to the authority figure; these relations were not necessarily based on kinship. Concepts of kinship, such as the obligations between parents and children or seniors and juniors were expressed in hierarchical political statuses. Atwood describes this system as having a “distinctive patrimonial and kin-like coloration” (2012, p. 4), even outside of descent-based lineages. Mobility was practiced within local *nutag* (homelands), and involved the seasonal return to pastures.

Similarly, Sneath (2007) has argued that power structures in Inner Asia resemble a “headless state.” Sneath shows how translations of early Mongolian texts reflect the biases of colonialist and orientalist social theories, which framed nomadic societies as tribal or clan-based. For instance, records from the 13th century, which referred to aristocratic positions, such as a “duke” were translated instead as “chief” (2007, p. 64). These scholars purposefully shaped a reading of history based on an evolutionary model of history and the state, perpetuating an interpretation of Mongolian political history as fundamentally clan-based until the socialist period. Sneath demonstrates that the aristocratic and military basis of steppe politics illustrates a long history of statecraft between political leaders across the region. He also shows how the idea of “clan” has been used by politicians in the modern state-building project. He writes, “The success of aristocratic houses or lineages over very long periods of

time, in both centralised states and other political formations, reveals descent and kinship as enduring techniques of power and aspects of stratification rather than their antithesis” (2007, p. 195). He argues that pastoralism has always involved central oversight, especially as it pertains to the coordination of migration (Humphrey and Sneath 1999; Sneath 2001). Institutions such as aristocratic families or Buddhist institutions had jurisdiction over territory use rights as well as ownership of large herds of livestock. Pastoralism was a central element of these economies, trade, and political legitimacy.

From the 17th to the 20th century, Mongolia was part of the Manchu Qing (Ch’ing) Empire. The central government of the Qing was located in Beijing and the Outer Mongolian territories were administered according to a “banner” system, where Tibetan Buddhist institutions acted as the local administrative authorities alongside noble lords (Sneath 2000). In Southern Bayanhongor province, for example, a large monastery organised the long seasonal migrations between the Gobi to the south and the mountainous regions to the north (Fernandez-Gimenez 1999). Humphrey (1992b) estimates that up to one quarter of the Mongolian male population was affiliated with these monasteries as either monks or labourers. Additionally, monasteries and nobles were further tied to the Qing administration through trade and debt (Atwood 2003; Sneath 2003).

Bawden states, “Under the Ch’ing, Mongolia was subjected to centralised control of a strict and minute nature” (1984, p. 547). Bawden describes the proliferation of maps created by the Qing to administer the territory, where banners were divided into smaller territorial units called “*sum*.” Police monitored pasture use on behalf of the banner authorities. Bawden also writes about cases of land disputes in areas where borders were not clearly defined or enforced. A fascinating case from the early 1800s, which Bawden discusses at length, is a complaint lodged to banner authorities about such a dispute. A section of the complaint from a banner prince named Azar to the Qing authorities presented by Bawden is:

The people of the two banners of the Tushee gung Sonomwanchig and the zasag Mairdarjav, though there is no drought or cattle starvation in their own pastures, have for some time been coming arbitrarily into my banner pastures, and what with their transport and riding animals they eat up the grass on which my poor people live, and are always pasturing commingled with them. In my stupid opinion, it is quite untrue that they are coming under the stress of being constrained by drought or starvation. It is just that they are wilfully after extra gain, and so eating up the foodstuffs and grass belonging to our poor people. Moreover, suppose that these people always dwelling commingled there, mutual or internal cases of murder or robbery should arise, under whose direction shall they be dealt with—that of the zasag, the lord of the pastures, or the zasag in charge of the offenders? (1984, p. 552)

I quote this passage at length to draw attention to the role of local governors, such as Azar, in addressing the economic and social concerns of the people living within his jurisdiction. These newcomers threaten his authority and economic base and he appeals to higher authorities to establish a protocol for mitigating such events. High and Schlesinger (2010) have discussed similar boundary transgressions by foreign gold miners during the Qing period. These miners and their collaborators received harsh punishment for violating Mongolian land use customs and violating the social and cosmological order. Also, they were seen as threats to the integrity of the banner administrative system, which enforced separation between ethnic groups.

The contemporary political divisions of Mongolia bear a resemblance to the Qing system, with households belonging as registered members to a *bag* subdivision, headed by a *zasag darga*. The term *zasag* and its connotations are valuable to underscore. Both Humphrey (1992b) and Kaplonski (2006) have discussed the prevalence of morally correct behaviour being associated with an exemplar figure. This has important implications for modes of

governance, which is reflected in the word *zasag*. As Kaplonski has discussed, *zasag* refers to “government,” but is based on the word which means “to correct” (2006, p. 84). This idea of government links rulers (exemplars) with subjects based on moral expectations about the regulation of correct behaviour (see also Humphrey 2008). The exemplar and the appanage community unit are two general concepts that have maintained continuity over time and which are important heuristic devices to think through modes of governance today.

The People’s Republic of Mongolia (MPR)

After defeat at the hands of the Japanese in the late 19th century, the Qing Dynasty was in a weak position to manage its far-reaching territory, which was under threat from the Russians and Europeans as well. The Qing began to encourage Chinese expansion into Tibetan and Mongolian territories, prompting the leadership in Mongolia to appeal to the Russians to back armed resistance along the border. By 1911, Mongolians established independence from China by appointing Jibzudamba Khutugtu as Bodg Khan, a theocratic title meaning “Holy Emperor,” to the throne (Atwood 2004, p. 269). The years following independence involved conflict amongst political factions in Mongolia, the Chinese, and White and Bolshevik Russians. In an effort to maintain independence from the Chinese, Mongolians appealed to the Russians for assistance. The Russians successfully defeated the Chinese, though conflict ensued between a Russian warlord associated with the White Army and Bolsheviks (Atwood 2004). The Bolsheviks won this conflict, ushering in Mongolia’s alliance with the Soviet Union. The Mongolian People’s Republic was established in 1924 and gave way to a democratic system in 1991. During its nearly 70-year history, the organisation of the Mongolian state and economic system was closely modelled after the Soviet Union. Moscow played a strong role in foreign and domestic policy (Morozova 2002). The Soviet presence in Mongolia was expressed ideologically, economically, and militaristically. Geopolitically, Mongolia was positioned at an important frontier of Japanese expansion during World War II.

Starting in the 1960s, the Soviet army intensified its military presence partly due to antagonistic relations with China and by the 1980s about 82,000 Soviet troops and their family members were stationed in Mongolia (Radchenko 2012). Some sources estimate up to 500,000 Soviet troops stationed in the country (Nixson et al. 2000, p. xiv). Herders in Ölzii County, where I conducted the majority of my research, often recalled their attempts to obtain cigarettes and candy from the Soviet servicemen stationed in the county center.

This strong Soviet influence contributed to the establishment of a new administrative infrastructure and governmental norms, which affected both pragmatic and imaginative iterations of mobile pastoralism. The Soviet influence in Mongolia was aggressive, especially during the Stalinist period. Mongolians believed to be connected to the pan-Mongolia movement or thought to be Japanese spies were targeted by the Soviets amongst the Buriyat ethnic group in Siberia. Investigations spread to Mongolia. Between 1937 and 1939, at least 20,000 Mongolians were killed as Soviet advisors attempted to gain control over rural and religious threats to the emergent socialist state (Atwood 2004). The Buriyats of eastern Mongolia, as well as monks, and others political leaders viewed as a threat to the Soviet order disappeared, were subject to arson and attacks, or executed (Baabar 1999 [2010]; Empson 2011). Kaplonski (2002) estimates that during the purges up to 100,000 people may have been killed and he describes political show trials as a way in which the purges were legitimated and used to shift power to the newly established political institutions (Kaplonski 2008). Although they became less frequent, purges continued through the 1950s as the MPR sought to concentrate power in Ulaanbaatar, away from systems of family and religious hierarchy.

The purges put an end to previous forms of education based in monasteries. A rigorous compulsory state schooling system became an important form of socialisation and further alignment with the Soviet Union and socialist ideology. The Mongolian script was

replaced with Cyrillic in the early 1940s and compulsory schooling was introduced in 1955 (Steiner-Khamsci and Stolpe 2006). Children of herders boarded in student dormitories starting at the enrolment age of eight. The literacy rate for adults reached 97 per cent by the late 1980s (Steiner-Khamsci and Stolpe 2006, p. 167). According to the Marxist typology of social progress, pastoralist production should yield to industrialisation, and the urban space would become privileged as a center of culture and progress (Bruun and Narangoa 2006). Compulsory schooling for the children of herders and the dormitory system were part of a larger organisation of public and private life in the framework of cooperatives or collectives. Rural cultural centers were another manifestation of the deliberate production of socialist subjectivities. Marsh (2006) discusses the establishment of cultural centers after the establishment of the MPR, which were deliberately designed to develop Soviet “cosmopolitan” sensibilities through educational activities, movies, theatrical performances, and music. Marsh demonstrates how the government leaders at the time saw the cultural centers as a means to reform the worldviews of rural people away from traditional values and styles of artistic expression (see also Marsh 2009).

Modernisation and industrialisation were primary goals of the MPR. The constitution imitated the USSR’s 1918 constitution and set out an agenda to rapidly transform Mongolia into an industrial-agricultural state (Bruun and Narangoa 2006; Dupuy et al 1970). Urbanisation was promoted through city building projects, which focused on producing industrial sites and factories. The population of Ulaanbaatar expanded rapidly, housing nearly 25 per cent of the national population by the mid-1970s (Sneath 2009). Other industrial cities were built including Darhan and Erdenet. By 1962, the MPR joined the Council for Mutual Economic Cooperation (COMECON or CMEA), closely linking Mongolia to the Soviet Bloc through trade and coordinated production plans (World Bank 1992). Mongolia’s placement in CMEA and close relations with the Soviet Union eventually aided its admission to the United

Nations in 1961. Agricultural products were a major export from Mongolia to the CMEA countries and pastoralism was re-defined by the changing macroeconomic organisation of Mongolia in this context.

Agriculture, primarily in the form of livestock husbandry, was an important part of the economy, with major exports being raw materials such as wool, livestock, hides, meat, cashmere, and furs (Ovdiyenko 1965). The state reorganised pastoralism as a national economy, introducing mechanised transport, new fodder systems, and breeds. Incentives were also designed to reward men and women for productive work and contributions to society, such as the Honour of Motherhood given to mothers with more than four children (Hodges et al 2007, p. 14) or “Herdsman with a good herd” (Badamkhatan 1981 [2010], p. 1016).

Socialist writing in the 1950s characterized practices of mobile pastoralism as “extremely backward” (Ovdiyenko 1965, p. 3). To reconcile this supposed backwardness, in the mid-1950s, the Soviet Union increased its aid to Mongolia, which included financial aid as well as the provision of factories, machinery, equipment, and other industrial supplies (Dupuy et al 1970). The state administration made a focused effort in transforming pastoralism into a national enterprise around the establishment of collectivized production. Broadly defined, collectivisation organised agricultural production into state farms and agricultural associations or co-operatives referred to as *negdel* (Atwood 2004). In the 1930’s herders contested the collectivisation project and protested by slaughtering their own livestock (Humphrey 1978). According to one source, herders killed seven million livestock in an act of resistance to the first five-year collectivisation plan starting in 1931 (Dupuy et al 1970, p. 298). Steimann (2011) reports that around the same time period Kyrgyz pastoralists similarly opposed Soviet collectivisation measures and people slaughtered animals out of protest.

Collectivisation was a long process, which involved the gradual incorporation of livestock into *negdel* organisations, which were administered by the *sum* (Atwood 2004; Szykiewicz 1968). A Russian language text from this time period describes the social and economic transformations in Mongolia as a leading example for other socialist countries:

The Mongolian people are creating a new geography of production forces. During the years of the first five-year plan (1948–1952), the second five-year plan (1953–1957) and the three-year plan (1958–1960) for the development of the national economy and culture, the Mongolian People’s Republic, as a result of the development of national industry and the mechanization of transportation, changed from a land of backward, nomadic livestock herding to an agrarian-industrial state, into one of the leading countries of the Asian continent. The MPR is the first and only (at least in such a classical form) country which has accomplished the transition from feudalism to socialism. It is unique in this respect. (Ovdiyenko 1965, p. 2–3).

Administratively, this “new geography of productive forces” involved the reorganisation of *aimag* (province) and *sum* (county) boundaries from 1957–1959 to facilitate the formation of cooperatives (Dupuy et al 1970; Ovdiyenki 1965). The government organized mobile pastoralism into a system of national production and aimed to modernise pastoralism through new technology. Production quotas for products such as wool, meat, milk, etc. became mandatory in 1941 (Sneath 2000).

Lenin’s decree that Mongolia should bypass capitalism involved substantial financial and technical support from the Soviet Union. A series of five-year and three-year plans were created to develop Mongolia’s agricultural sector to match the Soviet system of mechanized production (Bawden 1960; Bradsher 1972). Prior to the third five-year plan of 1961–1965, the Soviet Union delivered an aid package including huge amounts of technical assistance:

machinery such as tractors, combine harvesters, trucks, and livestock. They sponsored the electrification programme, provided free training and education for Mongolian students to study in the Soviet Union, and also extended a 615 million-rouble loan. At this time, the Chinese also provided the Mongolian government with a loan of 200 million roubles (Dupuy et al 1970, p. 303). Bulag wrote of this time period, “In a bizarre competition between the Soviet Union and China to control Mongolia, both sides extended huge aid to Mongolia, which led to the rapid development of infrastructure in Mongolia” (Bulag 1998, p. 15). Throughout this time period, Mongolia’s economy was dependent on foreign aid and trade relations with the Soviet bloc.

Collectivisation of Livestock

By the late 1960s, the government succeeded in institutionalising the collectivisation of livestock herding despite continued opposition by herders. By 1967, about 75 per cent of livestock was state property, with families retaining small private herds, usually around 25–75 animals depending on the region (Sneath 2003, Ressel 2005, p. 203). Each *sum* or county-like district made up a *negdel*, or collective farm. Each *sum* had a center, or settlement, and herder households lived on surrounding pastureland and were organised into production brigades (Sneath 2000). To this end, individuals would specialise in taking care of a specific breed, sometimes further refined to a group of livestock with the breed, such as lactating goats, ewes, etc. These specialized units were called *suur*, usually consisting of up to ten families (Szynkiewicz 1968). The collectives received production orders from the state and were paid fixed prices for quotas of raw materials (Sneath 2000). Herders received a salary from the state for their work (Sneath 2003). The administration of the *sum* dictated production plans and work schedules. The *sum* was also the location of local schools and dormitories for school children, health facilities, social centers, and public administration

buildings. The *sum* administrators were elected officials who held office for two years (Szynkiewicz 1968).

By the late 1960s, around 90 per cent of Mongolia's exports were livestock products (Dupuy et al 1970, p. 308). The government also focused on developing a grain industry and means to grow fodder. In 1959 the Revolutionary Party passed the Virgin Lands Campaign, which aimed to cultivate crops and grains on pastureland characterized as "virgin" (Konagaya 2013). The collectivisation of rural work was a common practice throughout Soviet-controlled territory in Central Asia. Kraudzun (2012) makes the argument that collectivisation was not only important to the economic system of the Soviet Union, but was a means for Moscow to retain control over border areas through the oversight and administration of rural work. He demonstrates how rural administration in the Pamir mountain range of Tajikistan along the border with China and Afghanistan was a geopolitically strategic position for the Soviets. Establishing strong infrastructural links between these areas and Moscow was a process of territorialisation. Reeves's (2014) research on borders in the Ferghana Valley demonstrates how these infrastructures continue to be reworked in state building projects.

Although the national government was heavy-handed in the regulation of everyday life, Mongolian customs and belief systems remained in practice. For example, Sneath (2009) discusses how practices of divination, such as scapulimancy, the reading of burnt sheep shoulder bones, continued to be practiced during the socialist period. Ressel (2005) also makes the case that the government allowance of private animals to families allowed informal networks to continue to be important.

Economic Crisis and Restructuring

In the late 1980s, peaceful demonstrations in Mongolia called for economic and political change. Public intellectuals played a formative role in these demonstrations (see for example Baabar 1990 [2010]). The Mongolian People's Republic came to an end with the resignation of the country's leaders and a general election in 1990. At the same time, the Soviet Union was undergoing rapid political and economic change, leading to its collapse in 1991 and the end of CMEA. The termination of aid, expertise, supplies, and imports from the Soviet Union, which amounted to approximately 30 per cent of Mongolia's GDP, created intense economic shocks throughout the country (Griffin 1995, p. 3). In 1991, imports of consumer and investment goods, including fuel, declined by approximately 60 per cent. Likewise, Mongolia's terms of trade disintegrated as the country left the rouble zone and began to trade in world prices (World Bank 1992). The supply shock had particularly strong effects on the Mongolian construction industry, as important inputs such as fuel and other materials became scarce. An ongoing issue in the Mongolian economy is its reliance on favourable terms of trade for a narrow export base largely composed of minerals and agricultural products. The government budget is sensitive to fluctuations in world prices of oil and copper, as the government deficit is mainly funded by mining tax revenues. For example, in 1996, falls in the prices of copper decreased Mongolia's GDP by 10 per cent (Chimeddagva, Jargalsaikhan and Walters 2000, p. 47).

The twin shocks of the collapse of the USSR and the end of CMEA posed serious problems not only for Mongolian citizens, but for the functioning of the government. A severe government budget deficit emerged with the cessation of Soviet funds. Inflation increased dramatically throughout the period of liberalisation. In 1992 alone inflation was 325 per cent (Nixson et al 2000, p. 65). The government responses to control the immediate problems of inflation and the emerging economic crisis occurred at the same time as it began to restructure the economy by following an IMF-prescribed strict liberalisation model of

reforms called “shock therapy” (Collins and Nixon 1993) The establishment of a market economy and the response to economic crisis seemed to converge around reforms aimed at restructuring the government budget and the role of the government in the country’s economic production. In 1992, the World Bank wrote, “A big part of the solution to Mongolia’s crisis lies within the public sector, both in reducing the extremely high fiscal deficits and in restructuring the public finance system to one suited to a market economy” (1992, p. 12-13).

At the same time, administrative restructuring incurred a heavy cost for Mongolia (Nixon et al 2000). As Nixon et al (2000) have argued, there was little consideration of the fit between the reform plans adopted by Mongolia and the situation of the country at the time. Shock therapy reforms were applied in an idealistic manner without considering the “actual process or goals of transition” (p. xv). They write, “...the pursuit of narrowly economic objectives has meant that many of the real achievements of the socialist period, particularly in education, health, and gender equity, are being sacrificed for little gains in terms of economic benefits for the majority of the population” (p. xvi). The government focused on rapid privatisation as a primary method of establishing a market economy. The fall-out of this process has been significant problems with distribution and an increase in poverty and wealth inequality (Janes and Chuluundorj 2004; Janes et al. 2006; Nixon and Walters 2006; Rak and Janes 2004).

On 14 February 1991, Mongolia became a member of the World Bank Group (World Bank 1992). The Bank and IMF provided an essential line of credit during the economic crisis, but their aid came with conditions for restructuring the economy. The structural adjustment reforms began with privatisation and trade and price liberalisation. These reforms allowed Mongolia to join the World Trade Organization by 1997 (Sharma and Davaakhuu 2015). Starting in 1992, members of livestock cooperatives and other state workers were

entitled to purchase livestock through a voucher system. The implementation of this system lacked consistent management and varied by region as the *sums* organised their own means of distribution (Nixson and Walters 2006; Russel, Adya and Tseven 2000). The co-operative's collectively-owned goods were divided amongst its members, including winter shelters, vehicles, and livestock (Sneath 2003). More successful and experienced families, or people with better information on how the voucher system worked, were able to benefit more from privatisation than others (Nixson and Walters 2006). Pastureland, however, was omitted from private purchase by constitutional provisions that protect common grazing land rights.

The push for land privatisation as part of Mongolia's economic reform process continues in 2014 and 2015 debates on land laws. In the early years of economic transition, economists from the Asian Development Bank and other investors called for the privatisation of land as a fundamental aspect of capitalist market systems. Additionally, economists argued that free-range livestock husbandry posed an environmental risk, citing Hardin's (1968) tragedy of the commons idea. Despite pressures to privatise land, a new constitution was drafted by the Mongolian parliament, which passed in 1992 (Sanders 1992). The constitution protects pastureland as a state-owned resource and identified the national livestock herd as an important source of national wealth. In 1994, the Land Law was passed and established three main categories of rights to land, which included land ownership, land possession, and land use (Fernandez-Gimenez and Batbuyan 2004). Two primary designations of property rights in this law are land ownership rights, which allow for land to be bought and sold in settled areas, and land possession rights, which refer to the right to use certain areas of land for a period of time based on a contract with the state. This portion of the Land Law is applicable to herder's winter shelter use and possession rights, *ovoljoonii gerchilgee*, which are the focus of my work in the article titled, "The role of kinship in negotiating territorial rights."

In the first ten years after the establishment of the market economy, the number of herders significantly increased. From 1990–1998, livestock increased by more than 20 per cent (Sneath 2010b, p. 1074); a majority of the increase was in goats (Maekawa 2013). The increase in livestock numbers and herders in the early years of transition reflects the lack of formal employment after the state system ended (Anderson 1998). Families with newly acquired livestock, both former state herders as well as new herders, were largely subsistence producers (Sneath 2006b). The turbulent Mongolian economy and uncertainty since the end of socialism has added pressure to pastoralist household economies and provided a form of food security for many. Herders also combined livestock husbandry with short-term work and trading. “Suitcase traders” plied newly-opened routes between Russia and China along the trans-Siberian railroad (Lacaze 2010). Additionally, absentee and contract herding has gained traction (Fernandez-Gimenez 1999; Murphy 2015)

The unemployment due to the termination of state-sponsored jobs increased the number of people reliant on herding for income and food security, including many with limited skills in livestock husbandry (Diener 2011; Janzen 2005). At this time, household mobility was compromised due to the lack of reliable motorized transport or draft animals, need for proximity to markets, and in some cases, the poor herding knowledge or skills of new herders (Spoor 1996). Sneath (2003, 2004) argues that Mongolian pastoralism has always involved a mutual dependence between larger institutions and households. Larger institutions, such as rich households, monasteries, or collectives, dictated aspects of migration and territorial use and absorbed risks to some degree. The breakdown of the socialist system eliminated many of the risk-mitigating procedures and services provided to herders. The increase of the population herding with limited experience further disadvantaged herders in the face of a turbulent economy and winter disasters in 1999–2001 and 2009–2010.

Since the transition to a market economy, herders have faced two major winter disasters, called *dzud*. The first was from 1999–2001 and the second from 2009–2010. In the first disaster, about three million livestock were killed (Sternberg 2010). Since the disaster in 2010, donor agencies have pushed for stronger governance interventions focused on decentralisation (Mearns 2004b). The World Bank’s Sustainable Livelihoods Project was renewed after the *dzuds* and established pilot projects for index-based livestock insurance. Initial research into the feasibility of index-based insurance followed the *dzud* in 2000 (Skees et al 2002). In 2014, the Sustainable Livelihoods Project was reinstated for a third iteration. Additionally, the UNDP and World Bank have played a role in developing and drafting a new Pastureland Law. The draft of this new, still developing-law states:

The main purpose is to provide a legal method for the transition from an unplanned and unregulated grassland user system to provide a system characterized by: secure possession of pastureland for herders and legal entities; pastureland planning and management system; improve the development and management of pastureland information; distinguish the functions, duties and responsibilities between different levels of administration; and to improve the system to identify and manage problems associated with land degradation and effects of global climate change (Hannam 2007, p. 4).

The government and international consultants are drafting this law in a context where legislation on mineral rights and environmental protection is also a contentious political topic. Mongolia is currently considered to be one of the most open economies in Asia and international investment is important to the fiscal stability of the government (Davaakhuu, Sharma, and Bandara 2014; Sharma and Davaakhuu 2015). Over the course of the last five years, the size of the mineral sector in the national economy has grown significantly, surpassing the agricultural sector since 2010 (Thampapillai, Hansen, and Bolat 2014). This

ties economic stability and future aspirations of prosperity more closely to the mining industry and its international investors. High and Schlesinger (2010, p. 289) estimate that approximately 30 per cent of Mongolia territory was leased to mining companies in 2010. One of the largest coal deposits in the world is located in the Gobi Desert. The development of the Oyu Tolgoi copper and gold mine in the South Gobi desert has contributed to high growth rates in the last five years (Sharma and Davaakhuu 2015). In addition to mega-mining projects, artisanal mining and smaller scale operations proliferate (High 2008). In 2015 the economy returned to the economic doldrums as world commodity prices have gone down, international investment has waned and the government struggles to find money to cover the resulting national deficit.

Despite the rising star status that Mongolia has achieved in recent years, at least a quarter of the population has been impoverished since the mid-1990s. The poverty rate decreased from 38.7 per cent in 2010 to 27.4 per cent in 2012 (Sharma and Davaakhuu 2015). The prevalence of poverty reflects the legacy of the reform process in the 1990s and contributes to the sense of uncertain futures for some. In order to address this problem, the government has implemented cash transfer social welfare schemes, including a programme targeted at the children of poor families starting in 2005, which expanded into the universal Child Money Program in 2006. Newly married couples receive a benefit from this programme, as well as all children under the age of 18. School-aged children are required to be living with their parents and going to school to receive the money. Such income sources, as well as pensions, are important to the functioning of many rural households (Hodges et al. 2007). A continuing development is the financialisation of the public sector, which appears in pastoralist households through annual bank loans, livestock insurance, and cash transfers (see for example Meyanathan 2013; Sneath 2012). Despite these measures, poverty and wealth inequality are persistent issues. These inequalities are also expressed through social

perceptions of rural and urban subjectivities. While the rural is idealised as a source of pure Mongolian culture, away from the polluted and corrupt city, in practice rural people and lifeways are often discriminated against as inferior to urban subjectivities. Ideas about modernity inform these discourses, as they did during the socialist era when the state initiated whole scale social transformation based on Leninist ideals and violently repressed past centers of power, such as the Buddhist temples.

This essay has offered a cursory overview of some aspects of the organisation of the pastoralist economy in the last century. By highlighting these aspects of the history of pastoralism in Mongolia, I aim to show that herders have always been part of the economies of governing elites in the region. The organisation of rural work changed considerably during privatization, economic liberalization, and economic crisis. The rural population experienced sudden change in the economic structure of work when formal employment and salaries of state-run collectives or state farms ended in the 1990s (Sneath 2003, p. 443). The establishment of democracy and capitalism in tandem with the collapse of the Soviet trading block, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, redefined the economic worth of property, agricultural products, and labour. These changes have generated a number of forms of insecurity, ranging from spiritual to food insecurities, which are rooted in the fluctuating qualities of Mongolia's liberal economy and regional geopolitics (Højer 2007; Humphrey 1985; Narmandakh and Khan 2012; Pedersen 2011; Pedersen and Højer 2008; Sneath 2003; Spoor 1996; Templer, Swift, and Payne 1993). Despite these changes, many aspects of government administration are familiar to past systems. Land, although subject to new ownership laws, continues to be owned by the state and is protected as a common resource in the 1992 national constitution (Sanders 1992). Administrative districts and local government organisations also retain the same basic structure as during the socialist period, although there is a push for decentralisation of local decision making in rural areas. Additionally, cultural

identities associated with pastoralism have been sources of power for elites and the control of territorial resources, faintly resembling appanage relations of the past.

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