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# Socio-economic segmentation – *Khot-Ail* in nomadic livestock keeping of Mongolia

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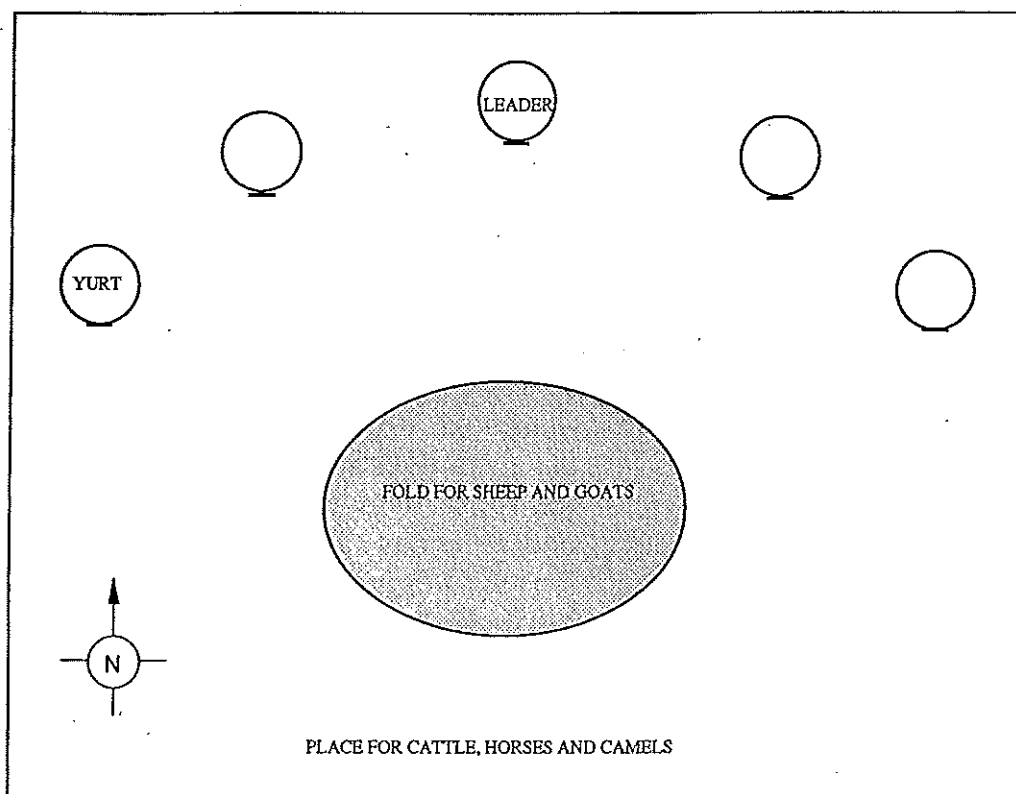
## Introduction

One of the most important factors for an increase in productivity of the livestock economy in Mongolia is the institutionalisation of an appropriate rural socio-economic unit of nomadic livestock keeping, privatised since 1991. The „*Khot-Ail*“ was for a long time a grouping of livestock keeping families well suited to the nomadic way of life, *i.e.* for the most effective carrying out of mobile livestock keeping, for the optimal use of pasture land and for the mutual support necessary in the difficult nomadic living conditions. From the start of the 18th century until the 1950's the *Khot-Ail* was in its characteristic form the main socio-economic unit in private livestock keeping in Mongolia. Despite the fact that the term *Khot-Ail* has been in use only since the 19th century, the institution had already essentially existed much earlier.

I shall first give a short explanation of the term *Khot-Ail*. The geographic conditions of the highlands of Central Asia make it necessary for the local population to conduct mobile livestock keeping as the principal form of economy. Nomadism is not only the optimal means of adapting to the special natural conditions but also the only effective form of agriculture in such an environment. Natural pasture and water supplies are extremely scarce and for most of the year limited. Therefore herds are forced to

undertake recurrent treks of varying distances in their search for food and water. These frequent migrations occur not only seasonally but also often within the seasons. Migration is the only solution to the problem of the food requirements of livestock and an effective use of the seasonally varying resources of natural pasture. This need for migration also demands a certain organisation of human groups in order to solve problems arising from mobility. For example not every family has at its disposal at all times the necessary labour, beasts of burden and equipment such as carts, or the knowledge of available pasture land. The particularities of labour and expenditure do not make it possible for a single family to manage successfully. Although nomadic livestock keeping in Mongolia does not require intensive labour on a daily basis, extra labour is necessary at certain times, as for example during calving or shearing. As a consequence forms of human groupings developed which, in general, were based on tribes or extended families. Although in the course of time these groupings underwent change in the sense that they came to be regarded as a means of defence, as economic, military or territorial administrative units such as *Khüree* (a large group of livestock keeping families managing their stock together and pitching their yurts in a circle in order to better defend themselves), *Ail* (livestock keep-

Fig. 1: Structure of the Khot-Ail



ing families), *Khot-Ail* (union of private livestock keeping families), *Shuuri* (administrative-economically organised group of livestock keeping families in the communist period) etc., and although the number of organised livestock keeping families has varied throughout history (by virtue of developments within the society) as well as in the various ecological regions of the country, the groupings were and still are the most important social basis of nomadic animal husbandry.

Increasingly from the end of the 18th to the start of the 20th century these groupings came under economic pressure, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The form which the groupings took in this period is known as *Khot-Ail* – an optimally adapted social-economic unit of nomadic husbanders within the framework of the many-sided economic conditions of livestock keeping families which now possessed their own stock and managed much more independently

than in earlier times. This form of cooperation was typical for a long time in Mongolia until the communist administrative-economic reorganisation. The original meaning of the word „*Khot*“ was the movable animal stalls or the stock fold and the yurt site<sup>1</sup>. The fact that the social and economic situation of the time forced pastoralists to bring together their stock means, I suggest, that the stalls of individual families were merged with those of several others, in order that the families might manage more successfully or at least survive. The term „*Ail*“ meant traditionally a livestock keeping family possessing its own stock and stock fold. In this way the term *Khot-Ail*<sup>2</sup> was formed. This merging of stock had, from an economic and social viewpoint, a deep significance since pastoral families had in the past never cooperated to this extent, even though they had lived and managed their stock together. Figure 1 illustrates the general pattern of the *Khot-Ail*.

From 1960 to 1990, on account of the structural reorganisation of the pastoral economy into *Negdel*<sup>3</sup> collectives, the economic background for the existence of the traditional *Khot-Ail* unions, namely private ownership of livestock, was abolished. In the last five years ownership conditions of livestock have again changed: this time from collective and state to private ownership. As a result there are now in the rural regions many separate livestock keepers, amongst whom many are inexperienced or have taken to animal husbandry from other professions and who have received their own share arising from the privatisation. They are independent of the state as well as of the unions which have emerged as successors to the *Negdel* collectives. Over 80% of livestock keepers are of the generation of the *Negdel* period. This means that only a few have experience of the *Khot-Ail* organisation of more than thirty years ago. Therefore it is important to look back to learn how private animal husbanders were socio-economically organised before the *Negdel* period.

In the last five years a form of *Khot-Ail* union has again developed which, however, differs from its original form. The main difference, which is today characteristic throughout Mongolia, is that families belonging to a *Khot-Ail* manage for themselves, whereas before the communist period they were economically speaking closely connected within their *Khot-Ail*. For example now families keep their stock separate from one another, produce in principle only within the family and market their produce in most cases alone, despite the fact that they belong to a *Khot-Ail*. From the state there has hitherto been little indication, and absolutely no structural or organisational measures, concerning the optimisation of the socio-economic organisation of private livestock keeping. In April 1995 a national conference took

place on strategies for economic development in Mongolia. The problem of an optimal socio-economic unit of private livestock keepers, the solution of which is one of the most important prerequisites for an increase in productivity in the pastoral economy, remained unconsidered.

Research material concerning the *Khot-Ail* is not very extensive. Despite the fact that in the few chronicles and official files touching upon the *Khot-Ail* there are certain reports, the first investigations were conducted mainly by Soviet scholars in the 1930s. The results appeared in journals such as „*Khozyaystvo mongolii*“ (Economy of Mongolia) and „*Sovremennaya mongoliya*“ (Contemporary Mongolia). In the forties there were few investigations concerning rural regions. From the fifties, in addition to Soviet scholars, Mongolian scholars made their own observations concerning these regions. This material is in principle the most important source for the reconstruction of the *Khot-Ail* as they were before the *Negdel* collectives.

## Overview of the history of the *Khot-Ail*

In the course of the long development of traditional nomadic pastoralism a social structure developed which optimally ensured production under conditions which were totally dependent upon the natural environment. This structure had, however, different forms and names in various periods of history.

### *12th – 17th centuries:*

The social differentiation in the tribal society of Mongolia enabled the emergence of a sort of community composed of small groups which possessed their

own stock independently of the tribe. In order to ensure their independent way of life it was necessary that the migrating tribes be divided further into migration units which were structured so as to preserve this form of animal husbandry. Such migration groups were also working cooperatives. Chronicles, which report on the oldest of such working cooperatives, speak of the *Khüree* as a migration group of the 12th century which consisted of several hundred patrilineally related members. There are also reports that the *Khüree* existed before the Mongols for several generations of the nomad kingdoms<sup>4</sup>. While the *Khüree* are considered in some works as a form of defence against enemy attacks, other works treat them as economic organisations<sup>5</sup>. If we follow the meaning of the word *Khüree* in the „Secret History of Mongolia“, we can justifiably say that originally economic reasons were decisive for this form of organisation. In unstable, warring times on the other hand the defence function might have dominated. As the source reports, there were frequent struggles between the tribes in the 12th and 13th centuries. These struggles had outwardly an effect upon the tribal structure. In particular the first quasi-administrative restructuring, which occurred with the establishment of the Mongolian Empire at the start of the 13th century, shook severely the tribal form of the traditional *Khüree*. Moreover the gradual differentiation of family ownership of stock and of family household played a decisive role in the breaking up of the *Khüree* community into *Ail*<sup>6</sup> of separate families. After this the *Khüree* is no longer mentioned in the sources. Instead we find *Ail*, whereby a smaller migrating group is meant. Probably the *Khüree*, from this time onwards, began to lose its significance. According to some scholars the first forms of the *Ail* existed already within the *Khüree*. Owing

to the strict tribal structure they certainly would have had no independence within the *Khüree*. The *Ail* was thus, since approximately the middle of the 13th century, the predominant form of the organisation of labour. The meaning of the term *Ail* then differed from what is meant today by the word – a family. To the *Ail* of that time belonged a group of families which possessed a common property and which were characterised by close family relations.

With the establishment of Manchurian rule Mongolia was administratively, territorially and economically subordinated to the Manchurian system. This led gradually to a social and economic crystallisation of pastoral nomadism, whereby attempts were made to retain the classical traditional *Ail* grouping in the economically and quite strongly institutionalised form of *Khot-Ail*.

The term *Khot-Ail* however did not appear until the middle of the 19th century. Instead there was another term which in principle can be equated with it. The word „*Khot*“ (*Khotong*) had long been used as to describe the yurt site and the stock fold. In the code of laws „Mongolian-Oiratic Regulation of 1640“<sup>7</sup>, the terms „*Otog*“ (Dylykov 1981: 14-15, 23, 30, 37; Alinge 1934: 55) and „*Aimag*“ (Dylykov 1981: 8, 17, 28-32) appear frequently and without doubt are directly connected with the description of small nomadic groups. These terms at that time did not signify the military-administrative divisions as they gradually did from the second half of the 16th century and the first half of the 17th century<sup>8</sup>. This is proved by the above mentioned regulation:

„If somebody leaves his allotted *Nutug* [pasture area, B.B.], then he will be punished. If it is an *Aimag* people [group of families] in question, the *Akhlagc* [group leader] will be fined nine animals. If it is a single

man (a person or a separate family) in question, who leaves without the knowledge of his leader, he will be fined nine animals. He who brings back someone who has left his own *Otog* [pasture area] and *Aimag*, will receive a horse from the *Aimag* leader and a sheep from each of the member families of this *Aimag*" (Dylykov 1981: 120).

The term *Ail* in this regulation no longer had anything to do with the group of livestock keeping families in its original sense, but had clearly come to signify small family associations (Dylykov 1981: 15, 23, 37) consisting of separate families „*Örkh*" (Dylykov 1981: 76-77). Belonging to a group was necessary for economic reasons not only for the pastoralists, but also served the interests of the state, whereby with increasing interaction the tax obligations of pastoralists towards princes and the state could be better supervised. Hence livestock keepers had to be organised in groups. The regulation states

„If an individual livestock keeper of his own accord leaves his *Khoshuu*<sup>9</sup> for a neighbouring one and settles between the two *Khoshuu*, he must be brought back. If he doesn't belong to an *Otog*, let him belong to an *Otog*. If he doesn't belong to an *Aimag* (in the *Otog*), let him belong to an *Aimag*" (Dylykov 1981: 117).

*From the 18th century to the start of the 20th century:*

In the course of the development of feudal conditions in the steppes, the interior network of the *Khot-Ail* union attained a new dimension, in which both the economic and individual dependence between the ordinary livestock keepers and the steppe princes increased. In the law books, such as „*Khalkha Zoram*"<sup>10</sup>, the term *Aimag* was no longer used in the sense of a nomad group but rather in

that of a larger territorial-administrative unit in a rural area. It is interesting that in „*Khalkha Zoram*" the terms „*Khot*" in the sense of a family group and „*Khotyn ach*" (leader of the family group) appear for the first time (Zamcarano 1959: 10). In legal files from the end of the 18th century, which contain complaints about pasture areas, the term „*Khot* people" (Mong. *Khot khiin*) can be found also to mean a „nomad group". For example a livestock keeper of the Delegdorzh *Khoshuu* of the Sain-Noion-Khan-*Aimag* uses very frequently in his charge of October 1791 the expression „...*Khot* people" (Sarkhüü 1975: 21, 23, 26).

*1921-1960:*

A further decisive feature in the development of the *Khot-Ail* is particularly characterised by the fact that the *Khot-Ail* union was subjected to the strong influence of the state. In this period the revolutionary party took various political-economic measures which in part shook up the traditional form of the *Khot-Ail*. By the repeated confiscation of stock and its redistribution among poor husbanders and by increasingly levying tax on animals per head and on the use of supplementary labour by families owning large herds, the *Khot-Ail*, which functioned on the basis of cooperation between poorer and wealthier families broke down.

*1960-1990:*

With the complete nationalisation of private livestock in 1958/59, the economic basis of the *Khot-Ail* union was destroyed. The new organisational structure of the livestock collectives replaced the traditional *Khot-Ail* unions. With nationalisation of private herds the affinity of husbanders to stock property weakened. Socio-economic segmentation was no longer a concern of the pastoralists himself, but a problem of the



Table 1. *Khot-Ail* in comparison with *Suur'*

		<i>Khot-Ail</i> <sup>1</sup>	<i>Suur'</i> <sup>2</sup>
Total number		Approx. 20 000	33 629 <sup>2a</sup>
Form of livestock ownership		Private ownership	Public ownership
Number of families in a union:	Mountains	6-7	1-2
	Steppes	4-5	1-3
	Gobi	2-3	1-2
Livestock type		Mixed	Separate types, also mixed
Number of animals	Mountains		380 for sheep <i>Suur'</i> – for goat <i>Suur'</i> 130 for cattle <i>Suur'</i> 600 for horse <i>Suur'</i> 150 for camel <i>Suur'</i>
	Steppes	750-1200 (mixed)	700 for sheep <i>Suur'</i> 500 for goat <i>Suur'</i> 115 for cattle <i>Suur'</i> 1000 for horse <i>Suur'</i> 200 for camel <i>Suur'</i>
	Gobi		450 for sheep <i>Suur'</i> 390 for goat <i>Suur'</i> 75 for cattle <i>Suur'</i> 500 for horse <i>Suur'</i> 290 for camel <i>Suur'</i>
Number of workers	Mountains	10-12	3 for sheep <i>Suur'</i> – for goat <i>Suur'</i> 3.4 for cattle <i>Suur'</i> 3 for horse <i>Suur'</i> 2 for camel <i>Suur'</i>
	Steppes	7-9	3.7 for sheep <i>Suur'</i> 3 for goat <i>Suur'</i> 2.8 for cattle <i>Suur'</i> 5 for horse <i>Suur'</i> 3 for camel <i>Suur'</i>
	Gobi	5-6	2.5 for sheep <i>Suur'</i> 2.8 for goat <i>Suur'</i> 3.5 for cattle <i>Suur'</i> 3 for horse <i>Suur'</i> 3.5 for camel <i>Suur'</i>
Right to use pasture land		free choice	increasing administratively directed pasture land use

*Negdel* collectives. In the *Negdel* period the *Suur'* replaced the *Khot-Ail* as the

smallest economic unit. It was often described as a new form of the *Khot-Ail*. In

my opinion, however the *Suur'* was an institution neither structurally nor functionally comparable to the *Khot-Ail*, rather an administration-oriented, rudimentary form of this (Table 1). The *Suur'* structure was in the end determined by directives from the the state. Livestock keepers for their part had no incentive to intensively maintain the livestock of the collective. The participation of members in the collective's labour, for example the minimum number of working hours, the responsibility of members for the *Negdel* collective, the quantity of private stock etc., were all legally determined by the ever reformulated rules of the Central Council of Livestock Economic Collectives. The majority of livestock keepers therefore felt estranged. They were forced to deliver to the *Negdel* quantities of wool, hair, milk, meat, hide etc., all of which had been calculated by the collective according to the number and types of animals. This is shown clearly in the expression „burdened stock“ (Mong. *yalny mal*) which became prevalent amongst livestock keepers in the *Negdel* period. It was obvious that the *Suur'* structure did not work. In the latter stages of this period it came to be more frequently discussed how labour cooperation in livestock keeping could be optimised and what form it should take.

*From 1991:*

With the renewed privatisation of livestock in consequence of the change of political system, new conditions again arose for the formation of *Khot-Ail* unions. Although until now there is no real union which could be compared with the classic *Khot-Ail*, there exists an immediate prerequisite for the formation of *Khot-Ail*, namely the individual ownership of stock. The stock, which had been divided within the 255 *Negdel* collectives and which comprised 77% of the country's livestock (the remainder belonged

as private property to the rural population or were state property), was almost completely privatised. 95.9%, that is 27,412,700 animals, from the total stock of the country (28,570,600) today belong to about 270,000 separate pastoral families, while the rest belong to economic companies, cooperatives (*Khorsoo*) and various public organisations. There are now only 197 such companies and cooperatives with limited liability and they own about 967,200 animals, that is each in average 5,000 animals. This means that they are not in a position to conduct livestock business on a large scale and to take over the work of the former *Negdel* collectives. Thus the fate of the livestock economy in Mongolia remains uncertain so long as livestock keepers remain separate. Although at the end of 1995 28,570,600 animals were registered, they are no guarantee for the stable development of livestock keeping. If one considers that in the last five years the export of stock has dropped by a factor of three to four in comparison to 1990 and that on account of the dramatic decrease in the income of the urban population (ca. US\$35 per month) less meat is being bought so that yearly about 2,632,900 less animals are needed (Zasgiyn 17.01.96: 2; Ardyn 06.04.96: 3), then the quantity of stock at the end of 1995 is in no way surprising, nor should it be interpreted as a sharp increase, as is now so willingly done.

### Social relationships within the *Khot-Ail* structure, their functions and significance

The many reports resulting from research projects conducted in the last few years convey the impression that socio-economic institutions of nomadic animal husbandry in Mongolia are structured in a logically increasing manner: *Ail* (live-



stock keeping family), *Khot-Ail* (group of livestock keeping families), *Saakhalt-Ail* (neighbouring group of livestock keeping families) and *Neg-usnykhan* or *Neg-nutgiynkhan* (livestock keeping families from a region), the last being the largest institution. This representation may appear systematic but does not correspond to reality. In my opinion the last two terms, *Saakhalt-Ail* and *Neg-nutgiynkhan* or *Neg-usnykhan*, do not describe socio-economic units of livestock keeping at all. They were and are today rather abstract terms only used ethnologically and do not represent an institutionalised social and economic union of livestock keeping families. Despite the fact that Mongolian nomads have been organised military-administratively or territorial-administratively as a result of certain policies throughout their history, their socio-economic organisation has been as a rule quite simple. In this respect the *Khot-Ail* was the main and the only effective form socio-economic institution since the middle of the last century. Until the collective oriented reorganisation of 1958-1960, livestock keeping families worked together within the framework of the *Khot-Ail*. Families belonging to a *Khot-Ail* were dependent upon one another in a social, economic and emotional manner. Relationships between families within a *Khot-Ail* were certainly much stronger than those between different *Khot-Ail*. The *Khot-Ail* groupings at that time belonged to the then territorial-administrative units *Khoshuu* and, from 1932, *Sum*. This demonstrates that social relations of the rural population with the outer world were practically conducted through the *Khot-Ail*:

- Economic relations between livestock keepers, such as constant or seasonal cooperation in times of migration, marketing of products, construction of winter and spring stables, laying in of the hay supply, digging of wells, shear-

ing of wool etc.. Moreover it may be assumed that the improvement of stock pedigree by means of selective breeding was part of the economic cooperation between livestock owning families.

- Family relations of differing degrees, all of which created an environment where members were strongly ethically bound to one another, being reliable and responsible for one another. This guaranteed the stability of the community household. Mutual obligation and responsibility are important prerequisites for pastoralists to be able to continue with their livelihood.

- Communication function: *Khot-Ail* was also an important social environment for the exchange of information and experience and for the training of future livestock keepers. There were various forms in which this exchange could take place, such as get-togethers of various sorts, common pastures in summer and autumn, etc..

- Significance for demographic equilibrium: *Khot-Ail* was a socio-demographic unit. Because the cooperation of labour of mobile husbandry formed the basis of the *Khot-Ail* union, the suitable demographic organisation of labour, i.e. the labour of men, women and children, was not without significance. Through this the distribution of the sexes and of age and the growth of the rural population were regulated.

- Socio-psychological function: traditional, ethical relations amongst livestock keepers made for a peaceful living together in the use of pasture regions, etc. Various problems could arise in the use of pasture land which could be regulated by the traditional ethical norms of the nomadic way of life.

- Political significance: military, administrative, territorial, economic regulations.

## Economic background of the *Khot-Ail* union

The main principles of the existence and activity of the *Khot-Ail* unions were above all based on economic interests. The inclusion of additional labour of this or that form within a household had at all times great economic importance in Mongolian nomadic animal husbandry. The livestock economy was extensive and a large amount of labour was required. The prerequisite for cooperation within a *Khot-Ail* was therefore determined by economic interests for which the quantity of livestock formed a basis. The spectrum of such interests according to the supply of livestock can be represented in the following way:

1. The interests of livestock keepers with large herds: the larger the household, or the larger the herds, the greater are the problems of labour. This means that families with much livestock very often suffer from shortage of labour and are therefore anxious to cooperate with families owning few animals and thus having spare labour. From the end of the 19th century to the start of the 20th century there were more than 3,000 families owning more than 1,000 animals and about thirty families with eighteen to twenty thousand animals (Idsinnorov 1986: 15). The accumulation of animals thus meant that the above mentioned cooperation within the *Khot-Ail* became necessary. For example a wealthy stock keeper, a certain Süren, who came from the *Khoshuu Da-chin Vang* of the then *Tusheet-Khan Aimag* (today the *Orkhon-Sum* of the *Bulgan Aimag*), was registered as having 19,669 animals in the year 1918. Four poor families with fifteen members all together had been included in his *Khot-Ail*. For each member of these four families there were one to three *bod*<sup>11</sup> and 0-8.8 *bog*<sup>12</sup> of private animals. Also the other 152 families of the

*Khot-Ail* tended 17,264 of his animals (Ulsyn tütükhyn f.A.16). It is also interesting that after the People's Revolution of 1921 until the fifties a good deal of such *Khot-Ail* unions were formed mainly amongst mutually related families. The reason for this was that the wealthy disguised the appropriation of labour from poor families under the pretext of family relations, since at that time economic sanctions were imposed upon those who appropriated herding labour. Hitherto in Mongolia such cooperation, comparable to that of the traditional classical *Khot-Ail*, has developed only to a small degree owing to the small number of families owning much livestock. In the middle of 1994 there were in Mongolia only 142 families with a thousand or more animals each. Today this number has risen to 306 families (Zasgiyn 18.01.96: 1). Thus it is gradually becoming visible that families which have accumulated much stock since the dissolution of the *Negdel* stand in need of a *Khot-Ail* cooperation. Already in 1994 the beginnings of a paid labour system were discernible among the above mentioned 142 families. For example one livestock keeper, a certain Khenmedekh from the *Sergelen-Sum Töv-Aimag* (as the second richest man in the country he then had 1,240 animals and is today the richest stock keeper with 2,358 animals) explained that additional labour was urgently required since he and his family alone were no longer in the position to maintain his livestock (Zasgiyn 08.01.96: 1). Today there are about 3,500 pastoral families, i.e. 1.2%, owning more than 500 animals. They each employ one to six families as additional labour (Table 2).

2. Families of average wealth have cooperated with one another for the most part in the area of livestock supply, since the amount of labour required within a family has corresponded in gen-

Table 2: Number of livestock keeping families in Mongolia and percentage break-up of the number of animals per household in 1927, 1952 and 1995/6

	Number of livestock keeping families	Number of animals									
		0-10	11-20	21-30	31-50	51-100	101-200	201-300	301-500	500-1000	1000+
1995/96 <sup>1</sup>	283,900	15.4%	17.8%		14.2%	21.5%	18.9%	11%		1.1%	0.1%
1952 <sup>2</sup>	216,400	46%			48.7%				5.3%		
1927 <sup>3</sup>	155,600	63.7%		34.2%				2.1%			
		Households without surplus production			Households with surplus production						

eral to the size of the family household. This form of *Khot-Ail* cooperation has not spread much. Many families manage alone or help one another occasionally during the difficult seasonal peak periods of work. There are also other interests for those joined in this manner. The mingling of stock creates for all sides favourable conditions for grazing and tending. There is a good deal of experience amongst livestock keepers concerning the mutual hygienic influences and nutritional effects when different types of animals mix, as well as concerning the need for the regeneration of vegetation resources in the pasture regions. Thus the formation of an optimal mix of animal types is one of the motivations of livestock keepers of average wealth for building a common household or bringing together of stock. This sort of *Khot-Ail* cooperation is in my opinion desirable today.

3. Poor families were almost always connected to wealthy families in a *Khot-Ail*. This system was extensive until the fifties. When poor families possessed only a small quantity of livestock sufficient however for their livelihood, they stood only in an economic relation towards the wealthy families. In this case their labour obligations towards the wealthy were accepted under limited conditions. When poor families were not able to subsist by themselves owing to an insufficient quantity of stock, they were linked with the wealthy families both economically and socially. In 1936 for example 47.66% of all livestock keeping families possessed twenty bod or less and 74.7% of these poor families had no animals at all (BNMAU 1939: 35). Because the number of poor husbanders was reduced, following the redistribution of livestock confiscated from the nobility and high clergy in the thirties and due to economic and political measures favouring the improvement of the poor

households, this system gradually died out. Under the conditions of extensive nomadic pastoralism of Mongolia, which is fully dependent upon the natural environment, a family with five or six members and possessing a hundred indigenous animals or less has little chance of producing a surplus and can only satisfy its own needs. 68.9% of livestock keeping families are in this position today (Table 2). In some *Aimag* the proportion is extremely high, for example in the *Khentii Aimag* it is 80% (Ardyn 03.04.96: 6). The correspondence of economic interests between wealthy and poor families leads frequently, however, to a neglect of family relations. Traditional family relations, which were characteristic for the nomadic way of life, are increasingly being superceded and exist now only in a rudimentary form. Today, five years after the dissolution of the *Negdel*, there are once again more poor families. Over 30% of the rural population lives below the poverty level (Khümüün 1.1995: 5), and the trend is increasing. Within four years 1,023 of the 13,375 herding families of the *Khentii Aimag* were without livestock (Ardyn 03.04.96: 6). For this reason it has become unavoidable that the *Khot-Ail* network should again function in order to ensure the livelihood of the poor.

### Family relations within the *Khot-Ail*

Scholarly opinion concerning the nature of the *Khot-Ail* is in essence of two types:

1. Family membership formed the core of the *Khot-Ail* and was closely linked with traditional family ordering. This opinion prevailed amongst scholars in the thirties.

2. The grouping was more a form of organisation of labour determined eco-

nomically. In investigations since the fifties the opinion prevailed that the *Khot-Ail* was shaped more strongly by economic influences.

These different opinions show that in describing the *Khot-Ail* there exists the problem of whether to emphasise the economic or the social side. In my view the *Khot-Ail*, just as the *Khiiree*, should be characterised by both its economic and its social functions, although the economic motivation was the essence of a *Khot-Ail* union. This economically motivated cooperation between livestock keeping families was as a rule built upon the basis of family relations under the conditions of traditional nomadic stock-keeping.

There were three variants of amalgamation within a *Khot-Ail*:

1. *Khot-Ail* based on family relations,
2. *Khot-Ail* based on a core of related families to which additional unrelated families had linked,
3. *Khot-Ail* composed essentially of unrelated families: although some families might have been related, this played little role in the community.

These variants exist even today in a rudimentary form in rural regions (Improved 1993: 21). Although all these types of *Khot-Ails* existed more or less synchronically, it can be seen that on account of prevailing economic and political conditions one or the other came to predominate. They also represent the continual loss of importance of family relations within the *Khot-Ail*. The first variant predominated in the first half of the 19th century. The significance of traditional descent groupings grew ever smaller in the course of time. In the 19th century both descent and collateral relations were to be seen in the family groups. The inclusion of Mongolia into the field of influence of international finance and the country's development in the period from the second half of the

19th century to the start of the 20th century as a source of raw materials and as a market for capitalist powers such as Tsarist Russia, the U.S.A., Great Britain, Japan and China, intensified the country's economic crisis. Mongolia had at the start of the 20th century debts to China amounting to eleven million *lang*<sup>13</sup>-silver (Ocherki 1971: 8), which was calculated as 100 *lang* per family on average. This had an effect upon the economic situation of the *Khot-Ail*. High taxes of various sorts, other compulsory contributions, the growing economic pressure to increase the supply of livestock and the resulting demand for labour all forced livestock keepers within the household cooperation of the *Khot-Ail* to give priority to economic concerns. Therefore, the second and later the third variant of *Khot-Ail* spread. In these second and third variants there was, however, quite often a connection of friendship. It is nonetheless worth mentioning that there were individual pastoral families not associated with any cooperative household until the formation of the collectives at the end of the fifties.

Family relations of a traditional sort have today loosened. Rural social structuring is no longer determined by close blood relations. There is hardly a single social segmentation unit which consists of descent groupings – if there is such a group then its inner structure and function bear no resemblance to the traditional form.

### Appropriate size of a *Khot-Ail*

From the research material of the thirties it is possible to estimate the size of a *Khot-Ail*. The number of families in a *Khot-Ail* depended upon the prevailing natural conditions. In the mountain and the mountain steppe zones a *Khot-Ail*



with six or seven herder families in summer and autumn and two or three in winter and spring, was regarded as appropriate. In the Gobi region a *Khot-Ail* consisted mostly of only two or three families. On account of the sparse vegetation per unit of pasture area and of poor soil fertility it was preferable to make use of pasture land in separate families or small family circles. Also herders were obliged to migrate very frequently since quite large pasture areas were required, and it is more favourable to do so either separately or in small family groups. For these reasons large *Khot-Ail* unions are not characteristic of the Gobi region. This all indicates that the number of families belonging to a *Khot-Ail* stood in close connection to the extent of available pasture land.

Thus the number of families in a *Khot-Ail* was essentially determined by the following factors:

- an economic interest in optimal labour cooperation and the least possible labour expenditure in stock-keeping;
- optimal adjustment of the distribution of the sexes and of age of the available workers to the kind and expenditure of labour required;
- extent of the prevailing pasture region: owing to a desire for the least possible migrations within a pasture area which provides sufficient annual fodder supply, the number of connected families must be optimised according to the pasture region;
- the need for a certain type and quantity of stock: for an optimal use of the pasture land taking the types of animals into consideration, for the supply of food, for the creation of favourable conditions for the breeding of stock, for the availability of pack animals for migration etc., the type and quantity of stock of the connected families should be considered.

### Leadership of a *Khot-Ail*

Within a *Khot-Ail* union one family ultimately played a leading role. The head of this family was normally the leader of the *Khot-Ail*. There were however other criteria according to which who could or should be the *Khot-Ail* leader.

- According to birth: in the *Khot-Ail* union until the 19th century, the principle of descent predominated and the son and heir took over the responsibility of the *Khot-Ail* leadership. As a rudiment of this tradition the term „*Akh*“ (older brother) was used amongst livestock keepers of the Khangai Mountain regions until the *Negdel* period. In later times this term had hardly any connection to traditional descent. The terms „*Akh*“ and „*Akhlagc*“ (leading brother, leader) had the same meaning and were both used, the difference lying only in the size of the unit. For example „*Akh*“ was used for the designation of the leader of a small group and „*Akhlagc*“ for a larger group. Already in the 17th century these different meanings existed in the „Mongolian-Oiratic Regulation of 1640“ the terms „*Ailyn akh*“ and „*Aimgiyn akhlagc*“ frequently appear (Dylykov 1981: 98, 111, 120).

- According to wealth: since wealthy families mostly formed the core of a *Khot-Ail*, the head of the economically leading family came also to be its leader. A microsocial condition for this was that either family relations had been increasingly neglected or the families were not at all related.

- According to experience and authority: when neither of the above situations applied, the leader was chosen according to his experience, competence, amiability, loyalty etc.

These conditions were not always disparate but could also occur together.



Table 3: Length and frequency of the annually migration of livestock keepers

	Mountains		Steppes		Gobi	
	Length of migration	Frequency of migration	Length of migration	Frequency of migration	Length of migration	Frequency of migration
1930's	10-12km	7-8	150-200km	10		
1940's	15km	4-10	200km	10		
1950's	15-20km	6-8	30-40km	7-8	50-100km	15

### Right of a *Khot-Ail* to use a pasture region

Traditionally the *Khot-Ail* used definite pasture regions for the seasonal migrations. The suitable pasture region of a *Khoshuu* was divided amongst the *Khot-Ail*. Official files show that from the end of the 18th century until 1932 throughout the various parts of the various *Khoshuu* assemblies of stock-keepers took place in the presence of those responsible for the respective *Khoshuu*, during which the pasture region was divided amongst *Khot-Ail* unions, and also that with this division of pasture land the borders were determined by mountain crests, stone piles and rivers. Livestock keepers at first mutually respected their pasture regions and in principle did not cross their borders. With the increase of territorial-administrative units in the 19th century, whereby the pasture area necessary for the yearly seasonal migrations was not always zonally well considered, the traditional use of pasture land became problematic. This is indicated by the fact that from the second half of the 19th century the winter site was designated in most cases by the name of the owner.

In legal regulations there are two different designations for pasture land: *Ötög, Buuc* (winter and spring site) and *Bilcheer-us* (summer and autumn pasturage). In *Ötög-Buuc* one had permanent housing at one's disposal. Despite the fact that livestock keepers sometimes grazed their stock alone for weeks on

end at a distant site, in principle they remained stationary the entire winter at the *Ötög-Buuc*. In *Bilcheer-us* the pasture sites were often shifted. A *Khot-Ail* therefore had *Ötög-Buuc* as well as *Bilcheer-us*. The distances between *Khot-Ail* were different in the differing natural zones (Table 3). The Soviet scholar A. D. Simukov reported in his study at the start of the thirties in the South Gobi region that the distances between the *Ötög-Buuc* of the *Khot-Ail* amounted to seven to ten kilometres, in some cases fifteen kilometres<sup>14</sup>.

Probably this was only the horizontal distance between the *Khot-Ails*. Vertically they had to be much more distant because the *Khot-Ail* traditionally used sets of highland and lowland pastures. But there are only poor data on this and the distances are only indicated by the length of the annual migration of the *Khot-Ails* (Table 3).

### Conclusion

The institutionalisation of an appropriate rural, socio-economic unit among private nomadic pastoralists is one of the most important factors for the continued existence of livestock keepers as well as for a rise in productivity of the livestock economy in Mongolia. If the spontaneous development process in rural areas, which prevails today, continues then the livestock economy, which is the economic base of the country, will find itself in difficulties.

The traditional *Khot-Ail* union is an example for an optimal socio-economic unit which should be formed under special market conditions. Today, five years after the dissolution of the *Negdel*, there are no *Khot-Ail* in their known form. An important reason for the delay in the reinstitutionalisation of the *Khot-Ail* is that at the moment the legal basis of a *Khot-Ail* unit, in other words its recognition as a legal entity and its right to use pasture land, is still missing.

#### Sources for Table 1:

(1) Simukov, A. D., „Khotony“, in *Sovremennaya Mongoliya* (Contemporary Mongolia), 1933, No. 3; „Mongolskie kochevki“, *ibid*, 1934, No. 4; „Materialy po kochevomu bytu naseleniya M.N.R.“, *ibid*, 1935, No. 6 and 1936, No. 2; Azarov, S., „Zivotnovodcheskaja tekhnika kochevogo khozjaistvo“ *ibid*, 1933, No. 2; Ceval, Ya., „Kochevki“, *ibid*, 1933, No. 2; Shul'zenko, I. F., „Rezultaty issledovaniy po zivotnovodstvu mongolii“, Ulan Bator, 1946; Pecnikov, A. M., *Zivotnovodstvo MNR* (Materialy gosudarstvennoi statistiki), Ulan Bator, 1949; also private communications

(2) „Unen“ (newspaper) 12th Aug. 1963  
 (2a) Onuki, N., *Mongolyn nüüdliin mal az akhuin niigmiin orchin üe*, Osaka, 1990, p. 65

#### Sources for Table 2:

(1) Ardyn Erkh (newspaper), 29th Feb. 1996, p. 3  
 (2) S. K. Roshcin, *Sel'skoe khozjaistvo MNR na socialisticheskom puti*, Moscow, 1971, p. 22  
 (3) L. Bat-Ochir, *Ard angi: butec, öörchölt, khorshoozilt*, Ulan Bator, 1986, p. 72

#### Sources for Table 3:

Ceval, Ya., „Kocevki“, in *Sovremennaya Mongoliya*, 1933, no. 1; Azarov, S., „Zivotnovodcheskaya tekhnika kochevogo khozjaistva“, in *Sovremennaya Mongoliya*, 1933, no. 2; Simukov, A. D., „Khotony“, in *Sovremennaya Mongoliya*, 1933, no. 3; „Mongolskie kochevki“, in *Sovremennaya Mongoliya*, 1934, no. 4; „Materialy po kochevomu bytu naseleniya M.N.R. in *Sovremennaya Mongoliya*, 1935, no. 6 and 1936, no. 2; Shul'zenko, I. F., *Rezultaty issledovaniy po zivotnovodstvu mongolii*, Ulan Bator, 1946; Pecnikov, A. M., *Zivotnovodstvo Mongol'skoi Narodnoi Respubliki*, Ulan Bator, 1949, vol. 1; Zagvaral, N., *Aratstvo i aratskoe khozjaistvo*, Ulan Bator, 1976

#### Notes:

(1) Damdinsüren 1957, §124, §195; Vietze and Lubsang 1992, see in index for „qota“

(2) *Khot-Ail* has been in general translated as *fenced enclosure, stalls, collection of yurts, village*, etc. The best descriptions can be found in Pallas (1776, pp. 142-143) for the Kalmucks, Radloff (1892, p. 462) for the Kazakhs, Vreeland (1957) for the Mongols of Mongolia in the 20th century, Mostaert (1956, pp. 279-289) for the Ordos region. For the 16th century the report of Siao-ta-heng should be mentioned (Serruys 1945). For the 13th century see also Carpini and Rubruk and the Meng-ta-Bei-lu (Munkuev 1975, Ch. 8 and 12). For further details see Potanin, 1879-1883.

(3) *Negdel*: livestock economic collective in Mongolia from 1958 to 1991.

(4) See Rashid ad-Din 1957; Süchbaatar 1971, p.157

- (5) See Vladimirchov 1934, pp. 37-38, 65, 82-83, 86; Nacagdorz 1978, pp. 43-46
- (6) *Ail*: yurt, livestock keeping family, yurt site, nomadic livestock keeping farm.
- (7) „Mongol-Oirat Regulations of 1640“: the threatening growth of Manchurian power compelled the princes of Outer Mongolia (*Khalkha Mongolia*) and the Oirats of West Mongolia to take energetic steps toward an internal stabilisation and an outward directed defence. At the instigation of the Oiratic prince Baatar-Khan, princes from forty Outer Mongolian and four Oiratic realms of ten thousand assembled in 1640. One of the results of this assembly was the written record of a large series of norms which were collected in the legal code „Caaziyn bicig“ or „Mongol-Oirat Regulations“.
- (8) *Otog* and *Aimag*: these words underwent in the course of time appreciable changes of meaning. From the 17th century *Aimag* became the designation for the territorial-administrative main unit of Mongolia. *Otog* had at this time the same meaning as the term *Khoshuu*. Later it became a designation for the pasture land and subject property of the high clergy.
- (9) *Khoshuu*: the territorial-administrative unit in Mongolia in the period 1691-1932. Although the term *Khoshuu* had been used much earlier, since the middle of the 16th century, it did not at that time have the meaning of a strongly controlled territorial-administrative unit.
- (10) *Khalkha Zuram* or *Qalq-a Jirum* (ancient Mong.), a well known code of laws of Outer Mongolia which was several times from 1709 to 1770 reworked and expanded. The code was drafted in 1709 by Mongolian princes of the *Tüseet-Khan-Aimag* under the chairmanship of the *Aimag-Khan*.
- (11) *Bod*: animal unit used in Mongolia – one cow or one horse = 1 *bod*, one camel

= 1.5 *bod*, one sheep = 0.7 *bod* and one goat = 0.9 *bod*

(12) *Bog*: a small animal unit used in Mongolia – one sheep = 1 *bog*, one goat = 0.7 *bog*, one horse, one cow or one yak = 7 *bog* and one camel = 15 *bog*

(13) Chinese currency unit: 1 *lang* = 37,3g silver

(14) See Simukov 1933, No. 3; 1934, No. 4; 1935, No. 6 and 1936, No. 2.

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### Resumé

Le *kot-ail* fut pendant longtemps en Mongolie un groupement de familles d'éleveurs, lequel était parfaitement adapté aux conditions de pâturage de la région. Pendant la réorganisation structurelle qui eut lieu entre les années 1960 et les années 1990, les ménages furent réorganisés en *negdel* et la propriété privée de bétail interdite. Au cours des cinq dernières années il y eut cependant une restriction avec un retransfert des biens de l'Etat et des biens collectifs en propriété privée. 80% environ des éleveurs n'a connu que cette période *negdel* et ne connaît pas la période précédente du *kot-ail*. Il s'agit donc ici d'une analyse historique de l'évolution du *khot-ail*, de la description de son organisation et de son fonctionnement.

### Resumen

El *khot-ail* constituyó en Mongolia durante mucho tiempo una asociación de familias de pastores, adaptada de manera óptima a las condiciones de pasturas de la región. En el marco de la reorganización estructural entre los años 60 y 90 las unidades domésticas fueron agrupadas en *negdel* y se prohibió la propiedad privada de animales. En los últimos años se llevó a cabo una nueva reestructuración, que transformó propiedad estatal y comunal en propiedad privada. Sin embargo, alrededor del 80 % de los criadores de ganado solamente han experimentado el período del *negdel* y desconocen el tiempo del *khot-ail*. El presente trabajo delinearé el desarrollo histórico de los *khot-ail*, describiendo su organización y su función.

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