

## Chiefly and Shamanist Landscapes in Mongolia

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The Western idea of 'the landscape' arises from objectification and is closely related to practices such as painting, map-making, song, and poetry. The secular, appreciative gaze is certainly not unknown among the Mongols. But it was historically intermittent and was inspired by non-Mongol kinds of representation, such as Manchu maps, Chinese and Russian landscape painting, or the 'genre' scenes in Tibetan religious paintings. In Mongolian culture itself landscapes are more in the nature of practices designed to have results: it is not contemplation of the land (*gazar*) that is important but interaction with it, as something with energies far greater than the human. The Mongols do not take over any terrain in the vicinity and transform it into something that is their own. Instead, they move within a space and environment where some kind of pastoral life is possible and 'in-habit' it. That is to say, they let it pervade them and their herds, influencing where they settle, when they move, and what kinds of animals they keep. However, this is not a pre-reflective or spontaneous existence, but one recognizing human choice and agencies, which are conceived as interrelated with and subordinate to the agencies attributed to entities in the land. Thus the Mongols choose to avoid forests and narrow ravines, preferring wide-open steppes, where the land is before them in a limitless expanse. But the most featureless plain has its gentle curves, or bushes, or marshy patches, and even such entities are credited with powers of some kind. I shall use the word 'landscape' to designate the ways in which these energies are envisaged, or, to put this another way, to describe the concepts by which social agencies constitute the physical world.

There are at least two ways of being in the landscape, which are simultaneous possibilities for any Mongol group. Each combines its own sense of place with spatial awareness.<sup>1</sup> The extent to which either of these emerged in history is a function of complex political, economic, and religious interrelationships, and this chapter, which aims to provide an overview of a vast region (see map) in both time and space, will be able to provide only schematic explanations of the processes involved.

The two landscapes engage different notions of energies-in-nature and the social agencies by which such powers may be harnessed to human benefit. One is that of the chief or ruler, and the other is that of the shaman. Both chiefs and



FIG. 6.1. Inner Asia.

shamans 'have power', but such powers should not be seen as if they were metaphorical substances somehow 'gained' or acquired by a pre-existing subject. Rather, they emerge by the exercise of different forms of agency which are socially constituted in basically asymmetrical ways. Very briefly, chiefly agency derives from patrilineal males which constantly reconstitute themselves as 'the same' through generations, and they are successful in so far as they can prevail upon the powers in the land, which are often anthropomorphized as kings and warriors, to produce fertility, health, and prosperity among people and livestock. Shamanist agency, on the other hand, acknowledges and celebrates difference. Shamanic legitimation derives directly from the ability to manifest in inspirational performances the energies perceived in 'nature' (*baikal*, 'what is', an idea of nature which is not separate from but includes human beings). The energies in the land are not envisaged as ranks of similar male spirits but as the myriad abilities of beings in the world: the ability of a fish to live under water, of an evergreen tree to flourish through the winter, or of a falcon to swoop on a virtually invisible prey. Shamans also use ideas of anthropomorphic spirits which are the 'souls' of the deceased, but these tend to dissolve with time into the nameless energies of particular beings or sites, a process which will be described later in this chapter. The more various the abilities (*chadal*) which can be cumulated magically in the shaman the better.

Common to both views is the idea that entities in nature have their own 'majesty' (*sur*) or effectiveness (*chadal*) which does not derive from human spirits but is simply there. This idea is often the first to be expressed when Mongols talk about the land and is perhaps a more fundamental Mongolian

attitude than the idea of spirits. Power relationships between natural entities are used as explanations of the visible features of the land. In northern Mongolia the play of fierce sun and shade has resulted in a relief of bare south-facing slopes and forested north-facing ones, a dappled pattern stretching as far as the eye can see. The flat, sandy Gobi region, on the other hand, is dotted here and there with tamarisk bushes.

According to Arash there was once a war between the tamarisk or *jagha* and a tree called *khara modo*. The name means black-wood, but it turns yellow in winter. Perhaps it is a juniper. Arash did not know what was the cause of the war, but the tamarisk won and remained in possession of the sands. The black-wood ran away, and to this day is found only on the northern sides of mountains in Outer Mongolia. A single tree may stand on the crest, or several may look over the ridge, but they never come further. (Lattimore 1942: 207)

It seems that the black-wood, when it burns, crackles and throws off sparks. But Arash told Lattimore that this crackling and spitting stops if you put some of the 'victorious' tamarisk on a black-wood fire; the black-wood will be frightened and keep quiet (*ibid.*).

The human relation to natural entities is analogous: their unpredictable energies and beneficial powers can be tamed by ritualized actions. People have their own relationships with particular mountains, cliffs, or trees<sup>2</sup> which they feel to be especially influential in their lives. A Mongolian friend told me that when he was travelling and unable to make offerings to 'his' mountain, he nevertheless called upon it in case it should be angered by his neglect: 'My mountain (*minii uul*), please help me! I haven't forgotten you, my mountain, I have just had to go away for a necessary reason.' Such an individual relation with a mountain is documented from as long ago as the thirteenth century,<sup>3</sup> but this chapter will be concerned with the social aspect of this attitude. Some physical objects are worshipped<sup>4</sup> only by a few people, some by whole communities, and a few by virtually all Mongols (Abayeva 1992). It will be suggested here that even a family ritual of worship partakes of a 'view' with regard to the natural object. The 'family' may constitute itself as a subsection of a patrilineage or as the group defended by a shaman, and in these cases two alternative landscapes present worlds in which there are different objects of worship. Both chiefs and shamans engage with the land on behalf of social groups. Characteristically the chiefly social group does not include women, whereas the shamanic one does.

### *Chiefs and Shamans: Background to a Latent Conflict*

The points of view, which create their own landscapes, are just that. It is important to note that they are not in principle identified with 'societies'. Thus it would be incorrect to say of some Mongol group that they 'are shamanists' as

though that is all that needs to be said. All groups have both chiefs and shamans, as well as a number of other socio-cultural categories of people with 'supernatural' abilities and their own views on the world (midwives, smiths, bone-setters, diviners, hunters, astrologers, and others). This chapter singles out the landscapes of chiefs and shamans because the views of these two categories are engaged in large-scale rituals which involve all members of the local group, whereas midwives, bonesetters, etc. have a more restricted realm of practice. But as regards any given person the chiefly and shamanist views are not exclusive. To take the early twentieth-century Buryat Mongols as an example: a shaman as a lay person (not a shaman) would attend a ritual directed by a chief, just as a chief would often find occasion to be present as a patient or client at a shaman's ritual. Today the ritual calendar of Buryat collective farmers comprises a series of both kinds of ritual, and lay people attend both (Abayeva 1992).

It is because chiefly and shamanic rituals present different views on the world, and people in general can find one or the other more compelling, that there is a latent tension between them. There is an important asymmetry here, in that chiefs have historically aspired to global power in society, whereas shamans do not have such aims and in any case are limited by the face-to-face and oral nature of their constituencies. Chiefs in the process of military expansion repressed shamans in an attempt to obliterate alternative kinds of agency (see Humphrey 1994). On the other hand, when native political organization came under threat and was generally seen as weak and unsuccessful, the people might turn their allegiance to shamans. This happened, for example, when Russian peasant settlers backed by aggressive Cossacks encroached on Western Buryat lands in the nineteenth century, causing widespread poverty, brigandage, and a sense of humiliation. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the consequent weakness of the Mongolian government, there has also been a resurgence of shamanism in north and western Mongolia.

Having recourse to a shaman often had direct influence on use of the land. From 1865 to 1870 a series of droughts convinced the elders of the Gushid Buryats that they should abandon their village and move to a different region. To confirm this decision they invited a famous shaman. He, however, said that they should on no account move. The problem was that they had been cutting wood at Upxyr nearby, 'angering' the forest. The Gushid obeyed his command to stop cutting down the trees of Upxyr, and in a few years a thick young wood had regrown, a dried-up spring gave water again, and this enabled the people to irrigate their pastures. In thanks to the shaman and the spirit of the spring the Gushid instituted an annual sacrifice (Mikhailov 1987: 118). Such was the prestige of shamans among the colonized and downtrodden Western Buryats in the nineteenth century that chiefs in many places declared themselves also to be shamans and practised as such. In other parts of West Buryatia shamans took over the customarily chiefly task of sacrifice to ancestral spirits domiciled in the

land (Mikhailov 1987: 115). In such rituals the shamans acted in the chiefly idiom on behalf of patrilineal groups. The chiefly ritual repertoire consists mainly of prayers, sacrifices, and offerings, and the 'beckoning' of spirits down to accept them. This contrasts with the shamanic experience of spirit presence through trance. The fact that shamans could operate in the chiefly way did not prevent them from performing in the shamanic idiom on other occasions (curing, exorcising, conducting consecrations of vessels for spirits, contacting spirits to divine future events, etc.), all of which were done by means of trance. This dual role of shamans in circumstances when chiefly efficacy was in doubt is discussed in Humphrey (1994).

The asymmetry between chief and shaman derives from the fact that although the category of 'chief' could vary in practice from a dominant elder of a sub-lineage to an emperor, the idea always was that this was a social role, usually legitimated by patrilineal descent. Being a 'shaman', on the other hand, was not in essence a social role or a profession but was seen as an ability, something which could descend on anyone, women as well as men, by choice of the spirits. However, in the end, a chief too was successful not just by descent but by something like ability, his destiny (*zayaga*). Chiefly destiny was seen as an absolute, manifest in the power, militancy, and achievements of the leader, and brooking no interference or dilution. This is why successful chiefs could not tolerate the myriad and unpredictable powers of shamans, for whom 'destiny' was but one among a host of forces about in the world.

Thus the imperial patriline of Chinggis Khaan,<sup>6</sup> known as the Borjigid, which has provided leaders throughout most of Mongolia since the thirteenth century, was thought by the Xorchin Mongols to be incompatible with shamanism. On the other hand, the Borjigid were said to include and to accord high respect to another category of inspirational practitioners, bone-setters.<sup>7</sup> This may be connected with the symbolism of bones, which not only metaphorically stand for male descent in general but are also used (by counting the joints in the limbs) to reckon generations in genealogies.

Given social groups in different historical circumstances have emphasized one or other of the two views. Explanations for this are bound to be complex and multilayered. A change, say from a predominantly shamanic to a more chiefly ritual process, can be explained by analysis of the economic, political, and religious circumstances in which the shamanic field of agency was contested. However, it is also observable that over the longer term (since the thirteenth century) some peripheral regions of Mongolia have never developed strong chieftainship and are renowned for their shamanism, whereas other areas have repeatedly seen the rise of empires, principedoms, and other forms of centralized polity, which was accompanied each time by repression of shamanism. When the State collapsed shamanism reappeared. The centralized polities emerged in the vast region of the central treeless steppes. The more

shamanically inclined groups are found on the western, northern, and eastern peripheries, where grassland is interspersed with forests, mountains, great rivers, and lakes. These observations are not, however, meant to imply that I see 'chiefly' and 'shamanist' viewpoints as timeless, changeless structures within Mongolian 'culture', somehow separate from particular human agencies. On the contrary, I would see Mongolians through history as constantly changing and re-viewing the images by which the world was seen. Nevertheless, it would be an act of wilful historical blindness not to recognize that they often came up with new views which were in many ways 'the same' as those from an earlier time or a different place and using the same vocabulary, though it is beyond the scope of this chapter to attempt a full explanation of this. Chiefly and shamanist landscapes may be seen as reiterative in this sense.

The missions of the Lamaist Buddhists were crucial in the to-some-extent historically recurrent landscapes of the Mongols. There were three phases of advance succeeded by retreat, following in each case the emergence of centralized states: in the fourteenth century under Khubilai Khaan, at the turn of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries with the short-lived States of Xalx, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the consolidation of the Manchu Empire in Mongolia. This last mission was a successful expansion into virtually the whole of the steppe region. Buddhism allied itself with the chiefly sacred geography, and lamas became in effect priests for political leaders. But Buddhism also introduced a moral shift. Spirits were pronounced to be 'good' and 'bad', and furthermore the whole practice of worship of entities of the land was denigrated in comparison with the religious goal of individual salvation. Thus Buddhist lamas took an extremely active part in mountain worship, but they said it was 'not religion'. Indeed, high-ranking Buddhist lamas could adopt a definitely chiefly idiom for the occasion. A prominent lama active in Inner Mongolia in the 1920s wrote:

When I, as a high-ranking *gegeen* [incarnation], went to the *oboo* [mountain-cult site] to participate in the ceremonies, I was always accompanied by various high-ranking lamas and lay disciples. Inasmuch as this was not a Buddhist ceremony, I did not dress in a customary Buddhist gown, but rather in the costume of a lay leader, with a flint and knife in my belt. The dress is formal, with the knives on the right side and the flint and other ornaments on the left. The worshipful bowings at the *oboo* were not performed in the traditional Buddhist custom [...] but rather were a kowtow in the old tradition. (Hyer and Jagchid 1983: 89)

It was comparatively easy for lamas to take over ritual operations at sacred sites hitherto managed only by elders or chiefs. But they ran into opposition, as we shall see, where shamans had added a priestly function at lineage sites to their own inspirational practices elsewhere. Sometimes shamans retreated from these sites and accepted a subordinate status; elsewhere they fled rather than

submit. At yet other places an uneasy syncretism evolved, an example of which will be described at the end of this chapter.

### *A Common Substratum of Landscape Concepts*

The energies in nature should exist and reproduce themselves in harmony. Lying below, as it were, any of the ritual practices referred to above, there is what Lattimore called 'a "code of the laws of nature and the harmony of man with nature" which grows in a spontaneous way out of the practice of being a nomad but is also partly a kind of mystical idealization of the practice' (1942: 211). The 'mystical idealization' Lattimore refers to has effect in a series of injunctions (*yos*), which differ greatly from place to place, but are always precise and always express the idea that the features of the landscape have their own being and nature which should not be disturbed by the activities of man. Now since human beings also have their way of being, which is the pastoral nomadic way of life, this is as valid a part of nature as any other. The *yos* essentially state that any unnecessary disturbance of nature must be avoided, and this includes inanimate entities. So it is wrong to move stones pointlessly from one place to another, or scuff the ground and make marks on it. Such marks must be wiped out with the foot before leaving a place. The circle left on the ground by a kettle should be erased. Burying things in the ground is done only with special rituals. It is wrong to interfere with the reproduction of nature: one must not take eggs, catch nestlings, or hunt young or pregnant animals. Grass should not be torn out by the roots—only withered grass should be collected (Tatar 1984: 321–2).

Injunctions of this kind indicate that the landscape is conceptually divided up into constituent entities credited with their own ongoing form of being. This can be seen, for example, from the rules about where it is forbidden to urinate: in rivers, the ground of the yurt, the livestock pound, on roads, or on places which are the domains of other creatures, e.g. in burrows or in hollows which animals have made to rest in. It is wrong to pollute a river by washing in it, but it is quite allowable to take water out of the river and then wash in it. In other words, it is not water as a substance which is pollutable, but the river as an entity.

A Mongolian landscape seethes with entities which are attributed with anything from a hazy idea of energy to clearly visualized and named spirits. Each planet, mountain, river, lake, lone tree, cliff, marsh, spring, and so forth, has some such 'supernatural' quality, as do animals, birds, fish, insects, humans, and even artefacts, such as tools, or guns, or man-made hay meadows. It is not possible to discern a coherent cosmology in all this. A question about how the spirit of a tree relates to the spirit of the *nutag* (homeland) within which it is found is often unanswerable. However, I shall suggest below that certain lim-

ited practices of conceptually 'putting together' landscapes exist and have rather different properties in chiefly and shamanic contexts.

### *The Chiefly Landscape*

The assumption that humans are nomadic beings is one point where we may start. I shall suggest that it implies, in the chiefly landscape, an ego-centred universe, and thereby the idea that 'the centre' moves. If we understand the landscape, as the Mongols do, as everything around us, then the landscape includes the sky and its phenomena, such as blueness, clouds, rain, lightning, stars, and rays of light. The sky (*tnggri*) is the power above all powers. Not only does it give the light, warmth, and rain which make the earth fertile and allow humans and animals to live, but it also expresses this by means of its will (*zayaga*) which sets out the destinies of all living beings. With this in mind, the idea of 'the centre' is not so much a point in a horizontal disc on the earth, as a notion of verticality, for which position on the earth does not matter. The aim is reaching upwards, the making of a link between earth and sky, as with the column of smoke from a fire. 'The centre' is established anew when people make a halt. It is, in other words, not a place but an action.

It is this notion of power which I suggest was emphasized in the chiefly, hierarchical and statist periods of Mongol history (though it was also present in the practice of the patriarchal family or lineage even in times of political disintegration). The use of space by the steppe Mongols for subsistence, for reasons perhaps largely ecological, in effect 'spirals' on a time axis, as people move through the annual cycle of pastures and repeat such cycles from year to year. Yet although the helical trajectory of Mongol subsistence-space use through time enables their very existence, the ruler-centred politico-religious orientation provides a kind of centripetal force which collapses the spatial dimension around the time axis (Fig. 6.2).

The Polish ethnographer Szykiewicz (1986: 19) showed that the journey between camps is felt to be an event outside the ordinary run of life; people set out at an astrologically determined time, they put on special clothes and use festive harness for their horses.

On the way, young men compete with one another, showing off their horsemanship and prowess. The moment such a caravan is spotted from yurts along the way, all haste is made to prepare tea and carry it out as a testimony of welcome. Those on the move become the guests of all who live on the steppe. At the same time, this ritual comprises a negation of the fundamental principle of nomadic life, namely change. The ritual emphasizes . . . continuity, particularly the idealized permanence of the place occupied in space.

The ritualized journey is thus a spatial liminality, into and out of the otherness of 'travelling that is not travelling'—paradoxically an otherness which serves to



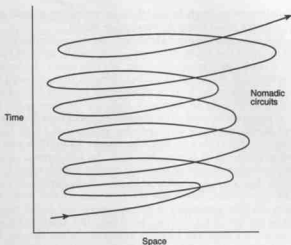


FIG. 6.2. An idealized representation of nomadic circuits in time and space.

reassert the nomadic way of life—thereby negating movement in the everyday world. The time axis, which is universal, and thus locates each household at the centre of the cosmos, is the *axis mundi*. This is an idea which the Mongols do not usually express as a generality, but often come out with in specific instances: the hearth of the tent, with its vertical column of smoke, the worshipped mountain, and the pole which supports the roof-ring are all symbolically the centre of the world. The deified sky alone of all phenomena is given the epithet 'eternal' (*mönke*) by the Mongols of the central steppes. In this landscape, with the collapse of subsistence-space into some kind of 'co-ordinate singularity',<sup>8</sup> we find in its place a social space constructed around the time axis. Time here is ideologically constructed as invariant repetition. Each category of person occupies a certain social space, which is conceived as unambiguous and invariant, repeated at each stopping-place, in a trajectory through time.

The tent itself has an invariant organization of social space, as seniors, juniors, males, females, guests, and animals are accommodated in specific places in relation to the central hearth and the orientation of the door to the south. Males sit to the west and females to the east, seniors to the north and juniors (including servants) to the south. Animals are kept by the door (Humphrey 1974). The concept of 'seniors' (*axmad*) varies in content according to the predominant principle of male-focused social organization; at one time genealogical, in recent times it is more likely to be reckoned by standing in

local administration or simply by age.<sup>9</sup> A similar setting-out of social space is constructed at the site of mountain-worship (see below).

How does such a view construct a landscape? One way of denying movement is not to recognize that places are unique, or intrinsically different from one another. I shall take as characteristic of the chiefly landscape the conceptualization of the central Mongolian plains, an area dominated for the past three centuries by the Manchu state and the Buddhist hierarchy. Here place-names are virtually all descriptive types. So the same rather limited number of names are repeated all the thousands of miles from the Altai to the Hsinggan Mountains. There are numberless examples of *Ulaan Uul* (Red Mountain), *Xar Bulag* (Black Spring), *Elest* (Sandy), *Xujirt* (Place with Soda), or *Bayan-gol* (Rich Valley). It might be thought that such terms are not really names in the sense of designating something specific. But this would be incorrect because there are regions within which, as with the colours of a map, the names are not repeated. Kazakevich (1934: 6) suggests that north-central-Mongolian extensive pastoralism in the pre-collectivized period required a radius of no less than 25 km. from any given camp (the distance a horse-herd could venture in a day). The length of annual routes was between 25 and 40 km., and occasional droughts, searches for lost animals, and so forth, would increase the area herdsmen needed to know intimately to a radius of about 150 km. It is such an area which the Mongols call their 'homeland' (*nutag*) and in which, I suggest, descriptive terms are in effect names.<sup>10</sup>

To turn now from toponymy to the descriptive terminology for the chiefly landscape we see that it is largely metaphorical, and consists of a mapping of the parts of the body on to the land (at least it is reasonable to suppose, as suggested by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), that the metaphors are extended from the body to the land, and not vice versa). The ways the terms are used suggest that land-entities are seen as 'wholes', or 'bodies', centred on mountains (*uul*; literary Mongolian: *agula*). The system is ego-centred, as though ego were the mountain, and it is orientated, in that the front is always to the south. Mountains have backs and fronts. The northern (or back) side of mountains is given the following epithets: *uulyn shil* (nape), *nuruu* (spine), *seer* (vertebra); the eastern and western sides are: *uulyn zuun/baruun xatsar* (east and west cheeks), *mör* (shoulders), *shanaa* (temple, cheek bone), *xavirga* (ribs), *suga* (armpit), *tashu* (side); and the southern or front side has: *magnai* (forehead), *xomsog* (brows), *övdög* (thigh) and *eleg* (liver) (Zhukovskaya 1988: 27, quoting Mongol sources). A hill standing on its own, or a high summit in a mountain range, is called *tolgoi* (head). A mountain cape, or elevated prong, is its *xoshuu* (nose, beak, snout). A valley opening from a mountain is *am* (mouth). This certainly suggests the mountain as some kind of gestalt, viewed from its summit or centre, as Ego views his or her own body.

It can be seen that mountain terminology in this central region is dominated by skeletal or bone metaphors. This is Lévi-Straussian *Elementary Structures*

country. The Mongols, like other peoples of North Asia, associate the bone with patriliney and descent through the father (the word for patrilineage in some dialects is 'bone', *yasun*); descent through the mother is linked with flesh/blood. Rivers or river valleys are called *gol*, which means centre and also aorta, the blood-vessel of life (it is by tearing the aorta that Mongols kill animals). Rivers are seen as descending from, or depending on, mountains. Terms for lake, pond, stream, spring, bog, etc. are mostly non-metaphorical and unconnected with one another. Essentially, these are appendages of mountains. The engendering of the landscape in this way is much more marked in central Mongolia than in the periphery. In the Altai, the shamanist Buryat areas, and even in the far east among the shamanist Daur, bone metaphors for mountains are much less prevalent, and the spirits of mountains may even be 'grandmothers', or 'girls', or they may consist of a man and wife.<sup>11</sup> In the central steppes, on the other hand, mountains are virtually all called *khan* (chief, prince).

Spirits in the chiefly landscape in general are termed 'rulers' or 'masters' (*ezen*, or *ejen* pl. *ezed*). The term is used for human rulers as well as the spirits and it occurs at all social levels, from the 'master of the tent' to the emperor, who was called the Ezen Khaan. These days the Mongolians are privatizing their economy and beginning to think about the possibility of allowing ownership of land. The expression coined for this is 'land master' (*gazarin ezen*). But this term has been used for centuries with quite another meaning, the *genius loci*. The original Mongolian 'landlord' from whom permission had to be obtained to use the land was not a human but a supernatural being.<sup>12</sup> The *ezen* of a locality provides generalized well-being, good weather, and fertility, or, if 'angered', drought and pestilence. In the chiefly idiom the major *ezed* are the masters of 'mountains'. In flat areas these may be no more than mounds, hardly visible except in the slanting rays of the setting sun. But nevertheless any particular mountain is the site at which to call upon the spirits of the whole landscape relevant to the agent (the social group or individual). Characteristically such invocations involve lists of mountains and culminate in appeals to 'skies' which are spoken of as spirits of clear, stormy, etc. skies.

Careless pronunciation of the names of worshipped mountains is held to be dangerous anywhere in their vicinity, just as junior people must not speak aloud the names of senior male relatives in their hearing for fear of offending them. It is difficult to convey the variety of occasions on which, even today, mountains are behaved towards as if they are real presences. Just as 'they' may be annoyed by someone blurting out their names, 'they' take offence if bold young Communist officials defy them and dig up wild onions from their slopes. Many stories are told of disasters which were caused in this way. In their presence mountains are called *xairxan* (dear one), and they are offered animals for their herds—not sacrifices, but live animals, which the former owners care for as though they belonged to a powerful human patron.

In the Manchu period 'land masters' were actively used in the political process. For example, the Kanjurwa Khutagt, a prominent Mongolian Lamaist reincarnation, wrote in his memoirs that during the visit of his second incarnation to the court in Peking a supernatural event occurred:

The emperor, it is reported, seemed to see a person standing behind him and inquired who it was. Turning to see for himself, the incarnation replied that the *ejen*, the spirit of the Serku region in Kokonor, was standing there. This pleased the emperor who then conferred upon the *ejen* a yellow jacket and a red button, the headdress symbol of special rank, denoting the second rank in the hierarchy of the imperial bureaucracy. Such bestowals from an emperor were rare and greatly prized.

This tradition was [the Chinese Emperors'] means of demonstrating that they regarded themselves as supreme not only over local rulers but even over regional gods. The bestowal of recognition was not limited to a particular spirit but was also upon the place where the deity was customarily believed to reside. Because of this incident, my previous incarnations over the centuries were always searched for and found in this Serku area. (Hyder and Jagchid 1983: 28).

If this was the emperor's way of pinning down the powerful Ganjurwa reincarnation to a certain territory, it is not surprising that Mongolians recognized that a political process was involved and themselves sometimes dared to treat a mountain as a resource. Bawden (1968: 103) mentions a story about an eighteenth-century governor of Urga (now Ulaan-Baatar) who went out to celebrate the spring worship of Bogdo Uul Mountain and was caught in a heavy storm. He reproved the mountain: 'I came here to worship you as a duty, not because I wanted to. What do you think you are up to?' Then he condemned the mountain to a whipping and to wear fetters, which were deposited on the cairn normally used for rituals of worship. Later in the year, still not satisfied with the weather, he came back and fined the mountain all its horses, confiscated them, and drove them away.

*INCA*  
*APRIL 1984*

The main site of worship in the chiefly mode is a mountain-top altar, which is called *oboo*<sup>13</sup> (see Fig. 6.3). All worshipped mountains have *oboos* on their summits. Physically, the *oboo* is a cairn of stones, to which each participant must add a stone or a bundle of branches contributed by those present and bound together. Modern *oboos* in Buddhist areas are often concreted in and painted white, becoming neat cylinders or shaped like an inverted bowl. *Oboos* should be built around a central vertical pole or have one in their vicinity. The term *oboo* is polyfunctional and refers to the cairn, to the spirit-master, and to the mountain or other entity worshipped (Abayeva 1992: 74). The rituals are seasonal, and the *oboo* is 'renewed' by adding new stones to it, inserting new branches, or tying on ribbons, horse-hairs, and flags. *Oboos* are occupation-marks, in the sense of 'We are here', and they are also orientation-marks for travellers. Smaller and more ephemeral *oboos* are also placed on roads at mountain passes. During the year nomads move between lands, each land with a governing and protecting *oboo*; a new one can be erected if a place has none. In



FIG. 6.3. A modern Mongolian painting showing circumambulation of the mountain cairn (*oboo*) by a nomadic group prior to making offerings. The skulls of favourite horses are placed on the *oboo* as a sign of respect for these animals.

my view, the *oboo* not only enacts the idea of the social group (a heaping-up of like things, stones, or branches), but is also the physical mark of the denial of horizontal space, a vertical statement. Just as the 'mountain' embodies the idea of height and hence of closeness to the sky, the *oboo* represents its peak. The ritual (*dallaga*) always involves circular movement, circumambulation of the site and the 'circular beckoning' of blessings from on high into sacrificial meat which is then shared and eaten.

The *dallaga* is not only performed at the *oboo*. It is one of the commonest rituals of the household head today in Mongolia. In regions with a strong shamanic tradition it was also performed by a shaman, acting on behalf of the patrilineal group. Among the late nineteenth-century Xori Buryats the shaman, having 'beckoned' down the blessings, would take a bucket full of the *dallaga* meat to the master of the group and say, 'This is the unbreakable blessing of the princes, the origin of the patriline (*ug garbal*), the endless happiness of the wish-granting jewel (*chandamani*), the great *dallaga*, from which one becomes rich and populous!' The *dallaga* meat was never given to any outsider, even the smallest piece, and generally for three days after the ritual people took care not to give anything to people outside the group (Poppe 1940: 68, quoting the Buryat chronicler Yumsunov).

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 The *oboo* rituals enact a kind of closing-up and binding-in. Many of the *oboos* made of branches were in the form of a conical tepee, with the offerings laid inside, as if in a small room (Carruthers 1910: 246). Stone ones often have a small opening in one side, or a hollow in the top. This creates an enclosure, a sheltered space, which in Mongolian is closely connected etymologically with secrecy and with sacredness (*xori-*, *xorigul*). It is an aspect of the denial of real spaces that the idea of the enclosure takes the place of the territory with a boundary. There is a linguistic link between the word *oboo* and *obooxoi*, a refuge or shelter. In the Mongolian landscape a shelter is principally a hideout from the wind, which is the agent of movement, unpredictable, bringing discomfort and change, coming from no one knows where. The *oboo/obooxoi*, like the Mongol tent, can thus be seen as an escape from the real landscape by recreating its conceptual structure in miniature, protected space.

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Chiefs and elders created their own landscapes with anthropomorphic spirits of mountains and other dominant objects, but the effect of the centralized Buddhist system was to reduce imaginative variety and standardize the mountain rituals. In 1893, for example, the chief lama 'discovered' a text for an *oboo* ritual, composed as it were by one of his previous incarnations, and issued it to all the hereditary princes of central Mongolia to be performed to avert plague, famine, and cattle-sickness at all worshipped mountains (Bawden 1958: 57-61). The text consisted of fixed formulas, within which local princes executing the order were invited to insert lists of all the local mountains, springs, rivers, etc. they wished to invoke. The Buddhist hierarchy also attempted to standardize the sensibility attributed to mountain-spirits: blood sacrifices were forbidden and it was even decreed that executions of criminals must not take place within sight of major mountain-rulers, in case they be offended at the sin of killing (Pozdneyev 1971: 50).

Princes and high lamas loved to be patrons of the great *oboos*, to arrive with the most impressive suite, to donate most livestock, to have their wrestlers and their horses win the games in the festivities which followed the rituals. The athletic games were to restore male virility and strength. If the *oboo* was the axis of time, it was a kind of timeless time, a perpetual harmony, a setting out of the ideologically permanently recurrent structure of society—for which the archetype was the Imperial lineage, recurrently primed in its vigilance and valour. Participants in the ritual sat in an order regulated by social status.<sup>14</sup> Women and foreigners were excluded from the *oboo* ritual itself, quite simply because they were not members of the patriarchal group (though they could take part in the festivities held afterwards).<sup>15</sup> Shamans were also excluded in many places; though members of the lineage, they were destabilizing pretenders to a different and more direct access to the spirits. In all of this the detailed knowledge of genealogies was not important. This is because the idea of the patriarchal group slid easily between the notions of lineage, clan, residential group, political division, and military unit. What was being enacted was the 'beckoning' of the

energies of nature to the advantage of the male group, a kind of recharging of the batteries of virility, in which gender mattered more than any other principle of group organization.

### *The Shamanic Landscape*

The picture so far is of a simplified 'punctual' landscape dominated by mountains and bone terminology, with water and lowland as inconsiderable appendages. Shamanic practice has the effect of opening up the vision of the cosmos. Here the earth as a whole, with its complexities and its subterranean depths, is seen in relation to the sky, with its ethereal layers. The earth (*gazar*) is now explicitly female, the Mother Etugen, while the sky (heaven) is male and a father. These associations recur through the sources, right back to the period of the Mongol Empire. The earth, old Mother Etugen, was given little attention in the State-dominated religion of nineteenth-century central Mongolia. But in regions on the shamanic fringe she was celebrated, incorporating both fertility and nurturance, and a kind of animal complexity. The following is from a late nineteenth-century Buryat invocation to Xangai (*xangai* means forested hilly region):

Eternal silk-faced Sky!  
 Eternal butter-faced Mother Etugen!  
 Eternal Sky with speckled eyes!  
 Mother Etugen with golden ears!  
 I accomplish the great fumigation-ritual [to you].  
 Mountain, called Ishi [root, origin] Khan,  
 River-mother, called Queen . . .  
 Your bending spinal-range,  
 Your filled up udders,  
 Your squeezed crevices,  
 Your sticking-out shoulder-blades,  
 Your huge armpit . . .  
 You have an unencompassable body . . .  
 Queenly earth-water,  
 I make an offering [to you]! (Galdanova 1987: 26).

No one will be surprised to learn that the Mongols have cults of caves as well as mountains and these are often called *umai* or *eke umai* (womb, mother's womb). The ordinary word for 'cave' or 'grotto' is *agui*, which has no bodily reference, and this is used for those caves occupied by a Buddhist ascetic in contemplative retreat. But here and there along the northern borders of Mongolia, in Buryatia and in the Xorchin region of Inner Mongolia there are special caves, the ones called 'wombs', and here there are shrines for female fertility cults. The rituals at these cults must be performed by shamans, not

lamas. They involve women penetrating through the narrow crevice of the cave. In the Dayan Derke cave of the Xövsgöl region of north-west Mongolia there were a series of chambers. The shaman said to the person clambering through: 'Look up, what do you see there?' The shaman would interpret what the person saw in the gloom. It was good if a ray of light seemed to suggest a child or an animal (Galdanova *et al.* 1984: 6).

As has been pointed out, Buddhism and shamanic spirit-cults were not in some harmonious 'structural' relationship here, as depicted by Tambiah (1970) for north Thailand. They were bitter competitors in the construction of rival ideologies concerning the reproduction of society. The lamas of the peripheral regions therefore took action against the cave-spirits. Unlike their attitude to patriarchal cults, they did not attempt to make use of the female power but tried to destroy or negate it. Indeed, the idea of real this-worldly physical birth was anathema to the reiterative male ideology outlined above, in which celibate lamas were the priests for patriarchal groups. The reified representation of the female ability to give birth in the cave cults was frightening as well as abhorrent to the lamas. Since the idea was that the power in the caves derived from the untamed sexual drives of the female spirits within, one of the lamas' feeble tactics consisted of setting up male sexual organs, carved out of wood, facing the caves. This was no more than a containing device, which acknowledged the spirits' power. In central Mongolia, where Buddhist State-oriented society had long since triumphed, lamas were able to dismiss such spirits as unimportant (indeed I do not know of any significant cave cult in this region). In the shamanic peripheries there were women-only cults of rivers<sup>16</sup> some distance from the settlement (attendance on such cults was known among the Daurs as *daud gara*—to go out on the *daud*, which was the distance a pheasant<sup>17</sup> could fly before having to come down for a rest). There were also prominent female spirits of the land in these regions.

If the 'punctual' landscape focuses on centrality, the shamanic landscape involves an idea of laterality and crucially, it acknowledges movement. To give an example: the contemporary Selenga Buryats worship a female spirit who is envisaged, at least by some people, as wearing dark-blue clothing and mounted on a black stallion. The story goes that this is the spirit of a woman who was travelling in the direction of the Xori Buryats to the north. Stopping on the southern slope of Bayan-Tugud hill she tied her horse to a single tree and then she died of disease. The local people buried the woman there, untied her horse and let it wander off. The horse was caught by people of the Selenga Tubsheten clan, who killed it and used it as food. They began to die of a terrible disease. Only after sacrifices were made to the spirit (woman and horse) did the disease disappear. Although the sacrifices are now (1980s) made at the tree, the spirit is considered to be the *ezen* of a lateral section of land which extends between the Bayan-Tugud hill and another called Olzeitei-Ondor and this area is known as *güdeltei gazar* (literally, 'running-track land', a *güdel* being a track or a run of a spirit or animal) (Abayeva 1992: 78). The idea of the 'track' is homologous,



in many other stories, with the movement of women between male social groups, a movement which often fails in one way or another (through ill-treatment, divorce, and flight of the wife with nowhere to go). This creates a hiatus of abandonment, from which asocial place the female spirit wreaks her revenge.

We may begin to explain this by observing that the distinction between the chiefly/Buddhist and the shamanic world-views rests on radically different theories of empowerment. Both chiefs and Buddhist lamas derive their legitimacy from social processes: from genealogical descent, from political or military structures, from teacher-pupil lines in the Buddhist system, and so forth. Shamans, on the other hand, think of themselves as acquiring their abilities not so much from social training as directly from the energies of the world, conceived as spirits which decide who is to be a shaman.<sup>18</sup> This distinction means that chiefs need only acknowledge external power as some abstract energy, driving and revivifying the social group (for example, 'destiny', or the 'land-masters' which are everywhere more or less the same). Shamans on the other hand must acknowledge the variety of the world, the infinite multiplicity of beings which people feel to have power. This view does not exclude human society, but constructs it as relying on interaction, waxing and waning with its exchanges, conflicts, enticements, depredations, and restitutions *vis-à-vis* other powers. Shamans act relationally, usually as intermediaries between entities conceived as different from one another, whereas the patriarchal group is constructed ideologically as if it were self-perpetuating.<sup>19</sup>

Though shamans tend to specialize in the introduction of this or that spirit, and are also said to 'inherit' spirits, if one looks closer it turns out that a shamanic predecessor is in fact not an ancestor as ordinarily conceived but 'naturalized' (cast into the world) in the very process of becoming a spirit. Buryats, for example, say that deceased shamans 'become cliffs' (*xada bolxo*, the term *xada* meaning both 'cliff' or 'rocky hill' and the spirit of such a place (Galdanova 1987: 32)). A *xada* is also said to be the son or daughter of a sky (*tengeri*). How a spirit can be both a deceased shaman and the child of a sky is not explained—as I noted earlier, landscapes are not coherent and invariant 'structures' applicable on all occasions, but ways of thinking and speaking in particular contexts. Although the term *ezen* (master) is a common way of talking about such spirits in shamanic discourse there also exists a variety of other terms for them.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, for ordinary people a spirit is usually considered a single being, but in shamans' songs it may comprise numerous energies which are its metamorphoses, its helpers, instruments, and parts (this will be explained further below). The shaman thus cumulates varied external powers, while the chief, in his ritual role, and the lama unify, regulate, and rank them.

The shaman puts on a gown which, among some Mongolian groups, is itself a 'landscape' representation. The Daur shaman, for example, appears as a fortified city, an extravaganza of symbolic openings and closures to the world.

Seventy-two small bronze mirrors sewn horizontally in bands round the costume are the strong city walls; eight large bronze mirrors sewn down the front are the gatehouses through which the shaman's soul can pass; sixty bells are the guards on the city wall; a female bird and a male bird on the shoulders are messengers to the spirits; twelve embroidered cloth strips down the back represent different birds and animals together with the various trees where they perch or dwell; another twelve strips symbolize both the months of the year and twelve passages or paths by which spirits come and go; 365 cowrie shells studding the gown are the days of the year and also a kind of armour against penetration by vengeful spirits (Batubayin 1990).

Of course, the self-representation of shamans by their costumes varied greatly, but the above example hints at one extremely important shamanic concept, the way or path. To explain this idea let me first take a detour by contrasting the shamanic with Buddhist ideas of the underworld or the world of the dead. Getting at an understanding of this contrast is difficult, since all of the Mongolian culture area has been subject to Buddhist influences at some period or other, and some Buddhist-type representations have remained even in areas where shamans are recently the only ritual practitioners. The 'underworld' is one of these. It was moralized by Buddhism, becoming a series of hells or prisons for sinners. It was reached through a cave, or a well, after crossing a bridge or a river, after passing guards, a gatehouse, walls and sentries, and it had a huge palace, many storeys high, with glass windows, with armed officials, and scribes writing in their books, and crucially it contained many prisons and torture chambers. It was ruled by a king, Erlic Khan, who informed dead souls of their sentences and punishments before they could be reborn on earth, all of which was written in his secretaries' records. In other words, this was a representation of the State, the dark vision of the real government institutions.<sup>21</sup>

Now it is true that there are accounts (e.g. the Manchu and Daur tales of Nisan Shaman) of shamans visiting exactly just such an underworld to rescue a soul and bring it back to earth. But there are other accounts, which seem more purely shamanic, where the world of the dead is not a 'State', but is simply 'somewhere else', across some void separating life from death, but not even definitely down below. Sometimes this other world is just nearby, across the mountains, or round some bends in a river, or inside a cliff, but it is just that ordinary people have lost the knack of finding it. In yet other ways of talking about this, the other world is this world, here, only we cannot see it. But sometimes it can be felt, or heard, or smelt. In other words, it is apprehended through the prism of faculties. But ordinary human organs of perception are not enough. This explanation is used to account for why shamans must acquire the abilities of their ancestor-spirit and animal helpers, which can see better, track down better, fly, or swim underwater. The exercise of such abilities constructs the 'ways' or 'paths' of shamans and spirits.

A vision of this kind in effect transforms the landscape. The souls of the dead are no longer trapped underground in a king's dungeon, but are somewhere in this world. The real land is inhabited by remembered ancestors, giving a sense of place. Now what is significant is not only big obvious things like mountains but the capacity of nature to conceal, contain, and host even insignificant beings, because disguised among them may be a spirit of vital importance to one's well-being. This is accompanied by mythological 'maps' superimposed on real space. For example; the Buryats say that the spirit of Lake Baikal has nine sons and one daughter, i.e. the nine rivers which empty into the lake and the Angara River which runs out of it, the former bringing him benefit and the latter only loss (Khangelov 1958: 318).

It is the shamanic accounts which can explain the presence of spirits in the world. The chiefly model simply deals with them as given. But in shamanism it is the souls of the remarkable dead people, or people who died in a strange way, who *become* the spirit-rulers of the land. In particular, shamans themselves, after their funerals, are given a second burial after a period of time during which their souls are transformed into spirits, and they are then acknowledged and invoked as *ezed*. This is clearly explained in a seventeenth-century Mongolian account of the death of one powerful shamaness, who became, three years after her first burial, *ezen* of a mountain in East Mongolia (with her husband as a kind of side-kick spirit) (Heissig 1953). This account is unusual, in that it is a written text, composed by a lama who was attempting to convert this spirit to Buddhism, but it accords with numerous ethnographical descriptions, by Mongolians and Europeans from all over the culture area. Shamans used to prepare their own coffins and chose the sites for their interment and metamorphosis. They then became spirits of those regions, in some cases an extensive domain and in others reduced merely to the site itself. The shamans who are their descendants inherit their power and are also able to go to these places to call them 'into reality', to explain what they want, or what people should do to obtain their magical benefactions.

This means that, in contrast with the chiefly model, it is absolutely vital to remember shamanic genealogies, and it also means that particular places, where shamans really were buried in the past, do matter. Where a social group remained in one place, its shaman ancestors were stacked up, as it were, and joined previous spirits, becoming collective 'masters' of the place. But in cases where the group moved this is apparent from the ritual sites of spirit rulership. So the Hungarian ethnographer Dioszegi (1963) was able to draw a nine-generation genealogy of shamans, and show how the shamans dying in each generation were the spirit-rulers of a series of different places. This chart showed the particular group to have migrated some hundreds of miles over this period. These sites are not only remembered in the shamans' songs, but people travel back to them to make offerings many generations later.

We may compare this with the death-ritual of elders and chiefs. Here, burial sites are avoided, may often be unknown, and even be secret and deliberately erased. This matter is historically complicated. The Buddhist practice was the exposure of corpses on the surface of the ground, such that they should be rapidly eaten by wild animals and birds. For all ordinary people it is considered ideal if no trace remains, if the land appears absolutely untouched as soon as possible. But with the Manchu Dynasty and the influence of Chinese ancestor-cults, the bodies of prominent aristocrats were embalmed and placed in huts at graveyards. They were allotted families of hereditary attendants, but the main role of these people was to keep people and animals out, to prevent the sites being despoiled. The main point is that these graves never coincided with places of worship (*oboos*), and the dead souls of chiefs did not become spirit-rulers of the land. The paradigm of the Imperial ancestor is Chinggis Khaan; his burial site, said to be at the legendary mountain of Burxan Xaldun, was ridden over by horses to erase any traces. His grave has never been found, though generations of foreign archaeologists have searched for it (many Mongols object to this). Although Chinggis is still worshipped and rumours still circulate about his reincarnation, as is the case with several other famous Mongolian warriors in history, a connection with any particular place was deliberately obscured, and indeed one can see why a political hierarchy composed of highly mobile sub-units would operate in this way.<sup>22</sup>

The shaman's first 'burial' site was avoided, since the soul was considered dangerous until transformed into a spirit. Among Western Buryats it consisted of a platform between trees, so as to be open for the soul's journey to the 'other world'. The shaman's accoutrements were hung up at the site, and since many of them were made of bronze or iron they last for a considerable time. Physically such a dual structure (see Fig. 6.4) contrasts with the circular 'punctual' construction of the *oboo*.<sup>23</sup> At the second burial, frequently the shaman's bones were merged with a natural object by placing them inside a hole made in a growing tree. Such a burial place, the site of subsequent worship, could be beside a lake, cliff, grove, spring, cave, or river. The ontology of such a 'naturalized' spirit is entirely unclear: is it an anthropomorphic being, or the very tree, cliff, spring, or so on, of burial, or is it the animal 'incarnations' which seem to live around that place? All we can say is that shamanic invocations speak as though the spirit has its 'seat' at this particular place and often moves around and changes shape. It may 'become' a bird or animal. These journeys and metamorphoses are significant since they indicate the geographic and zoological range of shamans' pretensions to power. The two are linked in that according to the specific animal or bird metamorphosis, e.g. as a black mouse, or a crow, or a kind of beetle, or a wolf, the 'tracks' and 'running courses' vary too. The shaman's speech is poetic but the imagery stays with the likeness of real places.<sup>24</sup> For example, the Tarsai spirit-rulers, an important shamanic line among the Western Buryats, said via the shaman (Khangelov 1958: 117):

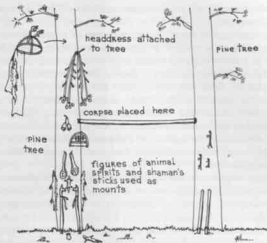


FIG. 6.4. A shaman's burial site of the Western Buryats, based on a sketch by M. N. Khangalov. The shaman's corpse is laid on a wooden platform between two trees. The shaman's implements (metal crown, bells, wild animal skins, sticks representing magical horses, models of helper-spirits, etc.) are attached to the trees.

Our trail is that of the grey hare,  
 The dark wolf is our servant,  
 The honking crow is our incarnation,  
 The Hoto eagle is our envoy.  
 On the summit of Bortoi mountain,  
 Having turned into dark wolves,  
 Curving our backs, we ran.  
 Whose son did you see there?  
 On the summit of Tarsai mountain,  
 Having become five geese,  
 Crying out, we came in to land.  
 Whose son did you see there?

There are other places in the shamanic landscape which commemorate the mythical adventures of particular shamanic ancestors when they were alive: the place where an enemy was defeated, or a wife was turned to stone, or simply where the ancestor urinated and a big cedar tree grew up. These become place-names. It is not that there are no recurrent toponyms of the 'black cliff' variety found in the steppes, but this shamanic landscape adds to them personalized

and historic names, which are a constant reminder of links between known individuals and places.

The shamanic second burial site is not conceived as spatially central, but as a resting-point on a journey. It situates the end of one life and also the beginning of a spirit existence which is at the same time the start of the shamanic life of the next recipient of these abilities. Receiving the *udxa*, becoming a shaman, involves symbolic death and a rebirth which ritually acknowledges the complex (male, female, animal) components of shamanic power. We see here a concept of time, made up of lifetimes, which is different from the seamless reproduction described for the patriarchal vision. One Mongol of my acquaintance, brought up as a shamanist, claims that the notion of eternity and changelessness (*möngke*) is foreign to shamanism, which emphasizes metamorphosis.

In shamanic regions the site of chiefly worship and the shaman's second burial site occasionally coincide, but usually they do not. The reason for this is that the principle of shamanic transmission is not patrilineal descent, but 'choice of the spirits'. In practice this only sometimes resulted in transmission inside the clan and more often in a zigzag line through male and female relatives of the deceased shaman. So although shamans were often thought of as 'belonging' to given clans, in practice most of them had ancestral powers from a variety of places. This derived initially from the first spirit in the line (very commonly a girl or married woman who had suffered and died at the hands of the patrilineage and was thereafter bent on revenge) but it also gathered powers from the wayward track of the *udxa*, which could move through affines, wandering migrants absorbed into the group, illicit lovers, or even magical animals whose power was transmitted to a shaman by some strange event. All this added to a shaman's power. The great shaman 'lines' among the Buryats were worshipped separately by several different groups, each having some mythology of its own about their relationship with the spirit. The resulting situation was extremely complex, and it is impossible to do justice to it here. I can only summarize by saying that weak chiefs could try to make use of the power of shamanic lines by incorporating them into the cycle of sacrifices and treating them as patrilineal 'ancestors', while, conversely, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, powerful shamans sometimes took on the main role at the chiefly communal sacrifices, acting as chiefs or priests for them. Each community reached its own accommodation in this matter. To give an example: the Buret settlement of Idinsk Western Buryats at the end of the nineteenth century held eleven communal sacrifices each year. Eight of them were in honour of spirits of patrilineal ancestors, stones, cliffs, waters, hayfields, etc.; three were sacrifices in honour of deceased shamans. The Buret people also travelled annually to Baitag Mountain in the Kudinsk district for a great sacrifice at which all groups of the Exirit clan in the region were represented, some 2,000-3,000 people (Mikhailov 1987: 68).

Buryat and Xorchin history suggests that whatever accommodation a given group reached between chiefly and shamanic power could be rapidly altered by some social or economic disaster, such as an epidemic or loss of lands to foreign colonists. In such a case the prevailing power was felt to have failed (to be ineffective with the spirits) and people turned to the alternative. The massive wealth and crusading zeal of the Buddhist missionary advance during the nineteenth century lent additional weight to chiefly pretensions. Lamas saw shamanic 'ruler-spirit' sites as power points, to be controlled, obliterated, or converted. Latent opposition, which was really perhaps just difference, between the shaman and the elders in the acephalous, clan milieu then became real conflict. In many documented cases, as recently as the beginning of the twentieth century, there were battles, when shamans were killed, or forced to renounce their calling, their sacred equipment burnt on the order of lamas backed by ruling princes. Conversion meant the turning of chiefly and shamanic cult sites into *oboos*, the introduction of a new ritual, usually in Tibetan, and the imposition of the 'punctual' view of the landscape.

But we also know that in many regions of the non-centralized fringe these missionary ventures were only partly successful. If local political and economic organization was not in fact sufficiently successful to support monasteries of non-productive lamas, and if in general the people were not apparently benefiting from the new Buddhist petitioners for the blessings of the land, then the lamas had a hard time of it. Shamans hated and cursed the lamas. They said the Buddhist books and paintings were not real, just paper and paint.<sup>23</sup> In the isolated and forested Darxad region of Xövsgöl, north-west Mongolia, the monastery was forced to move three times during the nineteenth century when epidemics among the lamas were attributed to the activity of a female shamanic spirit (Dioszegi 1961: 202). Sometimes shamans and lamas both maintained competitive cults at a single site, an example being the Dayan Derke cave in the Kubsugul region mentioned above.

The Dayan Derke cave was a place where women went to become fertile and shamans travelled to acquire spiritual abilities. Shamanists saw Dayan Derke as a powerful and cruel spirit (*xatuu ongon*) who caused as much suffering as joy. He was a shaman or warrior who stole the wife or daughter of Chinggis Khaan. Fleeing from the vengeful emperor he avoided a death blow by turning himself into stone. Now petrified, Dayan Derke became the 'black master' of the Xövsgöl region. Until the end of the 1920s, when it was carted away by zealous communists, a man-sized vertical stone stood outside the cave, and the cleft at its summit was said to have been caused by Chinggis's sword. Some people say that the stone once lay flat and raised itself to a vertical position. The stolen woman is said to have hidden herself in the crevices of the cave, her breasts giving out spouts of health-giving water. Lamas give the spirit a different biography, according to which the shaman Dayan Derke was defeated by the

Dalai Lama and converted to Buddhism. The shaman ran away from Tibet to Xövsgöl, stealing a wife on the way, and was turned to stone. To 'calm down' the angry Dayan Derke spirit, lamas built a monastery and conducted rituals at the stone, wrapping it in cloth and laying offerings before it. At the main Lamaist annual ritual the stone was said to become wet and to give off the smell of human sweat. On the same day shamans held seances for Dayan Derke, but inside the cave. Rather than 'calming down' the spirit as the lamas tried to do, they celebrated its power and transferred it to neophyte shamans from all over North Mongolia and southern Buryatia. The subsequent history of this cult deserves further research. The monastery was destroyed in the 1930s.<sup>7</sup> However, a complex syncretistic cult continues, perhaps largely for reasons of secrecy, inside the cave where, at this time (1980s), there are Buddhist paintings, a statue of Dayan Derke as a warrior, and a long text painted on a cloth. This text is in what I have called the chiefly idiom, mentioning success for the Soviet space programme, the uprising by a warrior-hero called Ayush, the undertakings of Soviet and Mongolian political leaders, and a eulogy in honour of the 1980 Moscow Olympics (Galdanova *et al.* 1984: 3-6).

We can observe that shamanism remained more powerful, and the chiefly/Buddhist mode more defensive, in forested mountainous regions broken up by large rivers and with relatively small amounts of open pasture. This suggests that the chiefly mode can only gear itself up to a totalizing vision of the world in wide steppeland, which not only corresponds in some way to the reiterative sameness of the conceptual landscape but also provides the ecological conditions for the reproduction of nomadic patri-focused groups. We may perhaps also conclude that the shamanic vision is not simply a mapping of human differences and adventures on to the land but is also a response to the actual diversity, of species and habitats, touching on people's lives and which they feel to be important. The contrast between the central Mongolians' ritual denial of travelling, which for them is a boring, laborious necessity, and shamanic enacted celebration of 'tracks' and 'ways' through difficult obstacles, seems to fit with actual environments. But however tempting such ecological observations may be they are insufficient, since they do not account for the dynamics of the concepts involved: headmen and chiefs died and entered the ranks of unmarked and identical male ancestors, but shamans (and suffering women), by dying, went on giving birth to spirits. Each vision implies the other, though they might not acknowledge it. As a result the two landscapes are always superimposed on one another, even if, at a given time and place, one or other is in the ascendent.

I hope I have shown that there is a connection between topographies, descriptive terminologies for landscapes and political structures, and that these 'place' different kinds of *ego* in the world. In the case I have described, the two kinds of 'person' are ideally male members of replicating hierarchical lineages on the one hand, and mediating, birth-giving, persons-in-transit on the other



(perhaps ideologically 'females'). But actual people, whether men or women, can take either or both of these stances.

### Notes

I am grateful to Mark Lake, whose essay on Mongolian pastoralism helped formulate my ideas about the dynamism of pastoral circuits.

In transliteration from Mongolian languages I have used standard modern Khalkh as a basis (though without differentiation between the front and back g). The exception is the term *khan* as opposed to *xan* (chief, king) which is generally known in English by the former spelling.

1. By this I refer to the ways the Mongols see themselves as *in* the landscape (a sense of place) and the ways in which it is conceptualized as *out there* (a sense of space).
2. A friend from the Xorchin region of Inner Mongolia said: 'When our family moved to a new village, my father told me he saw a beautiful tree growing nearby. It was all on its own, with thick bushy leaves, and this was an area with no trees, just sand and some bushes. "That tree must be something," he thought. "A village should have a tree to worship." He took big rocks the size of a human head and put them at the foot of the tree, and he made that tree the *shanzh mod* (sacred tree) of the village.'
3. For example, in the 13th-c. chronicle, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, it was a mountain, Burxan-Xaldun, which saved the life of Chinggis Khaan, when he was fleeing from his enemies, the Merkid. Chinggis then vowed that he and his descendants would worship the mountain ever after (Mostaert 1953: 319–20).
4. This term is used for want of a better one, since what is involved is not just worship in the usual sense of the term but also bargaining, pressurizing, and exchange with the entity.
5. I use the word 'supernatural' to indicate that the abilities would be so considered in Western academic discourse. The Mongols, however, do not have the idea of the supernatural. Certain people, they say, simply have greater abilities in understanding and manipulating *baigal* (the way things are) than others.
6. *Khaan* (lit. Mongolian *khagan*) is the term for Emperor; *khan* is the term for a lesser prince or chief.
7. 'Tajj kün böö baixgüi, Xarts kün böö baina.' (An aristocrat of the Borjigid cannot be a shaman. Common people are shamans.) A. Hurelbaatar, personal communication.
8. A co-ordinate singularity is a point which is not intrinsically special but appears singular when a co-ordinate system has been chosen in a specific way, e.g. if latitude and longitude have been chosen then the North and South Poles are co-ordinate singularities.
9. The tents at a camp are also ranked by seniority, from west to east.
10. No one has done the work, but it would be interesting to investigate the relation between repetitions of naming systems, the extent of nomadic journeys, and the notions of local community or 'homelands' in different parts of Mongolia. An indication that some relation would be found can be seen from the fact that along the border of Mongolia with Siberia from Lake Xovsgol to the Xangai Range, a

distance of some 1,000 km., there are six mountains named Burin Khan, giving an average of 166 km. in each section.

11. The names and visualization of mountain spirits is complicated by the fact that Buddhist lamas 'transformed' earlier native spirits, renaming them as a category (*sabdag*, *luus*) and conflating them with various minor deities or demons in the Lamaist pantheon. This process did not succeed in eliminating the earlier ideas of the spirits in many regions. However, the Lamaist deities are very various in form, including anthropomorphic, animal-headed, and other images. Today hardly any Mongols know these partly assimilated spirits, and they continue to worship the mountains with a blank space bracketed off for the spirit ('the spirit of the mountain, if only I knew what it looks like or what it is called').
12. I am indebted to John Gaunt for this point.
13. The term *oboo* derives from the verb 'to pile up', 'to heap'. This term is used in the Lamaist cult and also in some shamanist areas, e.g. among the Daur, but elsewhere the chiefly cult in the shamanist idiom used other terms for the stone altar.
14. At Buryat non-Buddhist *oboos* this was generally by lineage membership and age, elsewhere by rank (e.g. clerics above laymen, aristocrats above common folk, elders above juniors).
15. Widows of aristocratic men, who were the residual heirs of their husbands, did act as patrons at the mountain cults, but they would find an excuse—feeling tired, etc.—not to climb to the summit.
16. In regions with a more prominent chiefly ritual practice than among the Daur, river cults were not the exclusive domain of women.
17. Women were often likened by Daur to pheasants, with their bright feathers and plump shape.
18. I am indebted for this important point to an unpublished paper by Sherry Ortner concerning the decline of shamanism among the Sherpas of Nepal.
19. The question of the recognition by shamans of the female role in social reproduction is complex and cannot be dealt with adequately in a chapter on landscapes. (I have mentioned that shamans acknowledge and even prioritize 'female' kinds of powers in the landscape.) The matter is complicated in that all north Asian societies have several different kinds of inspirational practitioners (whom I have lumped together as 'shamans', though they have different names in native languages). Some of these practitioners specialize in rituals to do with women's fertility. They are always women shamans. However, there are certain great shamans, who may be either male or female, who have pretensions to mastery of the entire range of shamanic activities. This creates a zone of potential rivalry between them and the specialist practitioners.
20. For example, among the Buryats: *kugshen*, 'old women'; *abugun*, 'old man'; *baubai*, 'father'; *ejü*, 'mother'; *xada*, 'cliff'; *onggon*, 'spirit'; *shudker*, 'demon'.
21. By contrast, the inhabitants of the sky are pictured without all this constructed, built apparatus. They seem to float about separately, riding horses or other animals, but somehow perched on clouds.
22. There is a Chinggis Khaan mausoleum at Ordos in Inner Mongolia where elaborate rituals of worship take place. It is not considered to be his burial site but is a shrine to his battle-standards and other relics. The mausoleum has been moved several times this century.

23. Ritual structures involving two or more trees, with ropes strung between them representing the 'ways' of spirits, were very common throughout north Asia (Poppe 1940: 60-1; Batubayin 1990).
24. The poetic forms used are parallelism, metre, and control of vowel harmony.
25. Sunchig, a young female shaman aged 25, had a son who was put into the Daxad monastery at age 5. In grief the mother hanged herself, after having cursed her child as follows:

I want you to lose your all!  
 I want you to lose everything you have in this world!  
 Have no place on earth!  
 Let them tear up the collar of your cloak  
 Let them cut your bald head in two! [. . .]  
 Let the ravens tear out your tongue, you cur!  
 'Buddha, buddha', you keep saying,  
 Though it's but paint and canvas! [. . .]  
 'Lama, lama', you keep saying,  
 Though they are but shorn-headed wranglers.  
 'Sacred book, sacred book', you keep saying,  
 Though it's but ink and paper!  
 'Religion, religion', you keep saying,  
 Though it's but clay and oil paint! (Dioszegi 1961: 202)

Unfortunately, the ethnographer gives no date nor any other information about this incident.

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