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FROM SHATTERZONE TO NOMADIC COMMONWEALTH:

Rethinking Mongolia's Place in a Mobile World

Edited by Uradyn E. Bulag
and Munkhtuul Chuluunbaatar

Table of Contents

FROM SHATTERZONE TO NOMADIC COMMONWEALTH: Rethinking Mongolia's Place In A Mobile World

Uradyn E. Bulag
Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge

In recent years, the meanings and possibilities of nomadism have undergone a striking transformation—intellectually, politically, and existentially. Once considered a vestige of the past or a social problem to be solved, nomadism is increasingly recognised as a source of resilience, adaptability, and even world-making. Nowhere is this revaluation more dynamic or contested than in Mongolia, where nomadic heritage is simultaneously a resource for statecraft, a platform for international diplomacy, and a lived reality being constantly reinvented.

This volume, a product of the *Cambridge Mongolia Forum II* ("World Problem, Nomad Solution" Ulaanbaatar, August 2024), arises at a moment of profound Eurasian ferment. Across the region, policymakers, scholars, and herding communities are urgently debating what nomadism can offer a world grappling with environmental precarity, geopolitical fragmentation, and the search for alternative futures. Our collective project is twofold: first, to map the evolving forms and meanings of contemporary nomadism—as practice, as theory, and as political instrument; and second, to chart how Mongolia's unique experience can illuminate new pathways for societies navigating similar dilemmas. Out of this dialogue emerges the proposal for a "nomadic commonwealth"—an innovative mode of regional and global relation grounded in mobility, openness, and mutual recognition.

Beyond Survival: Rethinking the Frame of Nomadism

Classic scholarship, epitomised by Anatoly Khazanov's *Nomads and the Outside World* (1983), often cast nomads in an ambiguous relationship to settled states: as outsiders, survivors, or, at best, creative adapters to ecological marginality. These foundational works tended to reproduce binaries—inside versus outside, movement versus settlement, civilisation versus "primitive" mobility—implying that nomadism was merely a transitional stage on the road to modernity. Mobility thus appeared as a coping strategy in the face of scarcity and exclusion.

Recent scholarship, however, has moved decisively beyond these confines. Inspired by the philosophical interventions of Deleuze and Guattari (1986, 1987) and a wave of sophisticated ethnography, nomadism is now understood as a positive mode of being—one that transforms uncertainty and movement into resources for creative world-building. Rather than relics, nomads emerge as hubs of connectivity, trade, and innovation, shaping not only their own societies but the very contours of global history.

This shift is especially resonant in Mongolia, where the reinvention of nomadic identity is not merely a nostalgic gesture but a vital means of engaging a volatile world. The expansion of the Mongol Empire, for example, illustrates the generative force of

mobility, transforming the steppe from supposed periphery into the central axis of Afro-Eurasian interaction (Allsen 2001; Jackson 2017). Today, the pressing question is not whether nomadism can survive, but how it can be mobilised—culturally, economically, and politically—to address urgent global "problem spaces" (Scott 2004) and overcome the legacies of the twentieth-century "shatterzone" (King 2010; Bartov and Weitz 2013).

Heritage, Rivalry, and the Risk of Commodification

The twentieth century saw aggressive sedentarisation campaigns across Eurasia. States—especially the Soviet Union and China—sought to contain or erase nomadic life, recasting movement as a threat to order, efficiency, and rationality (Williams 2002). Yet paradoxically, the twenty-first century has witnessed a revival: states now embrace nomadism as both cultural heritage and national brand. This presents both opportunities—for international diplomacy, tourism, and economic development—and new risks, notably the danger of reifying nomadism as spectacle or commodified "tradition" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009).

Mongolia is at the centre of this process, navigating the tension between authentic lived experience and curated performance for global audiences. The country's ability to shape this process, rather than be shaped by it, will define its future role. The challenge is to cultivate a critical, adaptive, and relational nomadism—one that resists nostalgia and essentialism while remaining open to new forms of alliance and world-making.

The Structure and Argument of this Special Issue

The essays gathered here are not isolated case studies, but a conversation across disciplinary, national, and conceptual boundaries. Together, they offer a multi-scalar portrait of nomadism's contemporary possibilities and contradictions, engaging with three thematic arcs that illuminate how memory, mobility, and resilience are being reworked for the present.

Nomadism and the State: Mobility, Adaptation, and the Reinvention of Order

Lhamsuren Munkh-Erdene begins this arc by critiquing state-centric models of social order, arguing that the Eurasian steppe, far from being marginal, is the crucible in which the idea of the state was forged. Drawing on his own foundational work (Munkh-Erdene 2023), he shows how steppe societies' mobility produced distinctive forms of sovereignty, grounded in "extrahuman transportation" and dynamic military constitutions. This insight challenges not only the sedentarist bias of classical political theory, but also contemporary approaches to sovereignty and state-formation.

David Sneath deepens this reappraisal by exploring how Mongolia's elite property regimes, both pre- and post-socialist, are structured by mobile and flexible networks. Rather than viewing aristocratic or oligarchic arrangements as relics, Sneath demonstrates that these forms are active strategies for navigating Mongolia's turbulent social and economic transitions. He highlights how kinship, memory, and resource allocation are negotiated through the "nomadic toolkit"—a repertoire of practices that enables both continuity and innovation (Cf. Sneath 2018).

Timothy May complements these perspectives by analysing the enduring influence of nomadic military innovation on Eurasian geopolitics. His account of steppe warfare illustrates how Mongol strategies—rooted in adaptability, decentralisation, and the creative use of mobility—anticipated many features of modern military organisation. May's work resonates with contemporary debates on asymmetrical warfare and the challenges facing modern states (Cf. May 2018). Together, these essays argue that the nomadic "way of state"—often dismissed as anachronistic—remains vital for understanding the flexible, networked governance that shapes our world.

Nomads and National Representation: Memory, Rivalry, and the Art of World-Making

The second thematic cluster turns to the politics of representation and recognition, interrogating how nomadism is mobilised for national and transnational identity.

Carole Ferret's ethnography of Kazakhstan reveals the ambiguities of "heritage" in a post-nomadic nation. She shows how Kazakhstan's nation-building invokes emblems of nomadism—yurts, horses, ritual games—often in the absence of living pastoral practice. Her analysis of patrimonialisation highlights tensions between authenticity, performance, and memory, asking, "Does it require nomads to celebrate nomadism?" Ferret's work demonstrates that the mobilisation of nomadic symbols, far from being mere nostalgia, is an active negotiation over the meaning of modernity and national identity (Ferret 2023).

Tyntchtykbek Tchoroev sharpens this theme by examining Kyrgyzstan's reinvention as the "centre of the nomad world." Through a study of the World Nomad Games, he demonstrates how cultural performance serves as both a rallying point for regional affinity and a new site of rivalry. The Games celebrate shared steppe heritage while fostering competition among states for cultural primacy. His analysis echoes wider debates on the instrumentalisation of heritage in post-socialist contexts (Reeves 2014).

Thomas White, in his study of Alasha in China, extends the conversation to the politics of scale. He examines how Mongol identity and nomadic heritage are negotiated within the broader frameworks of the Chinese state. White shows how local actors deploy the language of heritage to defend practices like camel husbandry, even as they reframe these traditions to align with state narratives. His work foregrounds the ongoing negotiation over what counts as "authentic" nomadism, and how memory and mobility are mobilised both within and against state power (White 2024; Bulag 2002).

Together, these essays highlight the creative tensions at play in the contemporary art of world-making. Nomadism is not a static tradition, but a dynamic resource for imagining, representing, and contesting both self and nation. The conversation raises pressing questions about inclusion, the uses of memory, and the stakes of cultural competition.

The Practical Value of Nomadism: Sustainability, Science, and the New Commons

The final arc addresses nomadism's practical potential—and its limits—as a source of innovation in sustainability, development, and resource management.

Eric Thrift interrogates the global discourse of "sustainable cashmere," tracing how development language interacts—sometimes productively, sometimes not—with the lived realities of Mongolian herders. Thrift cautions against reducing nomadism to a technical fix or branding exercise, arguing that genuine sustainability requires attention to the complex agency of herding communities, their values, and aspirations (Cf. Thrift 2024).

Elizabeth Fox and Enkhbat Sainbayar expand the discussion by proposing a "Mongolian Meat Standard," envisioning how Mongolia's unique pastoral expertise could set new global benchmarks for ethical and sustainable meat production. Their analysis highlights the paradoxes of this ambition: the very practices that make Mongolian meat distinctive are often the hardest to standardise in international markets. Their work raises fundamental questions about translation, market logic, and the possibility of global leadership rooted in local knowledge.

Jadambaa Temuujin and Dolgorsuren Jamiyan broaden the conversation to environmental science, showing how traditional nomadic hygiene and waste management can be enriched by modern technological solutions. Their ethnographic and technical analysis illustrates the creative interplay between indigenous knowledge and new technology, offering models for addressing Mongolia's contemporary ecological challenges and beyond.

Across these contributions, a key insight emerges: nomadism, when understood as a living, adaptive system, offers not only cultural but practical resources for renewal. The challenge is to translate these practices without erasing their complexity or undermining local agency—a challenge that resonates beyond Mongolia, wherever rapid societal change is underway.

Toward a Nomadic Commonwealth

As the global landscape fractures and new alliances emerge, Mongolia faces a rare opportunity to claim a new kind of leadership. Drawing on its deep history of mobility, adaptability, and openness to neighbours near and far, Mongolia can convene a "nomadic commonwealth": a flexible, inclusive network grounded in the capacities of movement and relationship. This is not a utopian dream, but a pragmatic strategy for survival, prosperity, and world-making amid uncertainty.

Three key concepts illuminate Mongolia's predicament and potential. Charles King's notion of the "shatterzone" (King 2010; Bartov and Weitz 2013) identifies regions historically caught between empires—sites of both vulnerability and creative reinvention. Mongolia, landlocked between Russia and China, must transform this structural constraint into a springboard for new forms of agency. Scott's idea of "problem space" (2004) highlights the generative responses that arise under constraint, emphasising the possibilities inherent in navigating between powerful neighbours and shifting regimes. My own concept of a "world community of neighbours" (Bulag 2017) takes this further: community is not simply a matter of proximity but of active, ongoing relations—diplomatic, economic, and cultural. For Mongolia and other steppe societies, the challenge is to reimagine the outside world not as a field of threats, but as a living network of

affinities.

Mongolia's long-standing "third neighbour" policy has sought breathing space by cultivating ties with distant democracies. Yet, in a world defined by the shatterzone and problem space, Mongolia's nomadic heritage reveals a different kind of potential: the ability to reconceive neighbours not by geography alone, but by movement, memory, and shared experience—across borders, traditions, and histories.

Instead of seeing boundaries as fixed and proximity as merely spatial, the nomadic worldview posits relationships that are dynamic and ever-evolving. The history of the Mongol Empire and the enduring networks of trade, alliance, and exchange that once bound the steppe peoples together demonstrate that Mongolia is uniquely positioned to serve as the centre of a new commonwealth. In this vision, neighbours are not only those with whom borders are shared, but also those with whom histories, practices, and aspirations intertwine. The countries of Eurasia now embracing nomadic heritage—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, regions of Russia and China, among others—are not simply rivals, but kin and partners in an ongoing project of mobile world-making.

The "outside world" is thus recast: from a zone of constraint and anxiety to a field of affinity, creative experiment, and shared opportunity. Mongolia's task is not only to claim this space for itself, but to animate it as an active political and diplomatic project. By harnessing the core virtues of mobility, openness, and adaptation, Mongolia can transform its apparent vulnerability into a new position of leadership and creative convening.

This vision is as pragmatic as it is aspirational—a response to global uncertainty, environmental crisis, and geopolitical competition. It also sets a challenge: to move beyond performances of heritage for tourists or global markets, and instead to engage deeply with the adaptive capacities of nomadic life. The nomadic commonwealth is not a retreat into the past, but a movement toward a future where Mongolia may serve as a "Rome" for the steppe world—a node of connectivity, a site of encounter, and a source of inspiration for thriving amid uncertainty (Jackson 2017).

Such a project demands new forms of research, policy, and cultural engagement. It requires recognition of the value of flexibility, resilience, and world-making—not only within scholarship, but across diplomacy, the economy, and everyday life. The essays in this volume are a step in this direction, demonstrating how careful, collaborative study, grounded in both theory and practice, can illuminate a distinctly Mongolian—and distinctly nomadic—approach to the pressing challenges of our time.

By embracing mobility as a principle and reimagining the world as a web of familiar and evolving relationships, Mongolia need not merely survive, but can flourish—offering a mobile world-making vision that is as open as it is resilient. The future remains uncertain, but, as their ancestors did before them, Mongolians—and their Eurasian kin—may well find in movement, adaptation, and creative connection the key to their collective future.

Acknowledgements

This volume—and the Forum from which it springs—would not have been possible without the dedication and vision of a broad and generous community. I am deeply grateful to my co-organisers, especially Dr. Munkhtuul Chuluunbaatar and her outstanding team at the UNESCO-International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilisations, whose energy, skill, and hospitality brought scholars, policymakers, and diplomats together in Ulaanbaatar.

My thanks also go to the Ministry of Culture, Sports, Tourism and Youth of Mongolia, and to Minister Nomin Chinbat, whose support and sponsorship ensured the success of the Forum. I gratefully acknowledge our partners at the Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit (MIASU, Cambridge), the National University of Mongolia, the Chinggis Khaan Heritage and Cultural Institute, The National Art Gallery of Mongolia Citi University, and all institutional funders and supporters.

Above all, I thank the Forum's participants and contributors to this volume—those who travelled from near and far, those who joined online, and those whose research, insight, and curiosity sustain our intellectual community. In the best tradition of Mongolian hospitality, I welcome you as neighbours and fellow travellers, united in the shared endeavour of imagining and building a more open, resilient, and connected world—a true Nomadic Commonwealth.

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CONGRATULATORY SPEECH DELIVERED AT THE CAMBRIDGE MONGOLIA FORUM II, 19 AUGUST 2024

Nomin Chinbat
Her Excellency
Minister of Culture, Tourism, Sports, and Youth of Mongolia

Greetings!

I am pleased that you are all gathering in Mongolia for the Second Biennial Cambridge Mongolia Forum. On behalf of myself and the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, Sports, and Youth, I would like to extend my warmest welcome to you to Mongolia, to Ulaanbaatar, and specifically to the Cambridge Mongolia Forum! Unfortunately, as I am currently on government business in Europe, I regret that I cannot be with you today and tomorrow to learn from scholars and exchange views with you. However, I hope this video recording allows me to convey my message to you all.

First, I am very proud that our Ministry has been given the opportunity to host and sponsor the Second Cambridge Mongolia Forum here in Mongolia. We agreed to host this event when Mr. Garid from the Mongolian Embassy in London made the suggestion, as we understand and appreciate the Forum's mission to bring together Mongolia's policymakers and Cambridge-based academics. The goal is to build synergy aimed at improving and developing Mongolia's culture and economy both domestically and internationally. This is a wonderful initiative, and I want to thank our former Prime Minister and Ambassador Bayar Sanj and Professor Uradyn Bulag of Cambridge University's Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit (MIASU) for initiating it, as well as Professors Caroline Humphrey and David Sneath for their support.

MIASU at Cambridge University is no stranger to us Mongols. It is the leading institution in the West devoted to the study of Mongolia and Inner Asia. Since its foundation in 1986, MIASU has trained numerous scholars in this field, many of whom are now in leadership positions. We Mongols are the primary beneficiaries of this research unit—our own Member of Parliament, Professor Bumochir Dulam, earned his Ph.D. in social anthropology under the supervision of Professor Humphrey. Cambridge has also trained two additional Ph.D. holders in social anthropology: Dr. Baasanjav Terbish under Professor Humphrey, and Dr. Tuya Shagdar under Professor Sneath. I've learned that another Mongolian Ph.D. student, Zoljargal Enkh-Amgalan, is currently studying under Professor Bulag's supervision, and a new Mongolian student will begin her MPhil programme there this October. I am incredibly proud of the achievements of our Mongolian students and scholars, and I cannot thank the members of MIASU enough for their role in training scholars for Mongolia.

MIASU-Cambridge has now become a destination for many of our scholars for both short and long-term visits. Over the past decades, dozens of Mongolian scholars and students have visited and benefited from their research visits to MIASU. There is no other

research institution in the world that has done as much for Mongolia, as almost all these visitors have received MIASU scholarships.

In addition to scholarly exchanges, I was excited to learn that MIASU has conducted numerous large-scale projects. Three of their current projects, each employing two post-docs, are all related to Mongolia and involve many Mongolian scholars as collaborators or advisors. Through these projects, our scholars are learning how to conduct research, and because the research outputs are collaboratively produced, they have strong applicability in Mongolia. I am particularly excited to hear that Cambridge is supporting a study on Mongolia's digital readiness for the adoption of the Mongolian script as a parallel state script starting from January 1, 2025. It is unfortunate that the Mongolian script is still not Unicode-ready, which hampers its reintroduction next year. In this regard, I pledge that our Ministry will provide whatever support is needed for such a study.

As Professor Bulag mentioned in his opening speech, our Ministry has made a donation of $500,000 to MIASU to support the study of Chinggis Khan and the Mongol Empire, broadly defined. This is to train our scholars to engage with the best scholarship in this field—an important endeavour, as it aligns with the Mongolian state policy to centre our national history and identity around Chinggis Khan—our identity-giver—and the Mongol Empire, whose legacy has shaped our existence as a nation. We will leave it to MIASU scholars, in coordination with our scholars at The Chinggis Khaan Heritage and Cultural Institute, to implement a viable programme.

We believe this marks the beginning of a new era of cooperation between us and Cambridge, and we are eager to identify new themes and topics and provide our support wherever possible. I firmly believe that Mongolia's development in culture and tourism must be supported by strong academic research, and our Ministry is committed to finding a mechanism to achieve this goal.

You may have noticed that our logo is "MonGOlia" – meaning "GO Mongolia." By "Go Mongolia," we not only encourage international visitors to come to Mongolia, but we also aim to go out and engage with the international community to share our ideas, showcase our accomplishments, and offer our cooperation to build a better world for humanity.

I am thrilled to see two Kyrgyz scholars presenting on the Kyrgyz visions and their experience in managing the World Nomad Games. We are eager to learn from their experiences, and we also invite them to explore our approaches to organising the Nomads World Cultural Festival. Indeed, there is so much we can learn from each other, as our cultures share a deep connection rooted in our shared history, not too distant in the past.

You will note that three institutions under the charge of our Ministry are involved in organising this Forum:

- The International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilisations under the auspices of UNESCO

- The Chinggis Khaan Heritage and Cultural Institute
- The National Art Gallery of Mongolia

Our scholars in these institutions are ready to explore any potential collaborations.

May I wish the Forum a resounding success, and to all international guests, a pleasant stay in Mongolia!

THE NOMADIC ORIGIN OF THE STATE:
Extrahuman Transportation And Military Constitution

Lhamsuren Munkh-Erdene[1]
The National University of Mongolia

Abstract: By debunking the predominant theory of the origin of the state as a myth, resurrecting the conquest theory, and reinforcing it with the idea of extrahuman transportation, the paper argues for the nomadic origin of the state. The paper thus places nomadism at the origin of the state and civilisation and the Eurasian steppe at the centre of human history.

Keywords: Nomadism; state formation; Eurasian Steppe; Sinocentrism; political anthropology; Mongolian history

Introduction:

Debunking the hegemonic theory of the origin of the state involves refuting a series of theories including the theories of the origin and the nature of the state, the theories of the nomadic states/empires, as well as the theories of the origin and nature of pastoral nomadism. It also requires a replacement, and the conquest theory has been advanced to do the job. Yet, the conquest theory has been reinforced by the idea of extrahuman transportation. The idea of extrahuman transportation not only explains why societies with no means of non-human transportation lack a centralised, hierarchical top-down power structure, and remain divided in small, egalitarian communities but also clarifies the origin of inequality and the state. It also places the origin of the state or centralised, hierarchical structure of domination in human ingenuity.

Though the concept of extrahuman transportation can embrace all nonhuman means of transportation, as far as the origin of the state is concerned, the relevance belongs to herd animals as well as boats. And, while Eurasia happened to be the home of major herd domesticates, its steppe empires dominated world history up until the rise of the maritime powers of the western peninsula of the Eurasian landmass that we call Europe. The paper thus places pastoral nomadism at the origin of the state and civilisation, and the Eurasian steppe at the center of human history. The paper thus advances a radically different understanding of the origin and nature of the state and political organisation and hence advances a fundamentally new vision of human history: one that sees the human journey as neither fated, nor as doomed and 'stuck'. This is what I have tried to do in The Nomadic Leviathan: A Critique of the Sinocentric Paradigm, and the present paper is an attempt to summarise the book's main argument.

The Sinocentric Paradigm and the Great Anomaly

My quest to the problem had its origins in my doubts regarding the dominant scholarly explanation of the rise of the Eurasian nomadic empires and their relationship with sedentary areas, especially the region that is now China proper. According to the he-

[1] This work was supported by the Department 'Law & Anthropology' of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle (Saale). The author is also grateful to the organisers of the Cambridge Mongolia Forum for generously providing travel and lodging expenses.

gemonic theory of the origin and the nature of the state, identified as the Sinocentric paradigm, in vast, infertile, nomadic Eurasia, the state was impossible and unnecessary; ecologically, economically, socially, and politically, the steppe could not produce the state, or afford to have it. Equally, it was not required. Ecologically, the steppe is barren. "Extensive pastoral economy" is nonautarkic, or actually antiautarkic; it produces no surplus, and it can barely sustain a few nomads, let alone a state: the "poor nomad is the pure nomad" (Khazanov 1994: 72, 121; Lattimore 1951: 522; Sahlins 1968: 34–35).

Pastoralism simply cannot afford the state. It also forces the small population to disperse over an extensive area. Consequently, socially and politically, nomads are fissiparous; they are forced to split into small groups such as clans. If they form larger groups, they form tribes and, occasionally, temporary confederations; essentially, larger kinship groups. "It is, evidently, the mobility of nomads which limits the development of direct territorial and neighbourly links, thus leaving kinship as the best alternative for the expression of social relations" (Khazanov 1994: 138–139). Tribal organisation is sufficient to fill the needs of a pastoral economy; hence nomads need no state.

Why? Because, according to the Sinocentric paradigm, if there was no fertile land encircled by an inescapable barrier, then the state would never have arisen. Mother Nature created "areas of circumscribed agricultural land" and endowed them with fertile peasants whose hyper-reproduction, and overcrowding led to food shortages (Carneiro 1970: 734; see also Diamond 1999: 112, 292; Mann 1986: 75; Scott 2009: 324; Harari 2014: 97, 113–114). Peasants fought for food, and a village that was defeated had "nowhere to flee," "had no choice but to submit to the victors," and had to "produce more food than it had produced before" (Carneiro 1970: 735, 737). Only in such areas, and only in this way, did early states arise and, by implication, this was part of Mother Nature's design. Fertility and hunger created the state as a panacea for population pressure and food scarcity; "it was the social mechanism needed" to force peasants to "produce a food surplus" (ibid.: 734). The state arose as an agent of agriculture, and it emerged as a product of the economy as much as ecology; a concentration of grain and peasants created the state. In particular, it emerged as an agent of economic power, and an instrument of those "in command of the strategic means of production"—essentially, a preserve of the wealthy and populous (Sahlins 1968: 24). "Manpower and foodstuffs underwrite state power," and the state emerged as a "centripetal population machine" built on an "accumulation of manpower and grain production" (Scott 2009: 64, 82, 185).

Yet, historically, it was the Eurasian steppe empires that dominated the pre-modern world: at least, from the Xiongnu, or, in fact, from those who left the Deer Stone-Khirgisuur (DSK) complex to the rise of the maritime powers, the Eurasian steppe had been a home to successive empires that dominated the whole of Eurasia. The Sinocentric paradigm, thus, faces what I call a great anomaly (Munkh-Erdene 2023: 3–11).

The Sinocentric paradigm attributes the dominance of the Eurasian steppe empires to their military superiority, and this poses further questions. How could such military superiority—a military force that supersedes agrarian armies—have been created if there had been no centralised political power and organisation comparable to that of the agrarian empires? By what means, then, were Eurasian nomads able to afford to field such a military force if the steppe was infertile and its economy unable to support poor nomads? Most critically, how was it possible for nomads to do this repeatedly for much of human history if it was an ecological, economic, social, and political impossibility?

To come to terms with this fact, the paradigm was forced to devise alternative theo-

ries about the origin of the nomadic empires. While theories of secondary phenomena are enduring, theories of extraordinary phenomena challenge them. The earliest theory tasked townsmen to install charismatic leaders upon poor wild men and to build empires, a sort of civilising mission (Lattimore 1951; Sahlins 1968: 34–39). A revisionist theory elevated charismatic leaders who built imperial confederacies in order to overcome agrarian defence and to seise agrarian wealth; a shift that transferred agency to nomads (Barfield 1989). Craving agrarian wealth, charismatic leaders are forced not only to build their confederacies but also to equip their wars of conquest through pastoral surplus; a total negation of the political impotence that ecology and the economy imposed on the steppe (ibid.). Yet it was still to be the secondary phenomenon; agrarian power forced a response from the steppe.

In negation of secondary phenomena, notions of "abrupt climate change" along with charisma were mobilised to overcome ecological and economic impossibilities (Di Cosmo 1999: 14–16; Pederson et al. 2014). Climate disaster driven poverty has been given the task of bringing about social classes and the state, only to be quickly abandoned in favour of climate blessing-driven wealth and prosperity, while the former has been repurposed as the source of "extreme political instability" (Pederson et al. 2014: 4376). The state on the steppe is therefore a product of the abnormal climate; an extraordinary natural condition that overrules the ordinary natural. Since the state is impossible and unnecessary on the steppe, it is clear that the root cause of the nomadic empires should be sought elsewhere. While the search for these exogenous factors brings forces of agrarian wealth and wisdom, charisma and extraordinary natural phenomena into play, there is a definite shift in the search from the ordinary to the extraordinary, from the human to the natural to the supernatural: the paradigm dictates it.

Whether they are agrarian encounters or extraordinary natural phenomena, exogenous forces are obviously not enough to explain the rise of the nomadic empires. The Sinocentric paradigm combines them with the extraordinary, or even the supernatural, in the form of charisma. The Eurasian steppe is the breeding ground of military and chiefly charisma, and the nomadic empires are the personal creations of charismatic warlords; the steppe empires emerge as excesses of charisma. The Sinocentric paradigm needs charisma to explain the rise of the steppe empires; they are not necessary or essential outgrowths of ecology and economy, but rather the inessential personal disposables and dispensables of charismatic warlords. They are products of "extraordinary … supernatural, superhuman or, at the least, specifically exceptional powers" (Weber 1978: 241). In sharp contrast, because its ecology and economy generate the state, China, for instance, does not need charisma, and indeed it has virtually none.

Either way, what these theories devise is an anomalous, shadowy, state-like formation—the nomadic empire—variously described as a shadow empire, imperial confederacy, tribal confederation, loose framework of tribes, and alliances. The nomadic empires are fundamentally anomalous because the state is not normal in the steppe. The nomadic empire is state-like because it is not a typical or genuine state; it is a sort of a shadow of the normal empire. Not only are they themselves anomalous creatures but also, they are the creations of abnormal forces. However, since they not only arose over and over again, but also dominated much of recorded history, they actually emerge as the normal and typical, turning the exception into the rule.

There is also a theory of the form and nature of the nomadic empires. They are of two types: the tribal or imperial confederacy, and the empire or centralised empire (Fletcher 1986; Barfield 1981, 1989: 8–16; Di Cosmo 1999; Biran 2017: 138). The nomadic

empire, whether confederacy or empire, is a supratribal structure; it is a confederacy of tribes. It remains a tribal confederacy if it stays on the steppe or becomes an empire if it conquers agrarian regions such as China. Hence there has actually never been a nomadic empire; there are tribal confederacies and agrarian empires, albeit of nomadic origin. The designation 'nomadic empire' is therefore a sort of euphemism.

If the term 'tribal confederacy' describes a loose alliance of tribes with an elected, consultative supratribal war chief (the great khan), an empire is a centralised bureaucratic territorial polity under an emperor, a dynastic autocratic monarch who is succeeded through primogeniture. While a tribal confederacy is a product of the personal bond of the khan with his followers, the empire is a centralised bureaucratic impersonal administrative structure. Hence with the conquest of China or other agricultural areas, the tribal confederacy undergoes a metamorphosis; it becomes an empire, and the great khan the emperor (Fletcher 1980). Thus, we also see a theory of transformation from tribal confederacy to empire, a theory of assimilation or absorption. If referred to as assimilation, it is known as the Sinicisation thesis, and if absorption, it is the theory of the Chinese absorptive empire (Lattimore 1949: 18; 1951).

To become an empire, a tribal confederacy has to acquire all the features of the agrarian empire and cleanse itself of all tribal elements. To become an emperor, the great khan has to dissolve the great khanship and become a dynastic, bureaucratic, institutional monarch (Fletcher 1980). With the establishment of primogeniture, the great khan becomes the emperor; the tribal confederacy dissolves into the agrarian empire. In doing this, however, the paradigm has created an empire that does not conquer but gets conquered yet remains an empire by absorbing its conquerors; a cultural community that is predicated upon assimilation and homogeneity—the Chinese absorptive empire. By devising this concept, the paradigm has effectively redefined the concept of empire as a defensive and assimilative cultural homogeneity.

However, empire is anything but cultural homogeneity; by definition, it is expansive and heterogenous. Thus, the Chinese absorptive empire emerges as another anomaly that has also lasted for much of recorded history. Moreover, the great khans have rarely practiced primogeniture, so they appear to have invariably failed to become emperors and their khanates failed to become empires. However, unlike the acclaimed Roman emperors and the elected Holy Roman emperors, the Eurasian great khans were invariably hereditary monarchs. Thus, if primogeniture was the hallmark of emperorship, the Roman and the Holy Roman emperorship could be defined as tribal chieftainship at best. The Chinese emperorship also emerges as another anomaly.

The Sinocentric paradigm also presents a theory of historical cycles: a pan-Eurasian historical pattern of nomadic domination of agricultural areas that began in the eighth century BCE, with the rise of pastoral nomadism in the steppe, and lasted until the early twentieth century (Puett 2017: 95–104). This pattern is counterintuitive because small and ephemeral, acephalous, and fissiparous groups of poor nomads dominate enduring, centralised, large, wealthy, populous empires for much of recorded history. However, since this is a pattern that has endured, it actually forms the norm rather than the abnormal. Yet it forms a fundamental contradiction to the scheme's evolutionary premises; the inferior is to dominate the superior.

Ironically, the unipolar pan-Eurasian historical pattern of nomadic domination is actually the latest reincarnation of the unipolar Chinese dynastic cycles, with the steppe displacing agricultural land as the epicentre of the cycles (Lattimore 1951: 531–555).

Because the Chinese dynastic cycles contradicted what had happened in the past, the scheme has been reformulated into cycles of nomadic direct rule and indirect control of what is now China, and the reformulation decisively shifted the centre of power to Eurasian nomads (Barfield 1989: 8–16). The Sinocentric paradigm crowds the premodern past with anomalies: anomalous states, anomalous empires, anomalous emperorships, and an anomalous pattern of nomadic domination. Since nomadic domination lasted for most of documented history, the past or history itself becomes an anomaly.

The anomaly doesn't end with history; it embraces the theory of the state, too. The source of all of these anomalies lies in the paradigm's conceptualisation of the state, or rather the pristine or normal state, and its origin. The paradigm sees the (Chinese) state as a centralised, bureaucratic, impersonal, territorial administrative structure topped by a dynastic autocratic monarch whose succession is governed by primogeniture. The centralised, bureaucratic, impersonal, territorial structure is certainly a Weberian state. Indeed, in its conceptualisation the paradigm follows Max Weber and Thomas Hobbes (Fried 2008: 273, 1967: 230; Service 1962: 151; Sahlins 1968: 6).

Yet, territory, bureaucracy, centralisation, and impersonality are the defining features of Weber's legal authority that stands for the modern constitutional nation-state, a state founded on the rule of law, and its German version, the Rechtsstaat (Schmitt 2008: 167–252). They are not the features of Weber's premodern patrimonial state, the embodiment of his traditional authority. Weber's legal authority is the antithesis of traditional authority; his bureaucracy is modern civil/public service; and his bureaucrat is the modern civil/public servant—appointed and elected—who operates under the law and serves the law.

However, the Sinocentric paradigm projects Weber's legal authority into the premodern condition as a defining feature of the (Chinese) state. No doubt this is another anomaly, albeit caused by the misapplication of a theory. At the same time, in an effort to depict the Eurasian steppe as the tribal other, the paradigm casts nomadic empires in terms of Weber's traditional authority. It is certainly a proper application; however, its tribal language is out of place.

The paradigm emphasises impersonal bureaucracy as the defining feature of the state and even equates the state with bureaucratic structure. This, however, is a fundamental anomaly in terms of Weber's theory. For Weber as well as for Hobbes, the state is, first and foremost, the institution of rulership. Bureaucracy is, however, administrative, that is, a service structure; a structure that rulership creates as its service agency. Rulership creates bureaucracy, not vice versa; no ruler is a bureaucrat, and no rulership is bureaucracy because neither rulership nor sovereign is created by appointment (see Bodin 1992). Rulership/sovereignty and appointment are mutually exclusive: for this reason, if for Weber (1978: 220) an "authority" or a "holder of power" is created "by virtue of appropriation, of election, or of having been designated for the succession," for Hobbes (1996: 115–139) "sovereign power" is created by virtue of "acquisition," of "institution," and of "generation." For this reason, Weber describes charismatic, traditional, and legal authorities, while Hobbes writes of commonwealth by acquisition, by generation, and by institution. Weber's warband led by a charismatic warlord is truly Hobbes's Leviathan by acquisition.

Defining the state by bureaucracy or equating it with bureaucracy is tantamount to replacing monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy with bureaucracy. However, neither state nor rulership is the same as bureaucracy and, for this reason, cannot be identified and defined by bureaucracy; hence, there is no form of rulership or political regime called

bureaucracy. Because it is not ultimately about rulership, bureaucracy is, in this sense, nonpolitical.

The Sinocentric paradigm locates the origin of the state in the geographical environment and ecology—areas of circumscribed agricultural land. The geographical environment decides the political organisation of any given society by determining its economy. The state, in particular, and social and political organisation in general, are ultimately products of exogenic force, the external environment. Hence, the paradigm divides the world into state and nonstate spaces. This is also antithetical to Hobbes and Weber. For them, the state is inherently human; it is a product of endogenic human nature, it is for the preservation of life and liberty.

For Hobbes, the state is a product of the "condition of war," which is the universal fundamental "condition of man" (Hobbes 1996: 86). For Weber, the state emerges where there is "a chronic state of war," and war is "absolutely primordial" to humans (Weber 1978: 904, 1142). Hence the state, though not primordial, is universal, and there is no necessary division between the state/civilisation and tribal/barbarian for Hobbes or for Weber. For Weber, in particular, "kingship and state" "can easily develop within any tribe that is chronically threatened with war," and it emerges as a victorious warband led by a charismatic warlord that domesticates the subjugated (ibid.: 1134–1135). A chronic state of war or "the violent struggle of one community against another" begets the state, while "the king is everywhere primarily a warlord" and "kingship is normally charismatic war leadership that has become permanent and has developed a repressive apparatus for the domestication of the unarmed subjects" (Weber 1978: 1134–1142; 1946: 251).

To Weber, charisma is the great revolutionary force decisive in the rise of the state, and every new state is a work and embodiment of charismatic revolution. Each established state is a routinised ("traditionalised or rationalised or combination of both") product of charismatic political authority (Weber 1978: 245–246). To the Sinocentric paradigm, however, the Eurasian steppe is the womb of charisma, and all of its empires are creations of charismatic warlords. The paradigm, however, needs charisma not because it sees it as the necessary agent in the rise of the state, but because supernatural or extraordinary forces are required to explain the fundamental anomaly that it has itself created. What, for Weber, is normal in the rise of the state (charisma) is a form of abnormality that creates an anomaly in the Sinocentric paradigm.

The theory of the (pristine or normal) state and its origin that the Sinocentric paradigm has devised is fundamentally evolutionary materialistic, and it is antithetical and anomalous to Weber; here the dominant theory is pseudo-Weberian and pseudo-Hobbesian. This anomalous theory generates all the other anomalies outlined earlier and, in effect, renders the scheme itself anomalous. Ironically, the anomalous shadow empires of the steppes, which the Sinocentric paradigm depicts as essentially the warband of the charismatic warlord, match Weber's concept of the state, and also fit Hobbes's commonwealth by acquisition. When we adopt a Hobbes-Weberian conceptualisation of the state and its origin, all the anomalies that the Sinocentric paradigm has created evaporate. Instead, the Sinocentric paradigm itself becomes anomalous. With this, the image and the constitution of inherently tribal Inner Asia and enduring imperial China evaporate too. All in all, the Sinocentric paradigm's effort to explain the rise of the nomadic powers on the Eurasian steppe results in the anomaly of the scheme itself.

The Sinocentric paradigm domesticates Weber's scheme, dissecting and mutilating it. In giving materialistic birth to the Weberian state, it relegates charisma to prehistoric

primitivity: it deprives Weber's scheme of its revolutionary force in history. It equates Weber's notion of the state with his concept of legal authority, and his legal authority with bureaucracy, and his bureaucracy with his patrimonial officialdom. In doing so, it effectively purges Weber's traditional authority and patrimonial states. Not only does it inject/project Weberian legal authority into the premodern period, but it also effectively replaces rulership with administration. What is primary and fundamental in Weber becomes secondary and subordinate in this Sinocentric model: evolutionary materialism not only dissects and mutilates Weber's scheme but also turns it on its head.

The anomalies don't end with the origin and the nature of the state, they extend to the origin and nature of pastoral nomadism embracing agents, methods, definitions, time and space of domestication of animals. Lattimore generates steppe nomadism from a mixed economy by way of differentiation from among the proto-Chinese. Arguing that "the truth is that even such terms as 'true,' or 'strict,' or 'normal' nomadism are too broad," Lattimore defines "pastoral nomadism" as the "the 'extreme' of nomadism" or "the strict or extreme phases of steppe nomadism" (Lattimore 1951: 516, 517, 523). Thus, it is the proto-Chinese who domesticate animals, develop and incubate nomadism, and then pushes pure and real nomadism or its extreme form to the steppe.

Pastoral nomadism was also made to emerge as a survival technique for recluses who were displaced by ever-expanding Chinese agriculture. As such, pastoral nomadism was made a derivative offshoot, a devolutionary deviation, and an evolutionary dead end. Lattimore's making of pastoral nomadism a byproduct of Chinese expansion also fits well with his peopling of Inner Asia with proto-Chinese, thus, to populate China and Mongolia with a racially homologous population.

Lattimore defines pastoral nomadism as the extreme phases of steppe nomadism. Advancing the narrowest possible definition of nomadism, thus, delaying the emergence of pastoral nomadism, Lattimore places its emergence after the rise of the state and civilisation. To do this, Lattimore equated pastoral nomadism with horse riding, horse riding with cavalry, and cavalry with mounted archery. In this way, pastoral nomadism was made to emerge around the fourth century BCE. If the conquest theory is built on the military superiority of nomads, Lattimore, making the cavalry an "invention of the fourth and third centuries BC," renders cavalry irrelevant to the rise of the state, and claims early states as the monopoly of agriculture and peasants (Lattimore 1951: 62).

Pastoral nomadism has also been equated with extensiveness and poverty, and the definition was aimed at creating a sharp dichotomy between civilisation and pastoral nomadism (Lattimore 1951: 332, 416). The equation of pastoralism with extensiveness and poverty disqualified nomadism as the economic foundation of the state. This also allowed Lattimore to monopolise state and civilisation for agriculture. Though Lattimore recognises that "Inner Asia was a pivotal area of military power," he also dispels the conventional myth of nomadic conquests as Chinese dynasties of frontier origin and reduces "true nomads" to raiding bands (ibid.: xxiii, 544). Lattimore, thus, reconceptualised pastoral nomadism from the foundation of state and civilisation to byproduct of sedentary/agricultural expansion. As a derivative offshoot, a devolutionary deviation, and a dead end, and a destructive force, pastoral nomadism emerged as a barbarian plague.

Lattimore's treatment of mobility and pastoral nomadism fundamentally shaped subsequent scholarship, especially anthropological theorisation of social, political, and economic organisation. Ultimately, while Lattimore's treatment of mobility came to fruition in Robert Carneiro's as well as William Irons's theory, his treatment of nomadism

also attained its logical elaboration in Anatoly Khazanov's and Robert Drews's (Drews 2004). While the main aim of Carneiro's environmental circumscription was to eliminate mobility as escape, and thus to facilitate population pressure and political subordination, the main aim of Irons's "ease of geographic mobility" was to facilitate dispersal and low population density, and thus to facilitate an egalitarian political order (Irons 1979: 362). If Carneiro's theory was to circumscribe mobility for the formation of the state, Irons's was to circumscribe the state by mobility, or to uncircumscribe mobility for tribal order.

Lattimore's Chinese origin of Inner Asian pastoral nomadism was a veritable falsification. And, it was Anatoly Khazanov who restored the pre-Lattimorian theory of the origin of Inner Asian pastoral nomadism: pastoral nomadism emerged in "the southern Russian steppes" with "Indo-Iranians" who domesticated "horse no later than the fourth millennium BC," and made its way into Inner Asia owing "to certain pressures and impulses from the West"; "real pastoral nomadism" emerged around the first millennia BCE (Khazanov 1994: 93, 91, 96, 99).

Though Khazanov replaced China with Mesopotamia, his general scheme of the origins of state and civilisation including his theory of nomadism is essentially an updated elaboration of Lattimore's scheme. Lattimore makes the state and civilisation a monopoly of agriculture by delaying the emergence of nomadism, and Khazanov does the same—nomadism finally emerges around the first millennium; not because of Lattimore's sedentary expansion but because of "climatic changes connected with desiccation," that is, Arnold Toynbee's "climatic screw in Eurasia" (Khazanov 1994: 87; Toynbee 1934: 10). While in Lattimore's case, the proto-Chinese incubate nomadism, and then push pure and real nomadism or its extreme form to the Mongolian steppe, in Khazanov's case, cultivators "incubate" nomadism for "a long time" to generate "pure pastoral nomadism" (Khazanov 1994: xlii).

However, "plant and animal domestication occurred at roughly the same time, with signs of initial management of morphologically wild future plant and animal domesticates reaching back to at least 11,500 cal BP, if not earlier," a process that "persisted for 4,000 years or more" (Zeder 2011: S230, S231). Furthermore, while "in Western Eurasia, sheep, goats, and cattle were likely all domesticated in this manner between 10,500 and 10,000 years BP," a 10,660-year-old cattle specimen with a "unique mitochondrial genome" found in northern Manchuria, north of present day Harbin, displays that the specimen underwent "long-term human management" (Larson and Fuller 2014: 123, 125; Zhang et al. 2013: 2).

Khazanov decidedly rejects a hunting to herding route because of hunters' "lack of necessary fodder reserves"; "the most that hunters could do was borrow animals which had been domesticated" (Khazanov 1994: 86). He credits animal domestication to "groups involved in advanced gathering" as well as "incipient cultivators" (ibid.: 89). Rejecting the prey pathway, Khazanov thus argues for the commensal pathway—the way in which dogs, cats, pigeons, guinea pigs, chickens, and probably pigs, the animals usually associated with a sedentary way of life, became domesticated—for domestication of pastoral (herd) animals (Zeder 2012; Larson and Fuller 2014). However, not only were all pastoral animals domesticated via a prey pathway, but also "early domestication only took place within a subset of the geographical distribution of the wild ancestors" and "often in regions distant from centres of plant domestication" (Larson and Fuller 2014: 122). Most major livestock species were domesticated not by gatherers and cultivators but by hunters and herders (Zeder 2011, 2012; Larson and Fuller 2014).

Just like Lattimore, Khazanov defines nomadism in the most extreme way possible, with his aim being to strike the most extreme contrast with civilisation; he distinguishes "pure pastoral nomadism" from other types of pastoralism such as herdsman husbandry, semisedentary pastoralism, and seminomadic pastoralism "as the most extreme form," for it "adequately serve[s] the purpose of [his] study" to "imply two opposites: between pastoralism and agriculture and between mobility and sedentism" and between nomadism and civilisation (Khazanov 1994: xxxii). Thus, Khazanov specifically rejects "an all-encompassing" definition of "pastoralism in general" as an "ill-defined category" (ibid.).

Lattimore's aim is to demonstrate that nomadism was a byproduct and burden of civilisation that needed to be integrated into it permanently, and Khazanov's aim is essentially the same. Demonstrating that "nomads could never exist on their own without the outside world," and that nomadism—"as the final result of specialised pastoral economies"—"could only function while the outside world not only existed but also allowed" it to emerge and survive is his "thesis" (ibid.: 3).

If, however, Lattimore (1951: 518) acknowledges his pure nomadism and, its extreme phase as "more theoretical than actual," Khazanov's is actual: "the regular following of herds on horseback along routes of hundreds of kilometres" or even "a thousand kilometres or more" is the real pastoral nomadism, and it emerged when animal herders became "able to move more than 30 kilometres from the sources of water" (Khazanov 1994: 38, 92, 98). Burials found in a distance of "90 kilometres away from river valleys" signalled the transition to real nomadism for Khazanov, and the Mongol, Kazakh, Kirghiz, and Afghan pure nomads regularly migrated distances of 150 to "1,500 kilometres" (ibid.: 93, 52, 62). Though in the Sudano-Sahelian zone, a home of advanced nomadism, "cattle cannot be pastured more than 15–20 kilometres from a watering place," Khazanov marks the ability to pasture cattle more than 30 kilometres from a watering place as the transition to pure or real pastoral nomadism (ibid.: 59). However, the distance between pasture and water makes Khazanov's real nomadism more of an "ahistorical myth" than actual practice (Humphrey and Sneath 1999: 292). Khazanov's true nomadism—a nomadism that travelled more than 30 kilometres from a water source, thus "penetrating quite deep into the steppe," seems to have existed only as an extreme ideal type of theorisation (Khazanov 1994: 92).

Nonetheless, this pure and extreme nomadism has powerfully shaped scholarship, making Robert Drews search for "true riding" or "good riding" that would bring about his "true nomadism," or "full nomadism" (Drews 2004: 39, 3, 23, 63). His search for full nomadism effectively morphs into a search for bit, bridle, saddle, and stirrups. While Drews's search for bad and good horse-riding knowledge leads him to conclude that horse raisers herded horses on foot for several thousand years, making them appear as seminomads, horse herders had actually milked, bridled, and ridden their horses since 3500 BCE—and had also already colonised all of Eurasia from Spain to China, even changing their mounts (Outram et al. 2009; Librado et al. 2021). In fact, Pablo Librado and his team's finding completely refutes Drews's argument as "equestrianism involved strong selection for critical locomotor and behavioural adaptations at the GSDMC and ZFPM1 genes" that resulted in "horses with reduced back pathologies and enhanced docility" around 2200 BC (Librado et al. 2021: 634, 638). And, the team's finding not only shows that "horseback riding fuelling the initial dispersal of DOM2 horses outside their core region" but also implies that the early riders were consciously working to improve their mounts as early as "2700 BCE" (ibid.: 636; Librado et al. 2024: 819).

However, by equating nomadism and mobility with cavalry, this real, pure, and extreme nomadism denies animal herders their nomadic identity, and allows state-building and civilisation to be claimed as the monopoly of agriculture. On the other hand, although Lattimore surgically separates those engaged in "intensive and specialised agriculture" (the Chinese) from those engaged in "food gathering, hunting, fishing, primitive agriculture," he imposes that specialised and intensive agriculturalist (Chinese) identity on people who herd horse, cattle, and sheep and hunt, who sacrifice horses and other domestic animals to their sky god, who are heavy meat eaters and drinkers, who use bronze, and are chariot-fighting, warlike people (Bishop 1934: 312–316; see also Mair 2005; Legge 1872). At the same time, he also imposes a proto-Chinese language and identity on the Rong and Di, against their will, culture, and language, as well as on Ural-Altaic speakers against the evidence and scholarly knowledge of the time (Lattimore 1951: 345–387, 448–459, 514; Maspero 1978: 8–9).

However, recent scholarship decisively rejects Lattimore's imposition of proto-Chinese identity on the Rong and Di, while its argument effectively concurs with Carl Bishop's invasion/conquest theory. Edwin Pulleyblank maintains that "the Jung differed from the Chinese not only in customs and material culture but also in language," while it is uncertain if Di were Tibeto-Burmans or Altaic (Pulleyblank 1983: 419, 448). Moreover, while Lattimore (1951: 459, 514) makes the Rong and Di reemerge as Ural-Altaic speakers, Pulleyblank, who initially saw the Rong as Tibeto-Burmans, reclassified them as relating to the Xiongnu, while he maintained that the Qiang were Sino-Tibetans (Pulleyblank 1983: 419; 1999: 41). Victor Mair, on the other hand, maintains that "the Qiang or their successors … almost always have clearly Europoid characteristics (large and long noses, round and deep-set eyes, narrow faces, thin lips, prominent jaws, beards, tattoos, etc) (Mair 2003: 169).

Furthermore, if, for Pulleyblank, "the Shang rulers could have been originally non-Chinese speakers," the Zhou emerge as Tibeto-Burmans who "lost their identity with those Jung who retained their own customs and language" (Pulleyblank 1983: 413, 421). Maintaining that the Zhou's "non-Chinese allies were all from the same Tibeto-Burman 'Jung' stock as Chou itself," Pulleyblank fully concurs with Wolfram Eberhard (Pulleyblank 1983: 422). Jacques Gernet also maintains that "the originality of early Chinese civilisation was certainly not due to agriculture … but rather to all the innovations that may be ascribed to the noble classes of the walled cities" who were "hunters and livestock-breeders" who raised "cattle, oxen and horses" whose "art was zoomorphic" and whose dances "seem to have been peculiar to brotherhoods of cattle-breeders" (Gernet 1968: 45, 53, 48). Mair too maintains that "Analysis of the dynamics of Shang civilisation reveal that there may be even more profound steppic connection," and notes that "the concept of wén in Chinese civilisation," the "most quintessential characteristic of Chinese culture displays, during its earliest stages of development, intimate affinities with the same peoples who brought cattle, sheep, goats, and—above all—horses to East Asia" and hints a direct connection to "the mummies of Eastern Central Asia … often replete with tattoos" (Mair 2003: 182).

In its effort to claim state and civilisation for agriculture and population pressure, the Sinocentric paradigm devises an identity scheme that has two extreme categories: one is extremely expansive and all-embracing, and the other is extremely narrow and exclusive. While the scheme's true, pure, real and extreme nomadism, excluding historical pastoral nomadism, eliminates nomadism as a category, its all-embracing agriculture, embracing nomadism, renders both the categories of agriculture and nomadism mean-

ingless; both categories are purely theoretical ideal types. The scheme of delaying the emergence of nomadism not only eliminates mobility as a factor in the rise of the state and civilisation but also actively devises theories that specifically target mobility as an antistate force and eliminate it by creating circumscribed areas of agricultural land.

While extensiveness and poverty define nomadism for Lattimore, "economic one-sidedness and no autarky" or even "anti-autarky" define Khazanov's "traditional extensive pastoral economy" (Khazanov 1994: 16, 3, 72). However, Lattimore's idea of extensive and intensive economies, upon which he built his whole scheme, is also misleading. He adopts the idea from Karl Wittfogel, who uses the concept to distinguish between irrigated and non-irrigated agriculture, showing that irrigated agriculture is more input intensive, especially labour intensive, than non-irrigated agriculture (Wittfogel 1931: 152–181, 340). Lattimore transforms this differentiation into intensive and extensive economies, conceptualising China as an "intensive agricultural economy" and Mongolia as an "extensive pastoral economy." Extensive and intensive become identical to population density but not to the attributes of inputs, especially the labour inputs in production. Thus, for Lattimore, extensive and intensive acquired totally different meanings than they had for Wittfogel.

Wittfogel's intensive and extensive are about input attributes that are invested in industry or production. Moreover, Wittfogel discusses the economic advantages of "labour-extensive cattle breeding" in the case of Spain and England, "the replacement of labour-intensive irrigation farming by labour-extensive cattle breeding," and the "subjection of agriculture to large scale pasturage" that contributed to "the great reduction in Indian farming population in post-Conquest Mexico, Yucatan, and Peru" (Wittfogel 1957: 218). Wittfogel's labour-extensive means a small workforce in relation to output—in other words labour efficiency. Because of its labour extensiveness and high productivity, labour-extensive cattle breeding was advantageous to labour intensive irrigation farming.

With Lattimore's misappropriation, Wittfogel's initial idea was lost, and extensive and intensive economies were established as forms of economies or societies; and as forms of societies, they were effectively reified. Subsequent anthropological theorisations, including that of Sahlins, adopted Lattimore's extensive economy and rationalised it precisely how Lattimore had conceptualised it. As a result, Sahlins claims pastoral nomadism as the most extensive and the least productive of tribal economies, and as a fragment of "the most extensive of tribal economies" (Sahlins 1968: 34). The pastoral economy has since been accepted as the most extensive, least productive, and the most atomistic and anarchical economy (Service 1975: 249).

However, when we adopt Wittfogel's understanding of extensive and intensive as attributes of inputs in industry, especially as extensiveness or intensiveness of labour or workforce in relation to output, it produces a radically different understanding of the pastoral economy and society. In fact, as Wittfogel highlights in the case of Spain and England, the pastoral economy is more labour-extensive or labour efficient than preindustrial agriculture ever was. To give a crude idea, according to the National Statistical Office of Mongolia, Mongolia presently has a pastoral economy of over 67 million livestock and a population of 3.2 million. However, about 289,000 people aged above fifteen, that is, less than 10 percent of the population, run the nation's pastoral economy.

The Sinocentric paradigm, placing the origin of the state and civilisation in immobility and agriculture, and rendering mobility and pastoral nomadism as the source of tribal-

ism and barbarism, has fundamentally shaped our understanding of the origin of the state and political organisation. However, the Eurasian steppe empires, as it were forming a great anomaly that lasted for most of recorded history, always remained a conundrum for the Sinocentric paradigm.

Extrahuman Transportation

Circumscription theory eliminates mobility for the sake of the state and civilisation, and for Jared Diamond, the areas of circumscribed agricultural land are the fundamental condition that leads to slavery is regions "where population densities are high … [and] the defeated still have nowhere to flee but victors now have … options for exploiting them while leaving them alive"; it is the areas of circumscribed agricultural land that eliminate mobility, and it is the state space—"fixed in space, legible, taxable, conscriptable, and close at hand" agricultural lands, too (Diamond 1999: 292).

However, as Diamond himself eloquently puts it, New Guinea's "Grand Valley, looking like Holland: a cleared landscape devoid of jungle, neatly divided into small fields outlined by irrigation ditches, and with scattered hamlets" and an area of 80 kilometres in length and 20 kilometres in width, a home to 50,000 farmers with a population density of 32 people per square kilometre, surrounded by impenetrable jungle that effectively isolated it from the rest of the world until 1938, and emerges as an ideal area of circumscribed agricultural land (Diamond 1999: 205). The surrounding jungle is not only hard to traverse but also inhospitable. Anyone who does not have enough provisions faces starvation. The Grand Valley is as circumscribed as the Peruvian coast, Carneiro's quintessential circumscribed agricultural land.

The Dani have developed sophisticated and irrigated agriculture with pig raising, and the highlanders seem to have been engaged in "intensive agriculture" as early as 6000 BP (Brown 1978: 270–271). As immobile as Carneiro's ancient Peruvians, they are pure peasants with no animals to ride or pack. When it was discovered in 1938, the valley boasted a population of 50,000 strong—nearly doubling Carneiro's minimum of 30,000 and equalling that of ancient Uruk—with a population density equal to that of the United States, at 32 people per square kilometre (Carneiro 1988: 499). Yet instead of forming a state, or kingdom, or even chiefdom, the Dani agriculturalists, just like Amazonian Yanomamö, formed autonomous local communities of small settlements and hamlet clusters each with its own headman. They were also engaged in regular warfare, which did not usually result in the subjugation of the defeated and "immediate or permanent occupation of [the] land by the victor" (Brown 1978: 282; see also Sahlins 1963; Heider 1970; Strathern 1966; Chowning 1979). While "the average size of the largest political unit varied from 180 to 4200 [individuals], … the average territory of the largest political group remains between 3.7 and 12 square miles … [that] are convenient visiting distances for members. Very large territories could not be utilised or protected by the techniques of highland peoples" (Brown 1978: 278–279). Neither the circumscribed area of agricultural land, nor the irrigated agriculture, nor the population density led even to a chiefdom let alone a shadow empire or imperial confederacy.

In the meantime, in Mongolia, empires/states have been built at least since the Xiongnu. The current population density is 2 people per square kilometre, with a population of 3.2 million; this compares with a population density of 0.3 person per square kilometres and a population of nearly 0.6 million in the 1920s. A realistic estimate puts the population that gave rise to the Mongol Empire at around 1 million. Neither ease of geographic mobility, nor absence of widespread irrigated agriculture, nor lack of population

density prevented the building of empires. What set those in Mongolia apart from those in the Grand Valley is mobility. Those in the Grand Valley shared immobility with the Yanomamö: they had no means of transportation other than themselves.

The condition of the Dani and Yanomamö is exactly what Herbert Spencer called "the necessary limitation" put on human grouping by food supply; "Even in tolerably productive habitats, fission of the groups is eventually necessitated" (Spencer 1877: 484–485). This is what Alexander Rüstow conceptualised as "limits of a purely economic character" that leads to splitting: "When the number of persons belonging to such a coexisting group increases beyond a given and relatively low figure, the area required for effective cultivation becomes so large and the resulting inconveniences so irksome and unproductive that the group inevitably splits up" (Rüstow 1980: 11). Napoleon Chagnon also observes similar correlation of "the social complexity of [Yanomamö] villages … with geography and ecological factors such as elevation, drainage characteristics, species abundance" and "rapid population spurts" that led to fission and split in "the 'fertile crescents' of Yanomamöland" (Chagnon 2013: 272). Even Carneiro observes the process of villages' "fission as they grow" among many Amazonian populations (Carneiro 1970: 735). All these observations and arguments are valid. However, their explanations are misplaced: the fundamental limitation on human social complexity is not the availability of a food supply but rather human physical capacity to travel and carry.

While the Sinocentric paradigm equated mobility with flight and dispersal, in emphasising its military and conquest aspects, the conquest theory tended to equate it with migration rather than mobilisation and concentration. For instance, Rüstow argues that "original herd-animal nomadism … without wheel, wagon, or the technique of horseback riding, had already fully changed the human situation with respect of locomotion" making "genuine 'migrations' in large groups and over long stretches possible, migrations of whole hordes and tribes 'with bag and baggage,' 'with kith and kin'" (Rüstow 1980: 20–21). However, conquest theorists failed to explicitly spell out the fact that when humans were themselves the only means of locomotion and transportation, their physical or natural body capacity to travel and carry determined the scope of their operation, the amount of their production, and the structure of their community. It was the human physical capability to travel and carry that kept the Dani, Yanomamö, and similar communities small and "egalitarian," as it forced them to fit within an area that could support them.

Human physical capacity, which puts a limit on the distance humans can traverse and the load they can carry, sets limits on the size of area they could occupy and the community they could form in any given area, depending on the method of their subsistence and the natural resources of the area. While Grand Valley irrigated agriculture communities "varied in average size of population from 9 to 650" with a territory "between a minimum of 1.1 square mile and a maximum of 6.25 square miles," in the Amazon Basin the Yanomamö "horticultural" communities varied from 40 to 300 individuals, while large villages had territories of "four or five days' walk" (Brown 1978: 278; Chagnon 2013: 6, 49, 76). Any excess—territory, produce, or population—was futile and unsustainable. As such, immobility was the natural circumscription to human power, property, and domination; it provided natural immunity to inequality—and as long as it endured nothing was to change.

The domestication of animals and the use of draft animals (or canoes) liberated humans from their natural limitations, making long-distance operation and mobilisation possible; extrahuman transportation therefore made the state and civilisation possible.

Empowering those who possessed it, extrahuman transportation destroyed equality permanently and made the domination of man over man possible over a large area. If a flock of sheep, as a mobile provision of warbands, made early conquests possible, draft animals destroyed equality permanently. This fundamentally changed the nature of war: it was transformed into campaigns of conquest, the enterprise of dominion building.

Freeing humans from their natural constraints, extrahuman locomotion and transportation brought a revolution, empowering those who commanded them—they augmented the scope of their operations, the amount they could produce, and the size and structure of their communities. In making a long-distance operation with heavy loads possible, extrahuman locomotion and transportation made the occupation of large areas and the integration of many communities possible. Making mobilisation, centralisation and concentration of resources possible, extrahuman transportation freed human communities from their dependence on supporting areas; cities—human communities that are not dependent on an immediate food source—were made possible for the first time. Conquest, domination, and exploitation became possible only because of extrahuman locomotion and transportation. It was extrahuman transportation rather than environmental circumscription, mobility, or animal husbandry, and not immobility and agriculture, that made the state and civilisation possible. The revolutionary factor that facilitated the rise of the state—the Nomadic Leviathan—was actually the rise of pastoralism.

Extrahuman transportation, by making conquest possible, led to the rise of the warband. If the warband as a community of common political struggle with a legitimate monopoly of violence formed the prototype of the political community, the warlord as the authority that exercised legitimate violence against members of the band formed the archetype of political power. The rise of the warband inaugurated the state, and once it had domesticated the conquered by imposing order upon them, it "monopolises the legitimate application of violence for its coercive apparatus and is gradually transformed into an institution for the protection of rights"—in other words, the state (Weber 1978: 908). Enhancement of mobility, not the crippling of it, led to the state. Political integration and domination created the rulers and the ruled. Land scarcity was the consequence of the state rather than its cause. Conquest subjugated the inhabitants of an area and transformed them into a subject population, service-rendering and tax-paying servants, and an area into a territory, a domain of control and exploitation, of the conquerors.

Once we recognise that the state cannot exist without extrahuman locomotion and transportation, we are prepared to look for animal domestication in the Old World. Once we also recognise that the state is impossible without a monopoly of violence, we are prepared to look for the rise of the warband. Once we recognise that it is not population growth and wealth differentiation but unification and integration that bring hierarchy and social stratification, we are prepared to look for conquest. And, once we accept war and conquest as a matter of life and death, we are prepared to recognise the warband as a community of common political struggle of life and death, a community that legitimises violence, and a community that is governed by law and discipline. And, once we also locate in the imperium the prototype of political power—the authority to administer legitimate violence—we are prepared to appreciate the nature and significance of warlordship.

And, once we combine the mobility of pastoralists with the labour-efficiency of animal husbandry, and the nature of herding life that promotes leadership, rationalism, and martial virtues that the conquest theorists emphasise, we are in a better position to understand Weber's military differentiation. All these reconceptualisations allow us to

look at the nature and the logic of nomadic political order and the significance of its hierarchically nested numerical divisional system, and see it in a new light as a military constitution.

The Military Constitution

Once we adopt this vision of the state and place its origin in war, the anomaly of the Sinocentric vision becomes self-evident, as it is war, and the warlike nature and military superiority of the Inner Asian nomads over China and other sedentary areas that the Sinocentric paradigm recognises. In fact, it is the military superiority of the nomads that the Sinocentric paradigm ultimately sees as responsible for nomadic domination over the most populous of the sedentary regions. It is also the Sinocentric paradigm that depicts nomadic societies as a collection of warbands and Inner Asian polities as military machines, with all-pervasive armies or army-societies. And it is the Sinocentric paradigm that depicts Inner Asian rulership as charismatic warlordship (Fletcher 1980: 237–238).

And, once we adopt, as does the Sinocentric paradigm, Weber's "human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory" as the state, and place its origin, again following Weber, in the rise of a warband led by a charismatic warlord, the above-mentioned conundrum evaporates (Weber 1946: 78). If the formation of a warband led by a charismatic war leader is the beginning of a political community, "the entrenchment of a war leader with a permanent staff is the decisive step to be linked with the notions of 'kingship' and 'state' as compared to the peacetime chief" (Weber 1978: 1134).

Though Weber finds a (modern) political community where there is "(1) a 'territory'; (2) the availability of physical force for its domination; and (3) social action which is not restricted exclusively to the satisfaction of common economic needs in the frame of a communal economy, but regulates more generally the interrelation of the inhabitants of the territory," what defines a political community is not just physical force; rather, physical force is the political community per se (Weber 1978: 902). What creates a political community is war or a chronic state of war—a matter of life and death—and this legitimises its existence. What makes a community political is its legitimate monopoly over violence. It emerges as a war power and its raison d'être is to negate war or violence. For Weber, if there is no community whose raison d'être is the monopoly of violence, there is no political community by definition.

Only when there is a permanent distinct community or structure or apparatus whose raison d'être is the monopoly of violence is there a political community. War defines political community; it forces a political community to emerge as a war power and warband—a "community of political destiny, i.e., above all, of common political struggle of life and death" (ibid.: 903). War legitimises the monopoly of violence: "The individual is expected ultimately to face death in the group interest"; a defining attribute of the political (ibid.: 903, 906). "This gives to the political community its particular pathos and raises its enduring emotional foundations" (ibid.: 903).

War determines and defines its leadership and separates it from the peacetime economic structure; it emerges as warrior consociation "with freely selected leader" whose leadership is "normally legitimated by his personal qualities (charisma)" (ibid.: 906). War demands war charisma to lead the consociation; war is alien to and war charisma is blind to the peacetime social structure and leadership. Thus, war, or rather a matter of life and death, defines political community. War means the consociation legitimises and

monopolises violence against its members for the security of its members; war creates a community of legitimate violence:

> Violence acquires legitimacy only in those cases, however—at least initially—in which it is directed against members of the fraternity who have acted treasonably or who have harmed it by disobedience or cowardice. This state is transcended gradually, as this ad hoc consociation develops into a permanent structure. Through the cultivation of military prowess and war as a vocation such a structure develops into a coercive apparatus able to lay effective and comprehensive claims to obedience. These claims will be directed against the inhabitants of conquered territories as well as against the militarily unfit members of the territorial community from which the warriors' fraternity has emerged. (ibid.)

The monopoly of violence leads to monarchy, a monocratic command structure, and hierarchy; "the prototype for political powers is the imperium"—the power to command military force and compel obedience, especially, "the power to inflict punishment [italics original]" is the defining attribute of political power (Roth 1978: lxxxiv; Weber 1978: 651; also 839–864, 1308; Richardson 1991; Drogula 2007). War also leads to rational norms, laws, and the creation of a normative community; the warband emerges as a rational normative community uprooted from traditions.

> Among the most important factors which secularised the thinking about what should be valid as a norm and furthered its emancipation from magically guaranteed traditions, were war and its uprooting effects. Although the conquering warrior chief could not exercise the imperium in important cases without the free consent of the army, it was inevitably very wide. It was in the very nature of the situation that this imperium was in the vast majority of cases oriented towards the regulation of conditions which in times of peace could have been regulated only by revealed norms, but which in times of war required that new norms be created by agreed or imposed enactment. The war lord and the army disposed of prisoners, booty, and particularly of conquered land. They thus created new individual rights and, under certain circumstances, new law. On the other hand, the war lord, both in the interest of common security and to prevent breaches of discipline and the instigation of domestic disorder, had to have more comprehensive powers than a "judge" possessed in times of peace. These circumstances would alone have been sufficient to increase the imperium at the expense of tradition. But war also disrupts the existing economic and social order, so that it becomes clear to everyone that the things one has been accustomed to are not absolutely sacred. It follows that war and warlike expansion have at all stages of historical development often been connected with a systematic fixation of the law both old and new. Again, the pressing need for security against internal and foreign enemies induces a growing rationalisation of lawmaking and lawfinding. (Weber 1978: 771)

War thus creates a community of legal norm; the state is a normative community. Weber's ultimate institution of violence that inspires "highly robust motives of fear" and involves a "jeopardy and destruction of life and freedom" thus exacting obedience and generating the authoritarian power of command is the armed force (Weber 1978: 903). Ultimately, it is the armed force that creates the division between command and obedience, thus generating both the sovereign/ruler and the subjects/ruled. In particular, it is the armed force or sword that generates Hobbes's covenant of enslavement for fear of death in his commonwealth by acquisition thus makes the one who commands the sovereign and the one who obeys the subject. Seen from another angle, it is the armed force that provides peace and defence as in Hobbes, or the preservation of order in the interior

and protection against barbarians outside as in Engels, or the protection of personal safety and public order and organised armed protection against outside attack as in Weber (Hobbes 1998: 114; Engels 1909: 179; Weber 1978: 905). In short, the armed forces control life and liberty and, hence, exact obedience and generate he who commands, the ruler, and he who obeys, the ruled. "Thus the political community monopolises the legitimate application of violence for its coercive apparatus and is gradually transformed into an institution for the protection of rights" (Weber 1978: 908).

However, if the Sinocentric paradigm, placing the origin of the state in food production and population pressure, misdirects scholarly attention, its tribal paradigm precludes proper appreciation of the nature and constitution of the warband as the prototype of the body politic, and warlordship as that of political authority. In particular, the tribal paradigm represents the warband essentially as a tribe—a primeval segmentary kinship group—and the warlord as an ephemeral chief with little or no legitimate coercive authority. Thus, while Barfield treats Xiongnu, and even the Mongol decimal divisions, as tribes and their commanders as "traditional clan leaders," Anthony draws a sharp distinction between warband and cavalry, though he finds cavalry "armies" comparable to "the formal armies of urban states" in an "essentially tribal … political organisation" (Barfield 1989: 193; Anthony 2007: 223).

Yet, the very act of the creation of the warband was actually the invention of a military-political authoritarian structure of command and obedience, the state. The hierarchically nested numerical divisional system that was used by all the Inner Asian empire-builders in a variety of forms—the most common being the decimal system—was the military-political authoritarian structure. The system was itself a creation of war, and a military political constitution—a legal political framework that constituted the body politic and distributed power and authority within it. The system created a single, legible, concentric, and conical body politic with a top-down, hierarchical, monocratic, pyramidal power structure that incorporated the population into hierarchically nested numerical divisions, and concentrated power in the hands of the monarch.

The numerical divisional system was a work of human intellect, a constitution, and a military constitution that embodied a body politic and organised political power within the body politic. This was the constitution of the Inner Asian polity, and it was what Hobbes calls the Leviathan, and Weber calls a human community that monopolises violence. All of these considerations lead us to look at the conquest theory of the origin of the state that I have tried to resurrect in The Nomadic Leviathan (Munkh-Erdene 2023).

Extrahuman transportation, and thus pastoral nomadism, brought with them the Leviathan, and the empires of the Eurasian nomads—the ultimate epitome of the warband and military power—which formed the empire proper, the veritable Leviathan. The numerical divisional system by which the Eurasian empires organised their nomadic population was the constitution of the warband—Weber's "military constitution"—and this created a single concentric and conical body that consisted of hierarchically nested top-down command divisions under the monarch—the multitude united under the command of and in the person of the ruler (Roth 1978: lv). Thus, it created the Leviathan. This was the constitution of Athens, Rome, and Israel: their gens, phratries, curias, and tribes were all military numerical divisions (Weber 1998: 68, 139, 151; Niebuhr 1828: 262–289). These divisions made up the "military constitution" as well as the constitution of the "warrior state" (Roth 1978: lv; Weber 1998: 139; Weber 1978: 1120, 1135, 1287). The bureaucracy that the Sinocentric paradigm equates with the state is actually the administrative "apparatus for the domestication of the unarmed subjects"; paying tax and other

requisites is the duty of the unarmed and collecting them is the function of bureaucracy (Weber 1978: 1135). No (sovereign) rulership is created by appointment; appointment and rulership are mutually exclusive. Bureaucracy follows rulership and serves under it; as previously noted, bureaucracy is the administrative apparatus of the state.

Conclusion

As John Rawls maintains, "A theory however elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue" (Rawls 1999: 3). The Sinocentric paradigm is not just untrue, it is also ugly; it was devised to advance a colonial agenda, and stripping Mongolia of sovereignty and thereby reducing it to a Chinese frontier was its raison d'être. The Sinocentric paradigm is a part and parcel of the colonial chauvinism that justifies Chinese colonisation of Mongolia (Locke 1988: 285–302, 339–340; Vattel 2008: 128–130; Lindley 1926; Flanagan 1989; Arneil 1996; Korman 1996). The Discovery Doctrine, the Agricultural Argument, the theory of original accumulation, and evolutionary materialism all form its foundation, and all underpin it, and all are forms of colonial chauvinism. Tribal, acephalous, and headless all stand for a lack of sovereignty, and all render a given territory into terra nullius. The Sinocentric paradigm is a part and parcel of the colonial doctrine that has become the vision of history, and it needs to be overcome.

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ARISTOCRATIC AND NEOLIBERAL OLIGARCHY COMPARED: Examining The Property Regimes Of Mongolia's Pre- And Post-Socialist Ruling Elites

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Abstract: Mongolia underwent two episodes of revolutionary change in the 20th century; firstly, the overthrow of a Buddhist aristocracy and the construction of a Soviet-style modernist nation-state, and then the collapse of state socialism and the introduction of a neoliberal market economy and parliamentary system. This paper compares and contrasts the ideological and material conditions of Borjigin elite rule during the pre-revolutionary period with those of Mongolia's contemporary "oligarchic" political order. In particular, it examines the property regimes of the Pre- and Post-Socialist political economies, and explores the nature of elite rights over resources, practices, and persons. The discursive regime of Borjigin Buddhist aristocracy was very different from the ideational spectrum of contemporary Mongolian public culture; the new elite must contend with the legacy of state socialist populism, as well as the more recent ideological imports of neoliberalism. This paper argues that, nevertheless, in both eras, the protection of different forms of property remained central to the political system, then and now.

Keywords: Mongolia; oligarchy; aristocracy; property regimes; political economy; elite rule; neoliberalism; social inequality

Introduction

Over the last thirty years, Mongolia has made a number of remarkable achievements. It has performed an impressive geopolitical balancing act, maintaining good relations with both of its gigantic, great-power neighbours, Russia and China, without falling into the political orbit of either of them, and remaining fully open to wider international engagements with a range of third neighbour countries in Asia, Europe, America, and beyond. It has constructed, and preserved largely intact, the only functioning parliamentary democracy in the region, without slipping into either autocracy or chaos. Despite its relatively small population, it has a sophisticated, educated, cosmopolitan elite that punches well above its demographic weight in terms of international recognition and influence. But Mongolia faces a number of challenges in the 21st century, in particular, how best to reconcile widening economic inequality with the principles of democracy. To better understand these dynamics, it might be informative to briefly examine the history and political economy of elite rule in Mongolia.

Contemporary Mongolia is a strikingly unequal place.[1] Between a quarter and a third

[1] A longer discussion of Mongolian political economy and Patrimonial Capitalism appears in Sneath (2018).

of the population lives below the official poverty line,[2] up from virtually nothing in the State Socialist period. The growth of poverty has been accompanied by an extraordinary concentration of capital in the hands of a tiny minority. Over time, the Mongolian super-rich have come to own a staggering proportion of the nation's wealth. By 2017, for example, 99.6% of shares listed on the Stock Exchange were owned by around 5 percent of the total shareholders (Bayartogtokh 2017). The Mongolian super-rich emerged alongside the new parliamentary political system, and the two have remained entangled, giving rise to an order that has come to be described as 'oligarchy' (*oligarkhi*); the rule of the few. Real power and wealth, which were rumoured to have been monopolised by two hundred super-elite families early this century, are said to be in the hands of fewer and fewer—some have suggested just thirty (Baatarkhuyag 2017). The super-rich cultivate their links with the political parties, buying the influence they need to protect their astonishing wealth.

But it is important to remember what Mongolian 'oligarchy' is *not*. These 'oligarchs' are nothing much like the mythical Russian characters of the same name—quasi-criminal super-rich stooges of an autocrat. Mongolian oligarchs are essentially business tycoons who either are politicians themselves or have powerful links to the top political circles. And, unlike in Russia, multiparty parliamentary politics have bedded down in Mongolia, creating a constellation of vested interests, supporting something like a two-party system that bears no resemblance to Putin's Russia. A well-educated, public sphere of journalism and public critique thrives, and strives—with occasional successes—to hold politicians and captains of industry to account. And with control of press and media split between the oligarchic supporters of rival parties, there is genuine, ongoing public political debate and a continuous attempt to win voters over to particular individual politicians and their novel policy programmes.

Nevertheless, although they may be split into rival factions rather than united under an autocrat, a tiny elite of rich and powerful families continues to occupy a commanding position in both the economic and political life of the nation. What, then, underlies this form of elite dominance?

The roots of Mongolian oligarchic capitalism lie in the new neoliberal property regime introduced since the 1990s; in particular, in a process by which the ownership of profitable operations and resources was acquired and concentrated, a process which came to be described as *shudarga bus ömch khuv'chlal*—the 'dishonest/unjust privatisation of property' which matches David Harvey's concept of neoliberal "accumulation by dispossession"—the "corporatisation, commodification, and privatisation of hitherto public assets" (Harvey 2005: 160). This was part of the 'shock therapy' policies that Mongolia, like Russia, experienced in the early 1990s, when the command economy was converted to a market capitalist one overnight.

The result was a deep economic crisis. As Reinert (2004: 158) noted, "During the 50

[2] The ADB estimated that 27.1% of the population lived below the poverty line in 2022, and a 2016 World Bank estimate placed almost 30% of the population below the poverty line (ADB:https://www.adb.org/where-we-work/mongolia/poverty#:~:text=In%20Mongolia%2C%2027.1%25%20of%20the,day%20in%202023%20is%200.2%25; World Bank. http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2017/10/17/2016-poverty-rate-in-mongolia-estimated-at-296-percent).

years preceding the reforms of 1991, Mongolia slowly but successfully built a diversified industrial sector…. [that] was virtually annihilated over a period of only four years, from 1991 to 1995, not to recover again. In a majority of industrial sectors, production is down by more than 90 per cent…"[3] A few sectors, such as mining, remained profitable in the New Economy; and from the outset, the Mongolian government's privatisation programmes presented opportunities to those with the right connections to gain controlling stakes in what was left of the former state enterprises, and enrich themselves enormously. This was not, however, a well-orchestrated or systematic transfer of wealth, but an opportunistic and faintly chaotic process by which most state officials ended up losing out, just as the public did.

Ironically perhaps, for a nation that publicly rejected Marxism, capitalism in Mongolia appears to have obeyed Marx's 'natural' law of the "concentration of capital in the hands of a few" (1959 [1844]: 14). Rather than "trickling down," permanent wealth, in the form of the ownership of assets, has been sucked up to the top of an increasingly steep-sided economic pyramid.[4]

But Mongolia is far from alone in this—indeed, it can be said to be "on global trend." In his influential work *Capital in the 21st Century*, Thomas Piketty (2014) argues that in recent decades we have seen the emergence of what he terms "patrimonial capitalism." The progressive self-enrichment of the super-rich, Piketty argues, has led to a hyper-concentration of wealth, with the result that capitalism in the 21st century is dominated by inherited private capital, rather than the wealth created by work, entrepreneurship or innovation. This patrimonial capitalism is fast becoming the dominant form worldwide. International rankings of inequality give Mongolia a rather middling official Gini score,[5] comparable with those for Europe and America, rather than the most extremely unequal nations of the global South. As Piketty (2014) shows, however, in Europe and America inequality has been increasing relentlessly since the 1970s and now approaches the levels found before WWI.

Mongolian capitalism can be seen as patrimonial in another sense, though. Its roots lie in the opportunistic struggle over a form of national patrimony—the enterprises and resources inherited from the previous political economy and converted into private capital for the first time. Furthermore, Piketty's expression draws upon Weber's use of the term patrimonialism to indicate the manorial, aristocratic *ancien régime* of pre-modern Europe. And Mongolia's super-rich have already begun to attract comparisons with the feudal aristocracy of Mongolia's pre-revolutionary past. Journalist Aviyaagiin Baatarkhuyag, for example, described the thirty oligarchic families as having carved up the country into their own principalities like the feudal grandees of old (Baatarkhuyag 2017). Mongolian public culture still bears the imprint of the aristocratic culture of the

[3] Mongolia was, in Reinert's (2004: 175) phrase a "model pupil" of the Washington Consensus institutions, including the IMF, World Bank and the US Treasury Department. The central theme of reform was the transfer of ownership from state to private hands. In theory at least, this was to be an equitable distribution of national wealth.

[4] Economists Marshall, Nixson and Walters (2008: 19), for example, argue that faith in the trickledown effect is misplaced in the Mongolian case.

[5] World Bank. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=MN

past, which continues to shape aspirations, value systems and notions of the good life. Some of the enthusiasms of the old noble class were retained in the state-socialist state, to be revived in the 1990s as avenues for public display and personal prestige. Horse racing, for example, retains high status as a "traditional sport" and super-rich interest in racing has driven the prices of the best horses up to astonishing levels. Indeed, the notion of aristocratic descent has become attractive once more in the post-revolutionary era, and when Mongolians had to choose family or *ovog* names in 2004 a large proportion chose the aristocratic name Borjigin (Sanders 2003: 242), far more than could have actually traced descent in this way, since nobles accounted for less than 6% of the population in 1918 (Otgonjargal 2003: 15). But, to what extent does contemporary oligarchy really resemble pre-revolutionary Mongolia?

Until the 20th century, the dominant form of oligarchy or minority rule in Inner Asia was aristocracy—rule by a hereditary elite, as it was throughout Eurasia. It is attested to in the earliest descriptions of the steppe society. The 3rd century BCE Xiongnu empire had an aristocracy composed of three families, who governed their subjects using a military-civil administrative system of decimal units (Di Cosmo 2002: 176–9). These characteristics—aristocracy and decimal military-civil administrative units—persistently appear in steppe polities until the twentieth century. The Orkhon inscriptions refer to nobility in the early Türk empire of the sixth to eighth centuries CE (Sinor 1990: 297), for example, and the *Liao-shih* describes the Khitan aristocracy of the ninth to twelfth centuries (Wittfogel & Feng 1949). So, the Borjigin nobility of the Mongol Empire followed in a long tradition of dynastic and hereditary elite rule.

While many aspects of elite rule varied considerably over historical time, it is remarkable how stable many of the most fundamental aspects of aristocracy have been. The political constitution of various empires and states varied, of course, and even the Chinggisid political order underwent extensive transformation in the seven centuries before revolutionary socialism. However, many of the most fundamental features of aristocracy remained remarkably stable and consistent throughout that period. The enduring material conditions of aristocracy might be said to be economic and political dominance, a series of political privileges and the ownership of the lion's share of livestock and other forms of wealth. At the core of the system was the distinction between nobles and their commoner subjects, and the supremacy of the Borjigin lineages, including that of Chinggis Khan. To be noble was to be a member of a formally recognised and self-conscious ruling class, to be a legally privileged, high-status stakeholder in the political order.

The power relations that supported and reproduced aristocracy were found within a whole range of institutions, from domestic structures to dress codes. If we look for distinctive forms of Foucauldian "power-knowledge" in the historical record, we can find some promising candidates. The root metaphor for subject, commoner or vassal status in Mongolian—*har* (*qara*, black)—was used from the medieval period until the twentieth century, and appears to stretch back at least as far as the Türk empire of the seventh century in which *kara bodun* was the term for subjects or vassals (Sinor 1990: 310).

The discursive construction, then, of commoner status through colour symbolism appears to show continuities stretching back for more than a millennium. Similarly, the

institution of decimal military-civil administrative units to which commoner households were attached is described in the first steppe empire for which we have records and in virtually every eastern steppe polity since that time until the twentieth century, from the Xiongnu, to the 10th century Kitans (Wittfogel and Feng 1949: 84), the Jurchen of the 10th–11th centuries (Elliot 2001: 60), the Chinggisid Empire, and its successor states.[6]

Interestingly, in many periods the political relations and administrative forms seem to have been produced and reproduced by aristocracy, not the centralised bureaucracies of imperial states, which came and went in the region. Although a succession of large and powerful dynasties ruled part or all of Inner Asia since the 3rd century BCE, aristocracies do not seem to have been dependent on them for the political powers they held over their subjects, and we see this most clearly demonstrated at historical moments when the state form becomes headless—as documented by the Mongol Oirat Great Code of 1640.

A decentralised or "headless" aristocratic order is not a peculiarity of so-called "nomadic" polities, or even particularly characteristic of them. The Eastern steppe was ruled by centralised imperial dynasties for much, probably for most, of its recorded history, and we find numerous examples of states without heads in other parts of Eurasia. The Ruthenian or "Kievan Rus" polity formed a series of effectively independent principalities for much of its history (Ostrowski 2018), Post-Carolingian Francia was essentially decentralised, as was the 15th–16th century Livonian Confederation. Even more common in the historical record are aristocratic orders with weak central authorities, often elected, in which it is clear that power is distributed among the nobility. The "republic of nobles" of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Fedorowicz 1982) is probably the best-known European example, but there are many others both on, and off, the steppes.

What all these headless or weakly-headed states demonstrate is that, as a political order, aristocracy does not depend upon a central power or, to be more precise, the aristocracy is itself composed of myriad sources and centres of authority since some portion of the privileges of rule are dispersed into every (noble) body. In this perspective, dynasties and centralised state forms are the result of intra-aristocratic political relations that elevate a single royal or imperial house above their fellow-nobles. But the foundation of both the centralised and decentralised state is the substrata of power formed by minority aristocratic rule over the subject majority. This is not to say that the aristocratic appanages ruled by nobles were sacrosanct or immune from higher authorities. Appanages could be created and abolished by royal and imperial decree in the Mongol Empire and as Munkh-Erdene (2022: 187) shows, in Dayan Khanid era the ruler of the *khoshuu* was legally invested by the *tümen* assembly; just as in the later Qing this role was taken over by the emperor.

Aristocratic Rule and Forms of Property

How might we explain this combination of change and stability of aristocratic governance over time?

[6] As noted by Atwood (2004: 139): "The decimal organization, in which households were grouped into 10s, 100s and 1,000s, was a traditional Inner Asian method of social and military organisation. From the first XIONGNU (Hun) Empire founded in 209 B.C.E, nomadic states grouped their people in 10s."

I found it revealing to examine the nature of property in these two eras. Although subject to differing relations with rulership and state, forms and regimes of property are typically very stable over time, since they govern so much of day-to-day access to resources. I suggest that the fundamental rights held by aristocrats over both resources and persons, might be seen as forms of property. At first glance, this might seem absurd. Conventionally, the rights of the aristocracy are conceived of in terms of political, rather than economic relations. Noble privileges are related to the "political" structure and units of administration in different eras, not to property as such.

However, that would be to separate the economic from the political in the terms that we are familiar with today; and the political economies of the past, and the property regimes that supported them, were very different from contemporary capitalism. The political units (or territorial estates) that aristocrats governed varied in different imperial and royal domains over time; from the *mingghan* (thousand) and *tümen* (ten thousand) units of the Chinggisid empire to the *otog* appanages and *khoshuu* principalities of the late Dayan Khanid and Qing periods. But all of them were simultaneously political and economic units, ruled and regulated by institutions of loyalty and lordship. By the Qing period, the main unit for aristocratic governance was the *khoshuu*, the hereditary domain of the *zasag noyon* (ruling lord), who managed the territory with the assistance of a series of officials and held judiciary authority over his subjects. The commoners were tied to their *khoshuu* districts and required to render corvée service to local authorities. They can be divided into four categories: (a) personal servants of nobles and officials (*khamjlaga* or *khar'yat*); (b) the imperial subjects owing legal obligations to their lord (*albat*, *sumyn ard*, or just *ard*); (c) ecclesiastical subjects (*shav'nar*—described by Bawden 1968:106 as "church serfs"); and (d) slaves (*bool* or *khüvüüd*). This last category appears to have been numerically quite small, but in theory both nobles and commoners might own slaves.[7]

In addition, there were the independent estates of the various senior reincarnate lamas (*khutagts*), the most senior being the Jebtsundamba Khutagt. These were separate from, but comparable to, the *khoshuu* banners, with their own defined territories and with the advantage of having their subjects exempt from military registration. This system was termed "nomadic feudalism" by the Russian scholar Boris Vladimirtsov (1934). This terminology became unpopular among some later scholars, but the parallels between European feudalism and Qing-era Mongolia were striking, as Owen Lattimore (1976: 3) notes: "there are those who hesitate to call the Mongolian social order 'feudal', but I do not see how the term can be avoided: aristocratic rank was hereditary and identified with territorial fiefs, and serfdom was also hereditary and territorially identified."[8]

Of these, then, only *bool* slaves look like private property in the sense we are used to, subject to purchase and sale, and these could be owned by commoners as well as nobles. Property, then, appears to be a dead end when it comes to explaining the distinctiveness of aristocracy. But this would be to project our current notions of property back onto ear-

[7] Legal documents from the 18th century bare testimony to both the suffering of slaves and a certain, if very limited, concern for them by the Qing authorities (see Bawden 1968: 139–140).

[8] For further discussion, see Sneath (2007:124–131).

lier eras; to assume what Hann (1998) called the standard liberal model of property was somehow universal. In fact, as any number of scholarly treatments show us, the dominant contemporary concept of property, like the liberal market system that frames it, is a relatively recent invention, whose history is bound up with the emergence of capitalism.

Property as Differing Bundles of Rights

Ownership can be recognised as a variable "bundle of rights" with respect to various things (Hohfeld 1923), and these bundles were composed differently in different property regimes. Current conceptions of property reflect the global dominance of a very particular liberal notion that emerged in the eighteenth century alongside colonial mercantilism and commercial capitalism, famously described by the jurist William Blackstone (1893 [1753]: 393) as "that sole and despotic dominion which one man claims and exercises over the external things of the world, in total exclusion of the right of any other individual in the universe." In this scheme, property represents assets that are fully owned by legal persons such as individuals, states, or corporations. Owners are entitled to dispose of 'their property' in any way they wish, excluding others from its use, for example, or selling it on the market. This form of property, so apparently natural in the 21st century, was startlingly different from earlier forms, even in north-western Europe where it gained early purchase.

Before the eighteenth century, the aristocracies of Europe did not have a single legal category of property. A central distinction was made between personal possessions ('chattels') on the one hand, and land and buildings ("real property") on the other. While chattels were frequently individually owned and freely tradeable, the law recognised a series of different sorts of relations between persons and land; it distinguished the right to possess land from proprietorial rights over it, for example between usufruct or use-rights to land and the right to receive rent and other benefits from it (Tate 2006: 307). The Latin term used for "ownership," inherited from Roman law, was *dominium*, from which we get our political concept of "dominion." Indeed, like the Mongolian term *ezemshil*, it was a term derived from the concept of lordship—the bundle of rights held by aristocrats over other persons and things.

A central feature of European "feudal" notions of ownership, particularly of land, was that it was divided (*dominium divisum*)—making a distinction between *dominium directum* "title" and *dominium utile* "possession" or "use-rights." An aristocrat typically held title to large estates of land but only had personal possession of a part of it. Others were granted rights to use land, even though ultimate title was retained by the noble or, indeed, in many cases, the crown. And, in Europe, until the eighteenth century, the notion of property rights could be extended to people, and not just within the institution of slavery. For Hobbes, servants could be seen as their lord's personal property, along with children.[9] Even for Locke, who as the "father of liberalism" helped formulate the new property doctrines of the emerging mercantilist and capitalist orders, property was a broad and somewhat fuzzy category, including "lives, liberties and estates" (Locke 1764

[9] "Servants who, to spare their lives, have contracted with a lord, become the lord's personal property; analogously, children, as Hobbes notes, while originally under the dominion of their parents, succeed to the paternal estate…" (Lopata 1973: 208).

[1689]: 306). In his day, the "liberties" or "rights" of the owner of a large landed estate over those who lived and worked on it included a range of functions we would now consider to be political, such as the enforcement of law.

Looked at in this way, then, the notion that aristocratic property in Mongolia could include rights over persons is far from startling. In Mongolia—for many centuries—ruling aristocrats held a form of title over the subjects and territories they ruled, such that in some sense they could lay claim to anything. As Carpini noted of the Chinggisid nobles he encountered in 1246, "whatever the emperor and the dukes [duces] desire, and however much they desire, they receive from their subjects' property" (Dawson 1955: 28; Beazley 1903: 59). In the case of Dayan Khanid and Qing-era Mongolia, we can glean information on political and property relations from surviving law codes such as the *Yekhe Caaji* (*Ikh Tsaaj*) or Great Code of 1640, and the 16th—17th Century law codes of the Seven Khalkha found in 1973 and analysed by Munkh-Erdene in his ground-breaking 2022 work *The Taiji Government*.

These reveal the anatomy of political relations of Chinggisid governance of the Seven Khalkha. This was a realm of seven *khoshuu* (principalities), headed by a *khan* (king). The law codes reveal an administrative structure staffed by officials holding specialist named offices in which the institution of the *chuulgan* is clearly of central importance. A striking feature of the Chinggisid law codes is the way in which subject households are listed along with other possessions belonging to nobles, so that they are indistinguishable from property. Most of the punishments that are stipulated take the form of fines, usually of livestock in units of nines and fives. But for the aristocracy, these fines included subject households. Section 8 of the 1640 Great Code reads: "If a great noble (*yekhe noyan*) goes to battle and flees from the enemy, one hundred sets of armour, one hundred camels, fifty households of people and one thousand horses will be taken. … From a lesser noble (*baga noyan*), ten sets of armour, ten camels, ten households of people and one hundred horses will be taken" (Buyanöljei & Ge 2000: 34; Taupier 2018: 302).

Indeed, the concept of property (*ömch*) was used to describe the shares of a ruler's domains inherited by his sons as appanages.[10]

In a very real way, both conceptually and materially, the Borjigin aristocracy held rights over their commoner subjects as a form of personal property. They could, and did, give them away for various reasons including donations to monasteries and as *inj* (*inǰi*)—the property a noblewoman brought with her on marriage, often translated as dowry (Chuluunbaatar and Rogers 2020). Again, the terminology is revealing: The 1640 Mongol Oyirad Great Code makes explicit mention of both "*ed inǰi*" (*inj* in the form of goods and livestock) and '*khümün inǰi*' (*inj* in the form of human subjects).[11] Both, humans and objects, then, are placed within a property category. In the Mongol Imperial period, the term *inj* was also used for the inheritance given by the emperor to his sons (as, in later centuries, the term *ömch* was used). Of course, the rights of aristocrats over this form of human property were far from absolute. The law codes stipulate fines for the

[10] "Dayan Khanid princes; each prince was now entitled to his own share of the domain. Indeed, they treated their divisions as their property (emčü) and divided or apportioned them to their descendants as shares (qubi)" (Munkh-Erdene 2022: 176).

[11] Chuluunbaatar and Rogers 2020: 323; referencing Buyanöljei 2000: 84–91.

arbitrary or illegitimate killing or injury of subjects, for example, but a central feature of the great codes is the protection of the rights of aristocrats over their subjects. Runaways who seek to flee from one *khoshuu* to another within the state must be returned.

Ownership always entails a bundle of rights, and different property regimes entail different sets of rights and restrictions depending on the categories concerned. Rights to land, for example, are typically complex, qualified, and conditional on all sorts of obligations and requirements. A noble's rights over commoner subjects may not have been unlimited, but they were extensive and the primary sources show that the *taiji* government was centrally concerned with their preservation. This did not mean, of course, that all nobles held the same bundle of rights over commoners. The ruling lord, *zasag* noyon, held the fullest set with respect to his own principality. Depending on their rank, noble families possessed different numbers of *khar'yat* retainers or personal serfs (regulated in the Qing era), and depending on the vagaries of family fortune they might end up with very different numbers of livestock and other possessions. By the late Qing period, some nobles had become so poor that they had fewer livestock than rich commoners. But the point was that all nobles were members of a class who were entitled to own such assets—"feudal" rights over commoners—along with high status, legal privileges, and so on.

Looked at this way, Locke's insight that the primary purpose of the state is the preservation of property gains a new relevance—the aristocratic, dynastic states of Mongolia, as elsewhere, can be seen to be organised around the fundamental property of aristocratic privileges over commoner subjects.[12]

Ideological Conditions of Aristocracy

Paternalistic authority was a central value in this system. One of the highest-ranking Buddhist dignitaries, the Kanjurwa Khutagt, described relations with subordinates in a characteristically paternalistic way. He represented Buddhist rulers as looking on their subjects as "our children (*khüükhdüüd*) and grandchildren (*ach zee nar*)," and he stressed that superiors and subordinates "served each other in many ways" (Hyer and Jagchid 1983: 62). Although the Kanjurwa Khutagt, who had been of preeminently high status in the old regime, might be expected to present a positive description of "feudal" relations, his views do offer an insight into the values of the pre-revolutionary elite. Aberle's (1962) analysis of pre-revolutionary Chahar society noted similar attitudes: "a kinship ideology permeated the dealings of the … [banner ruler] … with his people... The amban was a 'father' to his people."

Frans Larson, a Swedish Missionary who was granted the title of Duke (Güng) by the Bogd Khaan in 1920, wrote that the vast majority of noblemen were "just rulers" (1930:

[12] When Locke, the "father of Liberalism," declared that "the great and chief end, therefore, of men's uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property" (1690 §124) he was reflecting a longstanding ideology of landed aristocracy. In this tradition, which stretched back to ancient Rome (MacPherson 2011 [1962]: 247-51), both law and state are seen as the joint political projects of those holding landed estates, staffed by commoners.

11).[13] But, invested as he was in the old regime, we can detect a certain rose-tinted view of the hierarchy of his time.[14] He wrote, for example, "When we ride through the country the people of the state whom we pass dismount and kneel while we ride by, but aside from this formal courtesy there is a genial democratic comradeship between the rulers of Sunit and the people" (Larson 1930: 43). I am not sure we can assume that such bucolic sentiment was shared by the kneeling commoners that Larson passed on horseback.

Something of the normative frameworks of that era can be seen in the use and meaning of the term *ezen*, which can be translated as "master," lord, or owner. As such, the term indicates relations of loyalty and obedience, which could apply to a series of social scales—from the Imperial (*ezen khaan*) to the domestic (*geriin ezen*). The duties and obligations subjects owed their lords and, ultimately, the emperor were metaphorically modelled on those of the household. In a Foucauldian sense, the relations of power contained in the notion of the *ezen* could be seen as "the concrete, changing soil in which the sovereign's power is grounded, the conditions that make it possible to function" (Foucault 1980: 187). But although clearly unequal, this was a multiplex relationship that entailed obligations and expectations on both sides. Proprietorial authority was so central to the notion of social order that to be masterless was to be wild or chaotic. The term *ezengüi baidal* (literally, a situation without an *ezen*) means "anarchy." This logic also applied to the spiritual world. The *gazaryn ezed* was used as a title of the *savdag*—local deities of territories and their environments.

But although they might be comparably rich and powerful, the 21st-century elites are, in truth, in a very different position from the aristocrats of the pre-revolutionary era. The ideological conditions or Discursive Regime of Borjigin Buddhist aristocracy were very different from the ideational spectrum of contemporary Mongolian public culture; the new elite must contend with the legacy of state socialist populism, as well as the more recent ideological imports of neoliberalism (technocracy, etc.). The idea that elites should inherit some sort of formal privileged status is repugnant in most versions of neoliberal ideology, which, born as it was in the revolt of the commercial classes against aristocracy, generally includes some claims to meritocracy. But since the new notion of property relies on a distinction between the economic and the political, the inheritance of relations of ownership seems quite natural.

On the other hand, there are other features of 21st-century ideology that set the parameters and conditions of political thought, and that transcend even elite interest. In this respect, they are, perhaps, more comparable to the supreme place of Buddhism in pre-revolutionary times. For example, there are two deeply embedded values in Mongolian public culture, both with roots in the State Socialist past. One is a notion of development (*högjil*)—an overriding concern with economic progress, a drive to "catch up"

[13] He writes he has met most of the noblemen of Mongolia and "and in all my experiences I have met with but three men who were not just rulers, with greater thought for the prosperity of their state than for their personal fortune" (Larson 1930:11).

[14] "An unwise prince covets personal wealth, and as the Mongols have no banks, but hold their fortune in herds, a wicked prince forces his subjects to give him all the best horses for his private herds. He also seizes upon the best wells and the grazing [end p.10] places without thought for the general prosperity of the state. But such men are rare" (Larson 1930:10–11).

with notionally more developed states. With the collapse of the Soviet vision of progress, the postsocialist political establishment adopted a version of free-market neoliberalism, largely because it seemed to offer a more effective path to development after the communist version had apparently run aground.

The other cardinal public virtue is national interest—particularly the protection of national sovereignty and independence. This too, in its way, had its roots in the gigantic Soviet-style nation-building programmes of the past, but in the postsocialist period this morphed into something more explicitly like other forms of nationalism, since it fit with a triumphalist narrative of historical progress towards "full independence" from being a subject territory of the Qing empire and then a Soviet satellite. This notion of national interest, the good of the Mongol "people" (*ard tumen*) as a whole, remains a touchstone of political legitimacy, just as it did in State Socialist times.

This particular variety of Nationalism that Mongolia developed might be termed *nutagism*—the public virtue of loyalty to the homeland (*nutag*) that runs from top to bottom of Mongolian public culture, a standard by which even the super-rich can be held to account. It can have local applications, whereby loyalty to rural districts is expected, or *uuguul* natives expect precedence in access to local resources over *suuguul* incomers, but it is at its most powerful at the national level, where loyalty to the Mongolian nation trumps other public values. So, the politicians said to be in these "oligarchic" circles have not been able to rest, safe and secure, in their positions. For decades, endless rounds of investigation of corruption amongst senior politicians and officials uncovered one scandal after the next, deepening public cynicism towards the political class.

Indeed, public critique of "oligarchy" opened the way for Mongolia's flirtation with populist politics which, in characteristic 21st-century style, arrived from the maverick Right rather than the more traditional Left of party politics. Wrestler and trader turned tycoon, Khaltmaagiin Battulga—or 'Genco' as he was known—won the 2017 presidential elections by targeting MANAN corruption and the oligarchs thought to be behind it. Cutting a faintly Putin-esque strong-man figure, Genco prosecuted a string of superrich politicians and tycoons on charges of corruption and even threatened to nationalise some of their holdings. This variety of anti-elite populism was not a tax-cutting Trumpian attempt to "drain the swamp" of state so much as a call to "explode the fog" of oligarchic politics. It raised the prospect of resource nationalism by harnessing the enduring public obsession with national sovereignty to target superrich who might be "selling out their country" to foreign interests. Indeed, although President Khürelsükh appears to be more a product of the wider political party establishment, he has kept some of the populist styling of his predecessor.

The result has been an exposed super-rich elite, anxiously attuned to party politics, so as to anticipate and hopefully ward off possible attack by political opponents in charge of state apparatus.

Conclusion

What, if anything, has been learned by comparing the property regimes that support elites in the pre-revolutionary and neoliberal eras? Firstly, it draws our attention to the naturalisation of the particular—in retrospect rather peculiar—systems of privilege in both eras. In the eras of aristocracy, it was common sense that nobles should have personal rights over their commoner subjects, just as today the rights of individuals over resources categorised as "private property" go unquestioned. In the 1680s, for example, Borjigin nobleman Okin Taiji migrated from Inner Mongolia to Buryatia where he swore fealty to the Russian Tsar. In 1692 he was captured by Abaga nobles loyal to the Qing and sent to Tsetsen Khan territory, only to flee again to Buryatia three years later (Humphrey 2014, Natsagdorj 2010, 2012). Throughout these migrations, he was accompanied by his commoner subjects (described in Russian documents as his *ulus*) whom he continued to govern and exact tribute from. Such a career would have been inconceivable without the property-like privileges of aristocracy, by which a nobleman's rights to govern his subjects were unquestioned in both Qing Mongolian and Tsarist Russian political economies.

These sorts of direct property rights over other human beings seem entirely unlike contemporary forms of ownership: the neoliberal property regime extends only to objects deemed economic, after all. But perhaps the most important object of ownership in the capitalist elite is the commercial company, which includes not only material and immaterial assets but also the economic livelihood of any number of employees. Of course, workers are not tied to their work-places in the ways that serfs were tied to theirs, but their labour, indeed their right to engage in economic activity within that setting, is owned by another, and the rights of the proprietor to command these are entirely naturalised.

Indeed, when one considers the wider political economy of a nation-state, we can see that neoliberal property does not just include strictly 'economic' assets but includes what we might call "political resources." Broadcasters, media companies, newspapers, think-tanks, sometimes even political parties, can be owned by individuals of sufficient wealth in states across the globe, on terms that are rarely questioned within the property regimes to which we are accustomed. These are, to be sure, very different from the sort of political resources of the aristocratic age, but they nevertheless bundle together wealth and power in ways that allow them to be concentrated in the hands of a small minority.

But there is no reason to suppose this "patrimonial capitalist" political economy cannot change. Historically, members of various elites have often been attracted to projects of political reform and even revolution. By the late 19th century, many senior nobles, such as To Wang and Gungsangnorbu, were actively engaged in forms of modernist social engineering. And in the early 20th century, many of the old elite were drawn to revolutionary socialism. In 1925, of the 4,000 members of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, over 700 were nobles or lamas (Otgonjargal 2003: 32).

Public disillusionment with three decades of neoliberal policies created the environment for populist politics to emerge, and these conditions remain, just as they do in many democracies around the world.[15] America is increasingly looking towards post-neoliberal thinking to inform future policy. Unlike Putin's Russia or Xi Jinping's China, the Mongolian public is engaged with international trends in the politics of Europe and America. Even sections of the "oligarchic elite" will be, I think, keenly interested in post-neoliberal policies if these begin to emerge in concrete forms in other liberal democracies, particularly the USA. The oligarchs may be "billionaires borne of the state" (*töröös törsön terbumtan*), as Mongolians say, but this entanglement works both ways; many of the superrich share a concern with national development with the general public and are keen to be near the forefront of global trends. Even if this might cost them something in terms of their own narrow economic interest, recent events have underlined the dangers of neglecting public anger at inequality, creating a potentially receptive audience for policies to promote social justice.

In the 20th century, Mongolia was twice propelled into new political economies, first a Soviet-style state socialism and then a "wild" or patrimonial capitalism, driven by modernist visions of national progress. 21st-century Mongolia is a more wary, more disillusioned place, but the enduring public values, economic development and national sovereignty continue to underpin visions of the good life and the politics that spring from them.

[15] It has been nearly 30 years since President Ochirbat suggested that neoliberal policies could turn Mongolia into the fifth Asian Tiger economy (Ochirbat 1996: 235–36).

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NOMADIC CIVILISATION AND MILITARY INNOVATION

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Abstract: For approximately 2,000 years (circa 500 BCE to 1500 CE), the nomadic horse-archer was the dominant warrior in history. Then in the modern era, which coincided with the advent of firearms, the military superiority of the Central Eurasian steppe nomads waned, and by the late 18th century sedentary states vanquished the last nomadic civilisations, thus bringing the nomadic populations of Eurasia under sedentary dominion. Since then, steppe warfare has generally been viewed as obsolete and its two millennia of success were attributed to large numbers of horse-archers and their mobility as well as success with tactics such as the Parthian shot, feigned retreats, and enveloping tactics. Furthermore, the general perception has been that these were time-tested and largely stagnant—unchanging over centuries. While history does support that the same tactics were used for centuries, outside observers and modern historians, however, have often missed or dismissed the larger significance of the military innovations that stemmed from nomadic societies. The innovations appeared not only in weapons and accoutrements, but also in tactics, strategies, military formations, and even as parts of state-building. While the horse-archer may no longer have a place on the 21st century battlefield, there should also be consideration of how the lessons of steppe warfare and steppe societies can be applied to modern warfare in the 21st century.

Keywords: Horses; cavalry; steppe warfare; nomadic warfare; chariots; drones; nomadic civilisation; military innovation.

The nomadic horse-archer of the Central Eurasian steppes was arguably the most dominant warrior in history for approximately 2,000 years (circa 500 BCE to 1500 CE). Yet, the military superiority of the Central Eurasian steppe nomads waned beginning in the 16th century with the development of effective firearms in the sixteenth century. Eventually, the technological and organisational advances in sedentary empires reached a point where they nullified the traditional advantages of the nomads, and by the late 18th century the sedentary states vanquished the last nomadic civilisations, thus bringing the nomadic populations of Eurasia under sedentary dominion. Since the triumph of technological progress over steppe traditions, steppe warfare has generally been viewed

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as obsolete with little to offer in terms of modern warfare. Too often, scholars and military thinkers have dismissed the two millennia of military success of Central Eurasian steppe nomads and rationalised it as being due to large numbers of horse-archers combined with mobility, as well as success with "tricky" tactics such as the Parthian shot, feigned retreats, and enveloping tactics rather than strategy or the ability to execute complex manoeuvres. After the closing of the steppes, horse-borne cavalry remained a valued and esteemed branch of most modern militaries, but even in the late 19th century it too steadily diminished in combat efficiency due to increased technological progress in rapid-fire rifles, improved artillery, and the advent of machine-guns. Combined with the historic fractious politics and rivalries among nomadic groups, there is little wonder that the sedentary civilisations, in their victory, and confident in a teleological historical perspective, dismissed the historic military success of steppe nomads (Black 2000). What follows is a broad perspective of military innovation among nomadic civilisations across history.

Through this lens, modern military historians maintained the general perception that traditional nomadic tactics were time-tested and largely stagnant—unchanging over centuries. Yet, while the sedentary states became confident and perhaps overconfident in their military success, technology, and a worldview and ideological viewpoint based on a teleological progress of history, observers and modern historians, however, have often ignored or dismissed the larger significance of the military innovations that stemmed from nomadic societies as well as lessons from history. The innovations appeared not only in weapons and accoutrements, but also in tactics, strategies, military formations, and even as parts of state-building.

The horrors of war in the twentieth century, truly beginning with World War I, particularly on the Western Front, demonstrated to the industrial nations, that defensive military technology and stagnant tactics and strategies made victory precarious for any offensive action. Indeed, casualty rates made warfare a matter of attrition. Yet, during the war, efforts were made to mitigate that as well as to develop technologies such as tanks and aircraft that promised to restore mobility in warfare. Thus, military theoreticians began to consider how to best use these new technologies, sometimes drawing upon the actions of steppe warfare as I have discussed elsewhere (Liddell Hart 1960, 1965, 1967, 1979; May 2007/2016, 2012; Gabriel 2006; Strawson 1971). Their ideas were implemented with varying levels of success.

Yet, military innovation has been present among nomadic societies for millennia. The military innovation of the Central Eurasian steppe nomads begins with the domestication of the horse in the fourth millennium BCE (Perdue 2005; Anthony 2007). This event not only gave rise to the possibility of nomadic pastoralism in the Central Eurasian steppes, but also forever changed warfare as the domestication of the horse led to the creation of cavalry (Perdue 2005). While it is unlikely that those who domesticated the horse foresaw the military utility—at least not initially—this was a watershed moment in military history. Cavalry warfare is not simply a matter of fighting from horseback but rather consists of organised units and fighting in an organised manner and not as individuals (Anthony 2007). Thus, although people may have begun riding on horseback as early

as the mid-fourth millennium BCE, this development only became possible after horse breeding practices emerged to support such an objective (Anthony 2007). True cavalry took even longer to develop and transformed over time (Drews 2004; Taylor 2024; Winegard 2024).

This revolution of horse domestication, if you will, was not a simple task of taming and domesticating the horse as a mode of transport. Initially, the horse was hunted as food and then domesticated with that intention, as it was probably initially seen as a food source (Anthony 2007; Taylor 2024; Winegard 2024). But once the concept of harnessing a horse to either pull a wheeled vehicle or, even more importantly, to mount the horse and ride it arose, it gave those who had horses unprecedented mobility, allowing them to arrive at the scene of battle quicker, as well as to escape danger with speed. While the modern observer might think that mounting a horse should have been obvious, it certainly was not. As anyone who has observed someone breaking a horse or American rodeo riders knows, it is dangerous work as the horse instinctively bucks and attempts to throw the rider (Taylor 2024; Winegard 2024). Injury and death are possible, and this is with the aid of modern saddles, stirrups, and bridles, all of which did not exist at the time of horse domestication. As the rider is behind the horse's head, and not easily seen by the horse, it naturally reacts. As William Taylor indicates (2024), the use of a cart or chariot actually may have aided in the domestication of a horse. The rider is not in direct contact with the animal and the natural impulse of the animal is to flee, and thus it pulls the vehicle. Additionally, being herd animals, the presence of other horses to pull the cart or vehicle may have had a calming effect.

The Chariot

The chariot is often viewed as an elite military vehicle in the ancient world as demonstrated by Homer's Iliad, and pictorial evidence in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China. It was fast and effective and changed warfare whether used as a vehicle to bring champions to the battlefield, or used in squadrons as was commonly done from Egypt to China (Drews 2004; Spalinger 2005; Taylor 2024). Sedentary civilisations, however, did not invent the chariot. Previously, exactly when and where the chariot first developed was disputed (Drews 2004), but with improved archaeological dating systems, we now know that it originated in the steppes around 2400 BCE among the Catacombs culture, an offshoot of the Yamnaya culture (Taylor 2024) in the Pontic steppes, and it quickly transformed warfare. The advent of chariots in the 3rd millennium BCE allowed their users to move troops quickly and deploy them across the battlefield. As the chariot evolved, it then became a weapons platform for archers or for throwing javelins and other weapons, striking quickly and then moving.

Chariot technology then spread, reaching the Sintashta culture in the northwest borderlands of Russia and Kazakhstan before 2000 BCE. Here we also see new technologies that would have long term ramifications for warfare: improved bit and bridle technology. The bridle noseband made it easier to brake or slow the horse by pulling the nose downward, while the bridle and cheek pieces allowed greater control of the horse in turning, making the chariot more manoeuvrable. This was also aided by another technological innovation: the spoke. While long thought to be a product of sedentary civilisations,

archaeological findings have demonstrated that the creation of the spoked wheels for the chariot originated among the Sintashta as well (Taylor 2024). The spoked wheels made the chariots faster than single-disk wheels. Furthermore, while it gave the Sintashta and others an advantage in war, it also made pastoral herding more viable and allowed the herders to better manage their herds (Taylor 2024). As such, chariots were utilitarian vehicles among the nomads and quickly adopted by other steppe cultures. Within a few hundred years, chariots spread across Eurasia and out of the steppe, and with them, domesticated horses. Through the Caucasus they entered the Near East and through Central Asia to Iran and India, and via Mongolia into China between 2000 and 1800 BCE. By 1200 BCE, chariots had even reached Britain (Taylor 2024).

"As horses and chariot technology left the cool northern grasslands, those with horses and chariots found themselves with a tremendous technological and military advantage over their neighbours and quickly rose to the top of the geopolitical food chain" (Taylor 2024). In the 1700s BCE, the Hittites rose to dominate much of the Near East through chariots as earlier adopters but eventually were replaced by other chariot users. Chariots and horses spread to Egypt because of the Hyksos invasions from the Near East but allowed them to establish power over Lower and Middle Egypt in the 1600s BCE (Drews 2004; Spalinger 2005; Taylor 2024). A similar situation occurred in China where northern polities with better access to horses, became more militarily dominant, a theme that continued through the modern period (Taylor 2024).

The chariot carried a psychological component in which the speed, mass, and power of the chariot intimidated opponents. It was not a perfect weapon, but the fact that so many societies adopted it provides evidence that it had sufficient prestige and purpose to be deemed a valuable weapon in any army's arsenal. As horse breeding in the sedentary societies did not produce an abundance of horses, as well as the expense of maintaining chariots, it remained the tool of the elite, unlike in the pastoral nomadic sphere (Taylor 2024). Yet as mentioned previously, those who had chariots also had an advantage. But even as sedentary civilisations improved on the chariots and their use in warfare, the nomads abandoned it in favour of riding horses.

Technology and the Development of Cavalry

While donkeys were ridden as early as the 3rd millennium BCE, it is more difficult to pinpoint when people began to ride horses. Evidence of reinforced trousers as well as saddle pads dates it to roughly 1450 BCE, although it may have occurred much earlier. Technological innovations that permitted the nomads to innovate chariots, eased the transition to horseback riding as the noseband, the cheek pieces, and the metal bit, especially those with a snaffle, which joined two pieces together, all allowed the rider to have more finesse in their control of the horse. Another factor was that horse breeding refined the horse to be better physically capable of having a rider (Taylor 2024). As with chariots, horseback riding gave their riders enhanced mobility, and even more so than a chariot. The chariot typically held a driver and one or two additional warriors and was pulled by a team of two to four horses. However, the chariot could be disabled by killing or severely wounding a horse. This then could also lead to the chariot crashing and thus incapacitating the men it carried. Of course, disabling a chariot in the heat of battle often

was easier said than done.

Fighting from horseback required even greater skill, as it required not only the ability to stay on the horse and control it while the horse moved at speed, but also while wielding weapons and while others tried to kill you. Any one of these is not inherently easy, but trying to do all three, requires a remarkable and often underappreciated skill. A warrior on a single mount, however, also had mobility, but was a smaller target than a chariot. Additionally, it had greater mobility as it possessed a smaller turn radius, unlike the chariot which needed space to turn. Continuing development in bridle and bit technology aided this process (Winegard 2024; Taylor 2024). Furthermore, while two or three horses might pull a chariot containing two to three men, the same number of horses could be used for cavalry, with each having a rider, thus multiplying the units available, and thus increasing the number of men available for combat and deployment, thus providing a commander more options. And if one horse was slain, the others were not directly affected and could continue fighting, unlike a chariot, which would be akin to having a car suffer a tire blow out at high speeds. Another advantage was that while it was still possible to be thrown from a horse, it was less likely, although chariot-users did take efforts to mitigate this with safety apparatuses such as straps and other devices to stabilise the users. Additionally, the horse gave their riders a height advantage as well as mass when crashing into the enemy when they chose to do so (Drews 2004; Anthony 2007; Taylor 2024; Winegard 2024).

Yet, despite the use of chariots, horse riding took longer to spread. It does not appear to have been common in the sedentary world on the edge of the steppes until the 1st millennia, with a great range of adaptation between regions. There is also dispute about when it occurred in the Central Eurasia Steppes, where the horse was first domesticated with dates ranging from 4000 to 1000 BCE, with some scholars expressing doubts that it could have existed as a practice in the steppe for hundreds, yet take centuries if not thousands of years to spread outside of the steppes? (Drews 2004) Yet, even as horse-riding entered the sedentary world perhaps in the late 2nd millennia BCE, horse-archers and other horse-riding cavalry did not appear in the sedentary world until the 1st millennium BCE, with the first definite appearance among the Assyrians in 886 BCE and horse-archers around 800 BCE (Drews 2004; Anthony 2007; Taylor 2024).

What is notable is that horse-back riding also altered nomadic society. This is most evident in Mongolia where wealth in owning horses as well as horsemanship raised one's status. Furthermore, while chariots had allowed more mobility and better permitted the nomads to tend to their herds and flocks, riding on horses improved that as well. Horses unattached to a chariot have more mobility and can traverse more difficult terrain more easily. Thus, their animals could access more pastures and move greater distances, allowing growth in herd numbers and also wealth (Taylor 2024).

Of course, when discussing cavalry and innovation, one must also consider equipment. While in many textbooks the saddle is indicated as originating in China, this narrative only considers modern geography and not historical evidence. For instance, it ignores that while the dating of the saddle and the geography places it in the kingdom of the Zhou dynasty (1046 BCE–256 BCE), which had nomadic origins. Furthermore,

it seems unlikely that most horse accoutrement would originate in the sedentary world which produced few horses as opposed to the steppes where nomads, whose very livelihood was dependent on the horse, would have undoubtedly developed or improved upon existing technology by necessity. Indeed, among the Pazyryk, Scythian, and Saka cultures (700–400 BCE), we see proto-saddles with pads made with padding of animal hair. Eventually this saddle evolved to having wooden or bone supports as well as girth and crupper straps to stabilise it. As evinced by equipment across cultures, every society would adopt and then adapt existing technologies to best suit their own needs. Some of the nomadic proto-saddles even included pommels and cantles, but not an internal frame. By the 6th century CE, a true saddle replaced the proto-saddle. A true wooden frame saddle was found in Urd Ulaan Ureet in Mongolia and is currently the oldest known true saddle. The saddle possessed a jointed wooden frame or saddle tree. This elevated the saddle off the spine of the horse, particularly when combined with the stirrup, another innovation (Taylor 2024).

We can also consider stirrups as an example of innovation. While the exact origin of the stirrup remains disputed, it still seems most likely that it originated with nomadic people, although archaeological finds and art provide a case for perhaps a sedentary origin. Like the saddle, the stirrup was not purely a military innovation, but it had great utility in warfare. The stirrup most likely originated as a rope or leather loop simply to aid in mounting a horse (Baumer 2012; Taylor 2024; Winegard 2024). It eventually evolved into a double stirrup, or rather a stirrup on either side of the horse, thus enabling the rider to easily mount from either side. Besides being an aid in mounting the horse, it also provided some martial advantages by allowing the rider to rise in the stirrups to deliver a blow. Furthermore, he could ride while standing, using his legs as shock absorbers, thus taking some stress off jostling on the body. Over time, the leather or rope loops were exchanged for wooden and then metal parts, thus providing a sturdier platform as it was wider and less precarious to stand upon. The ability to stand also aided in archery, although warriors were perfectly capable of shooting arrows at the gallop when not using stirrups or remaining seated in the saddle if they timed the shot with the horse's gallop. However, by standing and with timing the shot, the archer could potentially get a better and more powerful shot (Anthony 2007; Drews 2004; May 2007/2016; Taylor 2024; Winegard 2024). These quickly were adopted and spread throughout Eurasia largely due to the use by nomads, with the Franks adopting them from the Avars (Pohl 2018; Taylor 2024).

Of course, to have horse-archers, we must also consider their preferred weapon, the composite bow. While many societies used self-bows, that is bows made of a single piece of wood or other material, the composite bow was a technological marvel. Made of wood, horn, and other materials, glued together, it was a weapon that could be made with limited resources and could be manufactured by most nomads. Of course, quality varied, but those made by skilled bowyers were far superior to self-bows. The layers of material gave the bow resilience that allowed it to remain strung for long periods, and by the virtue that the bow, unstrung took upon a C-shape, once strung it usually took the traditional bow with double curves. Due to the shape of the bow, it could be smaller than a self-bow yet hold greater power (Latham & Paterson 1970; May 2007/2013). Further-

more, its smaller size gave it more utility on horseback. While it is possible to shoot a long bow on horseback, the longer a bow is, the clumsier it becomes from horseback. Nomads had long practiced the "Parthian" shot, made famous at the battle of Carrhae in 53 BCE (modern Harran, Turkey), where the Parthian Empire (247 BCE–224 CE) crushed the Romans led by Crassus (115–53 BCE). Yet, this technique was old even by then but shooting backwards while riding was an enviable skill. Indeed, the nomadic horse archers had a shooting range of 360 degrees. With smaller bows, they could more easily turn in the saddle and shoot where they needed whereas a longer bow forced the rider to then adjust to avoid hitting their horse's head as they moved back and forth (May 2007/2016; Taylor 2024). Technological advances during the Hunnu (Xiongnu) period, added lengthened "ears" to the bow's arms that helped stiffen the bow while being set at a recurved angle. This modification shortened the bow while also making the initial pull heavier, thus adding more power to it, thus making it more effective against armour (Graff 2016).

The composite bow also had the advantage of remaining strung for long periods of time without ruining the bow. The smaller size, combined with the advantage of remaining strung, allowed the user to keep the bow holstered in a bow quiver at his hip or even attached to the saddle. If the rider had multiple bows and horses, the horse could easily transform into a weapon platform, with each horse having a bow and quiver of arrows ready at hand. The rider thus not only had spare weapons and extra arrows should his bow become lost or broken, but also a fresh mount, again giving the nomadic warrior a distinct advantage over opponents who only had one mount that would tire over the course of the battle (May 2007/2016). Associated with this was also the "Mongolian release," also known as the "Asiatic release," by which the archer pulled the bow string with his thumb. This allowed a faster release, and when paired with a thumb ring, often of leather, but sometimes polished stone or metal, allowed the archer to pull heavier bows as well as reducing the friction of the release. While common across the steppe and eventually much of Asia due to nomadic migrations, it also came in use in parts of Europe due to the arrival of the Huns, and was renewed by the Avars, which brought not only the composite bow but the thumb ring. The Romans soon adopted it as well as recruited the nomads into their armies (Graff 2016).

Of course, the nomads also used other weapons beside the composite bow. These included axes, clubs, and maces, but during the ancient and medieval periods, few weapons had the prestige or utility as the sword. And due to the sword's allure, it has also had a surprising range of variety in the weapon's design. Its length varied but rarely extended over a meter in length. While it is difficult to ascertain who first invented the sword, one variety seems to have originated with the steppe nomads. This was the sabre, possessing a single edge, although at the tip it was often double edged, and curved. It was the ideal weapon for use on horseback. While one could stab with a sabre, it was the ideal weapon for slashing, particularly from horseback. The curve of the blade allowed the rider to ride by at speed and slash and the follow through of the arm and the horse's movement aided in the slicing of the target, thus preventing it from get stuck in the target. A straight blade, long preferred by sedentary cultures, could be used in the fashion, the lack of curvature ran the risk of the blade becoming stuck in the body of the warrior's opponent or being

jarred from the hand, and thus leaving the rider without his sword. The curve of the sabre allowed a follow-through that was fluid, making it superior on horseback. While sabres were in use prior to the Mongol Empire, it was not until the Mongol period that they became widespread in the Muslim world (Zaky 1961; Rivkin and Isaac 2017).

Finally, we see innovation in armour and development of what can be considered heavy cavalry. The latter is typically associated with sedentary armies, such as the cataphracts and knights, but the heavily armoured and lance wielding heavy cavalryman originated in the steppes among the Sarmatians. Wearing what was sometimes described as "dragon-scale" armour, the Sarmatians wore an unprecedented amount of armour. This armour, consisting of leather, bone, or metal "scales," sewn onto a garment. It is not clear as to what culture invented it, but the Sarmatians made it the most well-known and it may have served as the antecedent to the lamellar armour that became ubiquitous among the steppe nomads and many eastern societies. Furthermore, they wielded lances, often with two hands and focused on charging the enemy with shock tactics rather than relying primarily on horse archery (Christian 1998). Their position in the Pontic and Caspian steppes led to contact with the Parthian Empire as well as the Roman Empire on the Danube frontier. Some even entered Roman service as auxiliaries and served in distant posts such as Britain (Cunliffe 2019). This has led to some speculation that the heavily armoured Sarmatians were the source of inspiration for the knights of the Round Table. While this remains inconclusive, though tantalising, one legendary element that proved true were the "Amazons" of the Sarmatians. While women in the nomadic world often did become adept with weapons to defend their camps, women warriors among the Sarmatians proved to be fairly common (Cunliffe 2019; Christian 1998). Regardless, the Sarmatians did have an influence on the development of the Roman Empire, including the adoption of streaming banners (draco) by cavalry units as well as the long lance (kontos) (Graff 2016).

Of course, having all these weapons wielded by mounted warriors was concerning, but did not make an army. Organisation, discipline, tactics, and strategy are what differentiates an army group from a mob and an actual military. In terms of organisation, we know that at least as far back as the Hunnu period (220 BCE–89 CE), decimal organisation was common on the steppes. Units of 10, 100, 1000 were easy to organise as well as practical (May 2007/2016). Furthermore, small unit tactics could easily be applied to the larger units as it was only a matter of scale. For centuries, the nomads across Central Eurasia would use the same tactics. Occasionally new tactics emerged, but despite the lack of constant tactical innovation, the nomads continued to enjoy military success. This, in turn, led to less incentive for tactical innovation. Even as their enemies began to understand steppe warfare, this comprehension did not give them a decisive advantage over the nomads or make steppe warfare tactics obsolete. Why? With centuries of use, the nomads became even more proficient in the execution of their tactics. As with a sports team, how well one can execute a play or manoeuvre is often the deciding factor.

Thus, the feigned retreat became even more convincing. Furthermore, not all sedentary powers appreciated steppe warfare or studied it, so it is unclear how often someone's knowledge of steppe warfare tactics was transmitted to others or across generations of

commanders. Furthermore, we do not have many records of armies training to counter specific tactics—at least as a regular part of training, although several training manuals recommend it (Graff 2016; May 2006). When there is some mention, it appears to be the exception rather than the norm.

Tactical Innovation

Yet, new tactics evolved with each steppe empire as well as new political institutions and means of ruling. As with other states and empires, nomadic civilisations never remained stagnant. Some changes were not noticeable to many observers, but continuous subtle changes occurred, whether it was through the legitimisation of authority or other means. Sometimes the changes occurred through direct or indirect extension of influence. Nonetheless, they always maintained their own character and interpretations of nomadic civilisation. Tactically, not only did the nomads improve the execution of the tactic, but also, they innovated new tactics and styles of warfare. While many steppe empires did not attempt to expand and extend their rule over sedentary regions, they certainly had to defeat other steppe nomads to do so.

The problem with fighting nomads is that they used the same tactics. Thus, not only was improved execution of tactics necessary, which required sustained training, but also the need to add new wrinkles to old tactics. This was immensely important, as it made it more difficult for the opposing commander to determine what was happening or likely to happen. This is made most clear in 1204, when Temüjin, the future Chinggis Khan, defeated the Naiman and others. This victory, among the most pivotal battles in history, gave Chinggis Khan control of the Mongolian plateau and thus enabled the rise of the Mongol Empire (May 2006, 2007/2016, 2018).

What happened was that the Mongols introduced new wrinkles to old tactics, which baffled the Naiman, preventing them from utilising their superior numbers to good effect. Furthermore, as the Mongol Empire grew, the Mongols not only improved on existing tactics, but also developed new strategies of conquest and rule, as I've discussed elsewhere, and perhaps even a Grand Strategy (May 2015, 2017). We must keep in mind that the Mongols were often fighting on two or three fronts, or rather what in modern warfare one might consider a theatre, due to the immensity of their campaigns. While the empire did incorporate sedentary kingdoms, their armies, and resources into the Mongol Empire, it always remained very much a nomadic empire.

Even as the Mongols developed what might be considered Combined Arms Warfare, they often added a nomadic element. For instance, when the Mongol armies, which included thousands of Chinese infantry, fought in their war against the Song Empire (May 2018, 2019). While the Mongols took the advice of Liu Zheng to create a riverine navy, even as they listened to a former Song general, they did not adopt Chinese naval warfare wholesale. From the basics, they applied what they knew of warfare, particularly from the Mongol art of war. The Mongol general Aju should be given the most credit, as he applied steppe military theory by focusing on mobility and targeting space, not individuals. Manoeuvrability, even in the more limited confines of a river, remained the priority

(May 2019).

It should be noted that after the dissolution of the Mongol Empire and gradual fading of the empire, there was a decline of military innovation. It did not occur immediately, nor was it apparent immediately or universally. Yet, innovation still occurred in pockets, particularly where there were creative thinkers, such as Emir Temür or Toqtamïsh Khan. Unfortunately, the two fought, so Toqtamïsh's innovations might have been limited in their influence by being on the losing end of events. I would hazard a guess that with the demise of the Mongol Empire, the exchange of ideas as well as the more regular military education of army commanders diminished. And certainly, as with the two leaders mentioned, there were flashes of brilliance, but they became increasingly less frequent.

This is not to say that the armies of nomadic civilisations became less martial. Quite the contrary, they remained dangerous and potent. Their efficacy in their style of warfare did not diminish, but it did become more stagnant due to divisions and a fracturing of unity, leading to a breakdown in institutions and resources. Also, the advance of technology outside of the steppes began to give a significant edge. Yet, the overall quality of warrior that came from nomadic cultures remained, and there is good reason why armies still wanted them in their armies, whether it was the Ming empire (1368–1644), Muscovy (circa 1380–1547), the Ottoman Empire (c. 1299–1922), the Safavid Empire (1501–1736), or the Qing Empire (1636–1912) (May 2007/2016; May 2012). Indeed, as David Graff has indicated, throughout history sedentary states recruited nomadic warriors into their armies due to their martial skills, or eventually adopted many of their methods, weapons, or tactics (Graff 2016). Often, the best way to fight a nomadic enemy was to fight like a nomad.

The Gunpowder Revolution

The key military innovation of the early modern period was the advent of gunpowder weapons. While gunpowder weapons were available during the Mongol Empire, and the first cannons date to the mid-Yuan period, they were not as practical or decisive as to become a significant part of the Mongols' arsenal. Still, these weapons continued to evolve. While they played a role in the rise of the Ming dynasty and driving the Mongols out of China, how much significance should be given to gunpowder weapons in these events remains debatable (May 2023). The nomadic civilisations did not ignore them, but arquebuses or early firearms still had less applicability on horseback. They could be used, but not as easily or with the same overall effect as a bow and arrow (May 2023; Chase 2003).

Advances in cannon manufacturing and the increased production of firearms, however, changed and shifted the military superiority from the nomadic horse archers to sedentary infantry. Yet this did not happen overnight. Theoretically, the shift could have occurred with crossbows, and several medieval observers commented that increased use of crossbows could be an effective counter to the superiority of the horse-archer (May 2023; Chase 2003).

While crossbowmen could be effective, they did not greatly alter warfare. Cannon,

however, did. With a greater range than crossbows, composite bows, as well as arquebuses and muskets, cannon could disrupt cavalry formations, even before the advent of explosive shells. And while smoothbore cannons were not accurate, batteries of them could be quite effective, especially as they did exactly what the nomadic armies did—targeting a kill zone (May 2023; May 2006/2013/ May 2012; Chase 2003). While the production of cannon and gunpowder required resources and facilities that were sometimes more limited on the steppe, it did not prevent nomadic civilisations from also creating their own firearms industry. Indeed, the so-called military revolution did not exclude the nomadic civilisations (May 2023).

The best example of this can be found in the last great steppe empire, that of the Zhungars. Procuring individuals with the technical skill to make cannons and muskets of current design, the Zhungars kept abreast of the latest developments in military technology. Indeed, during the reign of Tsewang Rabdan, the Zhungars had captured Swedes, who Peter the Great had exiled to Siberia after the Battle of Poltava (1709), employed in making cannons, mortars, as well as bullets (Perdue 2005; May 2023). Not only did the Zhungars have their own fledgling gunpowder weapon industry, but they also innovated new ways of transporting artillery. Affixing the cannons to saddles, camels then carried them (Perdue 2005; May 2023). This also meant that the Zhungars had to be mindful of the cannon size and weight as a Bactrian camel can carry a load of 150–200 kg (330–440 lb) for 45–50 km/day while maintaining a speed of 2 km/hr, which is necessary for an army to make decent progress. While cannons were rarely a deciding factor in battle in the steppes, they nonetheless could be useful if only to disrupt cavalry formations at great distances. In battle, the saddles were then removed from the camels and used as a gun carriage, elevated to adjust for range. Indeed, the fact that the Zhungars were willing to embrace new technologies and devise ways to adapt them to their mode of warfare must have been a concern to both Imperial Russia as well as the Qing Empire. And it very well may have played a role in the Qing's determined destruction of the Zhungars (Perdue 2005; May 2023).

Nomadic Warfare in the Modern World?

The preceding points should not come as a surprise to many, and they are rather obvious to those who study nomadic civilisation, even if they have not given these particular ideas much thought. However, these points that I have outlined often come as a surprise to those who do not study nomadic cultures. Indeed, often they are unaware of them and must be convinced or will remain sceptical that nomads were innovative in any fashion, as simplistic as that may sound.

While unfortunate, it should not be unexpected. We must remember that most of our colleagues, particularly in history and political science, have been trained in or lived in a sedentary-centric perspective. Furthermore, they are often bound by a narrow definition of civilisation, what constitutes a state, as well as a teleological perspective of progress. What does not fit into those prescribed definitions must be inferior as well as irrelevant in the larger scheme of history. Of course, they will begrudgingly accept an outlier or recognise the impact, such as the Mongol Empire, but always with a bit of judgement, of a steppe empire, simply because of the size of the state.

While the horse-archer may no longer have a place on the 21st century battlefield, there should also be consideration of how the lessons of steppe warfare and steppe societies can be applied to modern warfare in the 21st century. In terms of modern warfare, lessons from steppe warfare may still apply. Indeed, in the recent unpleasantness in Ukraine, the Russian military carried out an attack that at least, on the surface, seemed to have been inspired by the tactics of steppe nomads centuries ago. In this, they have set out men or motorcycles, dirt bikes, dune buggies, and quadracycles (four-wheeled All-Terrain Vehicles or ATVs), with varying degrees of success. When used with artillery and rocket barrages, the quick moving vehicles often can cross minefields and reach Ukrainian positions. Once there, the troopers dismount and enter the entrenched Ukrainian positions. However, arriving at the Ukrainian positions often resulted in high casualties. These vehicles possess no armour, relying on speed and mobility as their only protection. Thus, they must weave and dodge their way through mines, machine gun and artillery fire, as well as drones. While it has spared the Russian armoured units, these motorcycle forces do not appear to be a major tactical factor. Still, having experienced significant damage to their tanks and other armoured vehicles, one can understand why the Russians have turned to what has become known as "Mad Max Warfare" as regular non-military items are converted for warfare, or new weapons are constructed on an ad-hoc basis.

The ability to cross open space quickly has always been a need in modern warfare—to outpace artillery fire and in the 21st century, drones. Being smaller than armoured vehicles, the motorcycles and other vehicles are more difficult to spot on a large battlefield and thus to target. Furthermore, they can avoid many obstacles, although they also cannot simply go over many that a tank might roll over. But in general, these waves are becoming known as meat-grinder assaults—simply hoping that numbers will wear down their opponent. These tactics are not new. Motorcycle assaults extend back to World War I. And now as then, they remain ineffective.

Yet these desperate measures nonetheless demonstrate that there is a recognition that defensive warfare has outpaced offensive warfare. Thus, it is prudent for military thinkers to find a solution. Some of the efforts emerging from these motorcycle assaults are not completely astray. For instance, machine guns have been fitted to the carriages of the ATVs, thus the rider can dismount and apply suppressive fire as well as take on drones more effectively than simply with an assault rifle. There is a tactical application.

As recent conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as in Ukraine have demonstrated, drones are, for better or for worse, part of the future of warfare. The assessment of drones or UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) and their potential to revolutionise military affairs remains contentious, with some saying that it will not only have great impact on how wars are fought, but also who can fight them due to their relative cost (Calcara, et al. 2022). This is where a review of steppe warfare might be useful. Small and agile, drones in warfare offer many possibilities. While drone tactics continue to evolve, in the Nagorno–Karabakh conflict, drones have been used with terrible effect as Azerbaijan used swarms of Harop drones to overwhelm defences by crashing into ground defence with explosives—essentially mimicking an angry swarm of bees (Reed

& Rife 2022). While a crude and inelegant use of weaponry, it is effective.

Yet, there are other uses. In Ukraine and in Afghanistan, drones have been used as predators (and of course there is an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) named Predator), hunting their targets (Ibid.). Used to eliminate specific targets, such as enemy leaders, it is effective but also limited.

It is feasible that larger numbers of drones could be used, perhaps in squadrons and used in formations. Indeed, swarms of drones are being used as evinced not only in Nagorno-Karabakh but elsewhere (Ibid.). As illustrated by the use of drones in various light shows where the drones fly and comprise different shapes, it is possible for drones to execute complex manoeuvres in large numbers.

Rather than simply crashing loitering munition drones into its targets or used as assassins or to conduct terrorist or sabotage operations (Ibid.), the drones armed with missiles and/or machine guns could be programmed or guided to carry out complex manoeuvres in significant numbers. This would be a force multiplier. The battlefield is the garden of innovation—talented commanders will innovate to find an advantage. Indeed, in early September 2024, Ukrainian commanders began to deploy so-called "dragon" drones against entrenched Russians, often sheltered by forests. These "dragons" then released a stream of thermite, which with a temperature of 2500°C (4532°F) ignited, burning foliage, people, and ammunition. Even if the dragon drones do not directly hit the trenches, thermite is difficult to extinguish and thus will burn everything in its path, forcing the defenders to abandon their positions, killing them, or if by chance they survive, leaving them without cover for other drone attacks or other forms of assault (Demarest 2024; Anderson 2024). While the Ukrainians have used thermite bombs in the past, the dragon drone can be more precise but also has the psychological factor of the enemy seeing a jet of flame appear in the night. How effective it is will only be known over time, but one must appreciate the psychological effect of the tactic.

More importantly, by examining the practices of steppe warfare, ever greater innovation might be found. Indeed, with sufficient drones, I argue that a commander could implement Chinggis Khan's strategy at the Battle of Chakirma'ut in 1204, or other battles fought by nomadic armies. The drones could fly to their target in bush formation—scattered and thus making it more difficult to target or to determine their numbers or even their tactical intent. Then by deploying them in Nagur or lake formation, the drones could hem in their opponents or confront them on a wider front. By using the shi'uchi or chisel formation, the drones would be in constant motion, while also providing regular fire via missiles or machine guns (May 2007/2016). This could be suppressing fire, allowing other units to manoeuvre, or simply by making direct and sustained assault.

Much like the Mongols, it would be important not to fall into a regular melody or pattern, thus making their movement predictable, thus allowing defenders to better predict and target the drone's path (Ibid.). Yet, with the advantage of numbers and by targeting a kill zone, the drones should be able to prevent mass retaliation.

When used to suppress and in coordinated attacks with armoured vehicles, infantry

and aircraft, fixed wing or helicopter, the drone assault should occupy the primary attention of the enemy, thus saving lives and expensive equipment. Yet, other possibilities exist as well, including potentially the nerge or jerge applications, again particularly when used in combined arms operations, as it is unlikely that drones can be a panacea to all combat operations (Ibid.).

Again, turning to the Russo-Ukraine war, we see strategic applications as well. Whether the Ukrainians realised it or not, in Operation Spiderweb they utilised a standard practice strategy of Mongol Empire: striking several points or targets separated by distance. In their wars on the Jin Empire, the Mongols divided their armies routinely to strike multiple points, often ignoring well-fortified locations near them, to attack more vulnerable. The same could be said in the Khwarazmian war, with Chinggis Khan personally leading an army deep into Khwarazmian territory to strike at Bukhara (515 km from Otrar).

In Operation Spiderweb (Operátsija "Pavutýna"), the Ukrainians deployed drones against Dyagilevo airbase and Ivanovo Severny airbase, two Russian airbases near Moscow. Dyagilevo is 812 km and 1,811 km from Kyiv. These two attacks are not surprising, considering that Ukraine possesses a strike drone that can carry a warhead of 113kg for a range of 1,609 km. Previous models had a range of under 1,000 km (965 km) while carrying a significantly smaller warhead.

Using this (a non-reusable drone) and others, the Ukrainians have struck targets hundreds of kilometers in Russia. Yet, by transporting drones surreptitiously by truck deep into Russia, the Security Service of Ukraine also struck bases at greater distances: Olenya airfield (on the northern edge of Russia by Finland and the Barents Sea); Belaya (in Irkutsk, near Lake Baikal), and Ukrainka (Amur Oblast, far to the East). From Kyiv, Olenya is 2,886 km, Belaya 4,300 km, and Ukrainka 6,500 km away.

Whereas the Mongols rode to distant points, the Ukrainians transported their drone (quadcopter drones with limited range) close to their designated targets. While undoubtedly these airbases had formidable defences, it is unlikely the Russians (or anyone) expected these three to be attacked. Although the attack on Ukrainka failed, it still showed the ambition and capabilities of the Ukrainians, just as the Mongols did.

Conclusion

This should not be viewed as a conclusive discussion of nomadic military innovation. Indeed, space does not allow for a properly nuanced discussion of even a portion of the topics presented. Rather, this is simply an overview or introduction to the topic to consider not only what military innovations came from nomadic civilisations as well as to suggest how modern military innovation could draw inspiration from the military history and cultures of the Central Eurasian pastoral nomads. One must remember that when it comes to strategy, one should not ignore the lessons of the past—genius is genius. Chinggis Khan and his generals such as Sübedei, Muqali, and Jebe were brilliant and used the military they had to great effect—as did later Mongol generals such as Bayan and Aju during the conquest of the Song Empire, when they incorporated a navy and

infantry. One can only speculate what Chinggis Khan and his staff might have planned if they had access to drones and other modern weaponry.

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DON'T YOU HAVE TO NOMADISE TO BE A NOMAD? The Ambivalence And Misunderstandings Of Kazakh Pastoral Nomadism

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Abstract: After the independence of Kazakhstan in 1991, the Kazakhs emphasised their nomadic heritage as the basis of their national identity. Nonetheless, they remain influenced by negative representations of nomadism and have difficulty combining pastoralism and modernity. In the 19th and 20th centuries, debates on sedentarisation showed all the ambivalence of the Russian and Kazakh positions on the topic. In the 1930s, forced sedentarisation was a side effect of collectivisation, which led to a tragic famine that killed a third of the Kazakh population. Following independence, the patrimonialisation of nomadism focused on some ancillary emblems, such as the yurt or the horse. For instance, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan compete to appropriate the Central Asian equestrian game of goat-pulling, misinterpreted as a "nomadic game." This patrimonialisation of nomadism neglects its essential feature, residential mobility, and, by ignoring actual nomadic practices, it definitively relegates nomadism to the past. However, ethnographic field studies, such as the one I carried out in south-eastern Kazakhstan, show that mobile pastoralism is still practiced today.

Keywords: Central Asia, Kazakh, nomadism, pastoralism, sedentarisation, goat-pulling game, cultural heritage

Having studied horse herding in Central Asia and Siberia, I am often mistakenly presented as an anthropologist specialising in Mongolia. This misunderstanding alone highlights the fact that contemporary Kazakhstan is no longer readily associated with pastoral nomadism abroad. When I first came to Kazakhstan in 1994 for my doctoral thesis in social anthropology on horse husbandry and horse training in Inner Asia, I was confronted with contradictory opinions on Kazakh nomadism. On the one hand, some people said: "We Kazakhs are nomads. We founded the nomadic civilisation. For us, livestock is everything. It's their meat that feeds us." On the other hand, other people said: "Since Sovietisation, the Kazakhs have lost their own culture, they have lost the basis of their national identity, they have lost all their nomadic knowledge."

In this paper, I would like to shed light on the contradictions, ambiguities, and ambivalence of nomadism among the Kazakhs. I would like to clear up a few misunderstandings on the subject, and I will show that, in fact, neither of these two opinions corresponds to reality.

To this end, I will try to set out a definition of pastoral nomadism and show the variety of its forms among the Kazakhs. I will trace the major changes in Kazakh nomadism

since the 19th century and the debate on sedentarisation between Russians and Kazakhs. I will show how, from the 1990s onwards, the authorities of independent Kazakhstan, in their quest for a national identity, promoted the emblems of nomadism, and I will shed light on the discrepancies between this stylised vision of nomadism and the realities of today's mobile pastoralism in Kazakhstan.

Central Asia is classically divided into two parts: the sedentary, agricultural world of the oases, which forms a central core south of the Syr-Darya river, and the world of nomadic pastoralism, essentially steppe, but also desert and mountain, which spreads out in a vast crescent covering most of what is now Kazakhstan and stretching from the north of Turkmenistan to the centre of Kyrgyzstan. The dichotomy between nomadic pastoralists and sedentary farmers is a constant in the Central Asian cultural area. But this geographical division is highly schematic and partly inaccurate. It has been blurred by the development of agriculture in Kazakhstan and the sedentarisation of pastoralists in the 20th century. Moreover, this dichotomy may be misleading because, as we shall see, it ignores the diversity of forms of pastoral mobility.

In Central Asia, the Kazakhs live in a semi-arid environment of steppes and deserts, favourable to nomadic pastoralism. Steppe lands constitute 30% of the territory of Kazakhstan, and deserts or semi-deserts, 47%, with an average annual precipitation of 200–300 mm on the steppe and 100–200 mm in the deserts (Kurylev 1998: 24–6).

Views on Nomadism and the Main Stages in the Sedentarisation of the Kazakhs Since the 19th Century

Nomadic and Sedentary Areas in Central Asia

Central Asia is classically divided into two parts: the sedentary, agricultural world of the oases, which forms a central core south of the Syr-Darya River, and the world of nomadic pastoralism—primarily steppe, but also desert and mountain—extending in a vast crescent covering most of what is now Kazakhstan and stretching from northern Turkmenistan to central Kyrgyzstan. The dichotomy between nomadic pastoralists and sedentary farmers is a constant in the Central Asian cultural area. But this geographical division is highly schematic and partly inaccurate. It has been blurred by the development of agriculture in Kazakhstan and the sedentarisation of pastoralists in the 20th century. Moreover, this dichotomy may be misleading because, as we shall see, it ignores the diversity of forms of pastoral mobility.

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The Kazakhs, a Nomadic People

The national identity of the Kazakhs is all the more linked to nomadism because, according to the most commonly accepted etymology (Vambéry 1878: 20; Bartol'd 1911:190), their ethnonym is related to nomadism. The name "Kazakh" is believed to

derive from the verb *kaz-*, which means "to wander" or "roam."

The Kazakhs are a Turkic people first mentioned in the 15th century. From that time onwards, they defined themselves as nomads and were identified as such. At the end of the 15th century, the Kazakh Khan Kasym declared to the Sultan Saïd-khan of Mogolistan:

> We, the inhabitants of the steppe, do not possess rare or precious objects or goods. Our main wealth is our horses. [...] We have no gardens or buildings on our land. Our places of entertainment are the pastures for our livestock and our herds of horses (Ibragimov *et al*. 1969: 226).

The first foreign travellers who ventured into the Central Asian steppe saw it as a hostile and dangerous environment, for example the English explorer Anthony Jenkinson in 1556–8.

Later, at the beginning of the 19th century, the figure of the Kazakh nomads softened somewhat in Russian and Western representations, going from caravan-robbing raiders to uneducated, simple shepherds (Suhih 2007: 14). Generally speaking, representations of the nomads of the steppes oscillate between barbarism and good-naturedness. Once condemned as a backward way of life, pastoral nomadism is now praised as a sustainable, ecological and respectful "good way" of using the natural environment.

Integration into the Russian Empire and the Beginnings of Sedentarisation

Between the 18th and 19th centuries, the three Kazakh tribal hordes (*žüz*)—the Small or Youngest *žüz* in the west, the Middle *žüz* in the centre and north, and the Great or Eldest *žüz* in the south-east—were gradually integrated into the Russian Empire. The Russian conquest was followed by an administrative division of the Kazakh nomadic areas, which were divided into *gubernià*, subdivided into *okrug* and themselves subdivided into *volost'*. The *volost'* took the names of the dominant Kazakh lineages. The Kazakh political elites (heads of lineages, *bi* "customary judges" or *baj* "rich livestock owners") were integrated into the Russian system of government, serving as "empire mediators." The Russian Empire did not initially set out to change the Kazakh way of life.

Under Catherine II, there developed a belief in Russia's mission to civilise the peoples of Asia, whose way of life, particularly their nomadic lifestyle, even more than their religion, became the essential criterion for differentiation (Kappeler 1994 [1992]: 148; Yaroshevski 1991). However, the efforts made to attract the Kazakhs to a sedentary lifestyle had little effect in the eighteenth century (Levchine 1840 [1832]: 246–7).

Sedentary, Nomadic or Wandering: A Classification of Indigenous Peoples

In the Siberian Kyrgyz regulations of 1822 drawn up by M. Speranskij, General Governor of Siberia, the Kazakhs were classified (Article 1) among the *kočevye inorodcy* "indigenous nomads" (*Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossijskoj imperii s 1649 goda* 1830, t. 38; Levchine 1840 [1832]: 467). According to the *Ustav ob upravlenii inorodcev* regulation of 22 July 1822, the natives of the empire (*inorodcy*) were divided into three categories (*razrâd*) with differing rights and duties: the sedentary (*osedlye*), who lived in towns

and villages; the nomads (*kočevye*), who occupied specific places and moved around according to the seasons; and finally the wanderers (*brodâŝie*) or hunter-fishermen (*lovcy*), who moved from place to place following the relief and the rivers. The first group, that of the "sedentary," included Central Asian traders and Tatar farmers; the second group, that of the "nomads," included Buryat, Tungus, Iakut, Kazakh and other Turko-Mongol pastoralists and agro-pastoralists; the third group, that of the "wanderers," included Siberian hunters and reindeer herders (*Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossijskoj imperii s 1649 goda* 1830, vol. 38: 394 § 29.126).

This classification was therefore more subtle than a simple dichotomy between nomads and sedentary peoples. Nor did it correspond exactly to three types of economic activity (agriculture, livestock husbandry, hunting), since farmers were to be found in both the first and second groups, and stock-breeders in the second and third—however, the animal species mattered, since reindeer rearing was classified separately. Finally, this classification was not exclusively based on the criterion of residential mobility, since it was stated, somewhat inconsistently: "indigenous people who live in mud houses or fixed huts, but whose way of life and activities are similar to those of nomads, are not classified as sedentary" (Ibid. § 9, p.395).

This categorisation therefore implicitly established a hierarchy in the degree of civilisation of the peoples concerned. In the General Regulations, it was specified (Ibid. § 170, p.404) that nomads and wanderers were distinguished not only by their residential mobility and mode of subsistence, but also "by the simplicity of their manners" (*prostotoj nravov*) and "by particular customs" (*osobymi obyčaâmi*). These nomadising and wandering *inorodcy* were thus placed at another level in the evolution of societies than the sedentary ones. Speranskij's design reflected the evolutionism that had dominated Western thought since the Enlightenment.

The Effects of Colonisation

These regulations aimed to soften the nomads' customs (Martin 2001: 35–39). To some extent, they also protected them from the abuses of the Russian administration, by preserving their way of life and their autonomy (Laruelle 2014: 162). However, they also planned to reduce their mobility because they were forbidden to nomadise beyond a specific territory (*Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossijskoj imperii s 1649 goda* 1830, t.38: 421: § 29.127, art. 77–78, 88 & sq.) and offered a plot of land of 15 dessiatins [16 ha] to those who wished to settle down. But in fact, these administrative measures had less impact on daily life on the steppes than the arrival of Russian settlers (Martin 2001: 74 ff.).

This arrival was at first illegal, then increasingly massive after the abolition of serfdom in 1861, and finally, at the turn of the century, encouraged by the laws of 1889 and 1906, with the result that in 1914 there were three million Europeans and five million Kazakhs in the Kazakh territory (Laruelle 2014: 167–168). The aim of this colonisation was to exploit the arable land of the steppes, and not to settle all its inhabitants. However, it deprived nomadic pastoralists of part of their grazing land, or their access to grazing land, by cutting off nomadic routes and forcing them to change their itineraries. Some nomads became sedentary because their livestock declined, and some migrated to the

towns.

The Tragedy of Collectivisation

The widespread sedentarisation of the Kazakhs finally took place between 1929 and 1934, after the Soviet Union's first five-year plan imposed the collectivisation of livestock. Collectivisation caused a sharp fall in livestock numbers and a terrible famine. This disaster resulted in the death of more than a third of the Kazakh population (1.3 to 1.4 million Kazakhs, or 35 to 38% of the population according to Pianciola 2004: 137) and the permanent emigration of many of them (0.6 million according to Ohayon 2006: 268). Livestock was decimated by requisitions and ill-managed forced collectivisation, and this removed any reason for nomadism. Indeed, the main motivation for nomadism is the needs of the herds. With no more livestock, there is no need to move. That's why we can legitimately argue that sedentarisation was a side effect of collectivisation rather than its primary objective, as I. Ohayon wrote (2006: 113). Admittedly, the official discourse presented sedentarisation as a necessary condition for progress towards socialism (Baišev 1981: 86).

And from 1941 onwards, the partial reconstitution of the herds combined with some pragmatism led to a return to mobility, if not of the whole population, at least of livestock and shepherds (Alimaev et Behnke 2008: 163–165).

Russian and Kazakh Debates on Sedentarisation

What were the views of the Kazakhs and the Russians on sedentarisation at these different stages? On the Russian side, positions were divided. On the one hand, the idea of the superiority of sedentary agriculture over nomadic pastoralism was universally held in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nomadic pastoralism was seen as an archaic way of life, in which man, subject to the vagaries of nature, could neither accumulate wealth nor enjoy the benefits of civilisation, so it seemed obvious that competition between nomads and sedentary people would inevitably end up in favour of the latter. The main idea was the following: the cultivation of the mind and the cultivation of the soil go hand in hand, and a society cannot be "cultivated", civilised, without being agricultural.

On the other hand, many Russians thought that nomadic pastoralism was a mode of production better suited to the natural conditions of the Kazakh steppes (Levchine 1840 [1832]: 316; Klemenc 1908; Švecov 1926: 102–104).

> For their own benefit, as well as for that of neighbouring states, and especially Russia, it is to be wished that they [the Kazakhs] do not change their condition of rich pastoralists for that of poor farmers, since their steppes seem, so to speak, made for nomadic peoples (Levchine 1840 [1832]: 316).

There were conflicts about this within the colonial administration (Kaufman 1903: 162). An expedition carried out in 1896-1903 under the direction of Fiodor A. Ŝerbina collected an impressive mass of figures on land use by nomads in twelve districts of the Akmolinsk, Semipalatinsk and Turgaj regions, in order to determine the amount of arable land unused by Kazakhs and therefore available for colonisation (*Materialy po kirgizskomu zemlepol'zovaniû*… 1898–1909). However, the participants in this expe-

dition held divergent positions, with some of them denouncing the harmful effects of the colonisation that their undertaking was supposed to promote, such as the Kazakh A. Bukejhanov (see below) or the Cossack from Orenburg, T. I. Sedel'nikov, a deputy in the Duma. And the results of this survey could be used either to support or to criticise colonisation (Campbell 2011).

In fact, it was as nomads that pastoralists could be useful to the empire: for the production of wool, butter and cheap meat, and for supplying horses to the army. My study on the use of "Kirghis" horses in the service of the empire (Ferret 2009a) shows that some Russian authorities were aware that the nomadic way of life should be preserved in order to develop horse breeding.

On the Kazakh side, the nomadic way of life was widely valued by the population. The *baj*, wealthy livestock owners, in particular, were deeply attached to it. Individual wealth depended exclusively on a person's livestock. And the size of your herd determined the possibility and the necessity to nomadise. In Kazakh society, everyone wanted to be a *kôšpelì* "nomad" (from the verb *kôšu*, "to nomadise" in Kazakh, implying no erratic displacement, but stable and regular movement in phase with the seasons), and the poor *žatak* "settled people" were despised and sought to revert to a nomadic lifestyle (Zeland 1885: 16).

However, Kazakh intellectuals, often educated in Russian schools, also associated progress with a sedentary lifestyle. In the 19th century, Ibrai Altynsaryn (1841–1889), the promoter of a Russian-Kazakh educational system, and Tchokan Valikhanov, known as the first Kazakh ethnographer and historian, foresaw a gradual sedentarisation while advocating caution in this area (Bejsembiev 1976: 161, 164).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the main currents of the Kazakh intelligentsia advocated sedentarisation: not only the one expressed in the magazine *Ajqap*, defending a revival of Islam inspired by Jadidism, but also the members of the nationalist Alaš Orda party led by A. Bukejhanov, which grew out of a movement inspired by progressivism and westernism, around the newspaper *Qazaq*. While they were all in favour of the sedentarisation of the Kazakhs, which was seen as a condition for the progress of society and therefore necessary for the preservation of *qazaqtyq* "Kazakhness," their opinions nevertheless differed on the required pace of sedentarisation, which should be rapid for the former, measured for the latter (Kendirbaeva 1999: 6–13; see also Bejsembiev 1976: 269–334; Rottier 2003; Hallez 2014: 290).

During the implementation of the first five-year plan, several Kazakh intellectuals were opposed to the collectivisation project involving forced sedentarisation as proposed by F. I. Gološekin, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Kazakh SSR (Ohayon 2006: 120). They thought that Kazakh society was not ready for such a brutal upheaval, but they did not question the idea of the superiority of sedentary European civilisation.

I have presented these various positions in order to show that it is not accurate to state without qualification that all Russians wanted the Kazakhs to settle down and that all the Kazakhs were unanimously and absolutely opposed to sedentarisation. Their respective positions were both more ambiguous on this subject.

A Shared Evolutionism

In the USSR, the discourse on nomadism remained within the paradigm of evolutionism. Inspired by the evolutionism of Lewis Morgan and the theory of modes of production of Marx and Engels, the Soviet archaeologist and linguist Nicolas Marr distinguished five stages in the development of humanity (primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and communism). However, from the 1930s to 1950, the aim was no longer to show that pastoral nomadism was a primitive way of life, but a feudal one, the third of the five successive stages of evolution as defined by Marr and Stalin: "History knows five fundamental types of relations of production: the primitive commune, slavery, the feudal regime, the capitalist regime, and the socialist regime" (Stalin 1997 [1938]: 274).

That's why Soviet historians emphasised the monopolisation of the best pastures by the *baj*, wealthy breeders considered to be the equivalent of feudal lords (Bekmahanov 1992 [1947]: 27, 54, 77), the exploitation of the poor who had no livestock and were employed to look after the herds of the richest (Ibid.: 86, 87, 103), and they highlighted the role of institutions that allowed the exploitation of other people's labour power in sometimes hidden ways, such as *sauyn* (literally "milking" or "milch," from the verb *sauu* "to milk") where, under the guise of charity or intra-clan mutual aid, wealthy breeders temporarily entrusted a few cows to needy distant relatives under conditions that were disadvantageous for the latter.

There were bitter discussions about the feudal basis of Kazakh society, which for some authors, was private ownership of land, and for others, private ownership of livestock. But whatever the case, the model for the history of human societies remained one of stadial and unilinear evolution.

A Definition of Nomadic Pastoralism and the Variety of its Forms among the Kazakhs

The System of Mobile Pastoralism

Nomadic or mobile pastoralism can be defined as a way of life based on the extensive husbandry of herds of herbivores (Bonte 1973). Extensivity corresponds to a low animal density per unit area (Landais et Balent 1993: 18–9). Consequently, livestock feed mainly by grazing. Pastoralism leads to nomadism when pastoral populations follow herd movements according to a seasonal cycle of pasture rotation that optimises the use of resources and the comfort of the livestock.

In 1851, the merchant Žarkov summed up the fundamental difference between Russian and Kazakh livestock farming as follows:

> We Russians stay in the same place, keep our livestock in the same place, and so we have to bring them hay. Among the Kirghiz [Kazakhs], the grass stays in the same place and the men make sure that the livestock go to the grass (Žarkov 1854: 216).

Water and grass are the two driving forces behind pastoral nomadism. As the Chinese said of the ancient Turks, the T'ou-kiue, in the 6th century: "They move from one place

to another, depending on whether they find water and grass there" (Julien 1864: 332). All year round, nomadic pastoralists "follow the grass." More generally, nomadic pastoralism works on the following principle: at any time during the year, the livestock has to be in the most favourable place for their comfort and well-being. Because of seasonal variations, nomads have to regularly move to go where the grass is best at each time of year, living in hot areas when the weather is cold, in wet areas when it's dry, and vice versa.

Thus, herds must be moved from one seasonal pasture to another. In Kazakh, these are the *qystau* in winter, *kökteu* in spring, *zhaĭlau* in summer, and *küzeu* in autumn (Erofeeva 2011: 100–49). Various criteria determine the quality of pasture for a given season, including topography, vegetation, watering places, winds, snow cover, and absence of insects. The most sought-after land is for winter pastures, which have to combine several conditions that are seldom all found together: good conservation of the plant cover to ensure winter grazing, and a thin layer of snow, preferably swept by winds yet protected from snowstorms (Rumâncev 1912, I: 154).

Regular herd movements exploit the heterogeneity of natural resources and stabilise them through movement. At the same time, they spare animals and humans from the worst climatic excesses. Nomadic movements are carried out in tandem with seasonal variations, with the aim of levelling out the weather in regions with an extreme continental climate, where the year is divided between a long icy winter and a short hot summer. Kazakhstan, in particular, is characterised by a huge annual temperature range, approaching 100°C. By moving south in the cold season, and north or towards the mountains in the hot, dry season, nomads manage to soften the climate that they and their animals endure.

In Central Asia, pastoralism is multi-species, with five species of small and large livestock. Classified in descending order of numbers among the Kazakhs, they are sheep, cattle, goats, horses, and camels. Livestock provide the basis of subsistence for pastoralists, thanks to their milk, meat, wool, skin, dung used as fuel, and, last but not least, their labour. Today, livestock still provide an essential supplement for most rural people, whether nomadic or not.

In Kazakhstan, pastoralism has been doomed to extinction on several occasions over the last century. The evolution of livestock has been marked by two major crises: in the 1930s, at the time of Soviet collectivisation, which led to the decimation of livestock and a terrible famine, as we have seen, but also during decollectivisation in the 1990s.

Representations of nomadic pastoralism in Central Asia are paradoxical in that this system is believed to be both unchanging and under constant threat. The pastoral activities of caring for the herds and processing their products are generally seen as having always existed and as remaining unchanged. I devoted an article to the timeless figure of the steppe nomad (Ferret 2012). This atemporality is one of the stereotypes of pastoral nomadism, along with other clichés: nomadism as predation, nomadism as wandering. Yet nomadism is not wandering in an open, uniform, and undifferentiated space; it is a historical phenomenon, long-lasting but circumscribed in time.

At the same time, influenced by an evolutionist vision of history, we constantly imag-

ine nomadism about to disappear. There is a slightly morbid fascination with the "last" nomad. This quest for the "last nomad," linked to the romantic construction of the anthropological discipline (Fabre & Jamin 2012), seems to me to be vain and fallacious. But perhaps it is precisely because we believe that nomads are incapable of change that we always see them as threatened with extinction.

The Definition of Nomadism

The definitions of nomadism are numerous and sometimes contradictory, using several criteria linked not only to mobility, the frequency and extent of movements, but also to activities (whether or not there is agriculture), and to the types of houses inhabited (whether permanent or not). For the sake of clarity, I have chosen residential mobility as the sole criterion for nomadism. Indeed, the multiplicity of criteria obscures typologies. What's more, activity and residence are not necessarily linked: there are nomadic agricultures and sedentary livestock husbandry.

In my view, the criteria for nomadism should not be confused with its symptoms. The essential criterion of nomadism is residential mobility. One of its symptoms may be the use of mobile homes such as yurts. But you can nomadise and live in permanent houses for part of the year, as was the case for a large proportion of the Central Asian populations at the beginning of the 20th century, who lived in wooden or mud-brick houses on their wintering grounds. Conversely, it is possible to be sedentary and live in mobile homes, such as now in the yurt districts in Ulaanbaatar. Thus, I believe the best solution is to base the definition of nomadism only on mobility: how do you move? how many times a year? how long do you stay at the same place? and who moves: all people, whole families, or only professional shepherds?

Variability and Flexibility of Nomadism

Mobility itself is fluid and flexible, moving back and forth between sedentary and nomadic life. It is flexible because in Central Asia, people can move from one mode of residence to another according to circumstances. That's why talking about "the nomads" runs the risk of essentialising people, freezing their status and creating fallacious and strict dichotomies between nomads and sedentary people, who would be radically different from each other. I prefer to talk about "nomadism" as a phenomenon that people can experience in different ways and in a non-definitive way.

When a nomad loses his livestock as a result of a disaster, he can settle down for a few years to rebuild his herds, and then, once he has enough livestock, he can return to the nomadic lifestyle. The Kazakh *žůt*, like the Mongolian *zud*, corresponds to the decimation of livestock as a result of climate hazards, such as a series of thaws and frosts, leading to the formation of a layer of ice which prevents the livestock from grazing. *Žůt* were reputed to occur at regular intervals, every 12 years.

Mobility also varies, because people experience nomadism in different ways. The term "semi-nomadic" is often used to describe intermediate forms of pastoral mobility, but it's never quite clear what this means: compared with "true" nomads, do the semi-nomads move around for only part of the year, or over shorter distances, or do they com-

bine farming with livestock rearing? I have therefore tried to characterise these forms in a more rigorous way, based on data I have gathered on the populations of Siberia and Central Asia, from written ethnographic sources or from my fieldwork. In particular, the Ŝerbina survey has yielded an enormous amount of data on Kazakh pastoral nomadism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (*Materialy po kirgizskomu zemlepol'zovaniû, sobrannye i razrabotannye èkspediciej po issledovaniû stepnyh oblastej* 1898–1909).

After analysing these Siberian and Central Asian data, I have proposed the following typology (Ferret 2014). It is important to emphasise that this is a classification of practices, not of peoples. It distinguishes only between practices—practices that are dynamic and subject to change. Referring to various forms of pastoral mobility, rather than classifying populations into categories such as "nomads," "semi-nomads," and "sedentary peoples," is far more than a trivial change in terminology. It represents a significant difference, which radically changes the nature of this typology.

- *strict nomadism:* the whole population of the group moves all year round on stable itineraries, without staying more than three months at the same place

- *quasi-nomadism:* all the group moves with the livestock, with a fixed settlement during one season (with or without permanent buildings)

- *semi-nomadism:* a minority of the group remains throughout the year at the same place, the others moving with the livestock

- *semi-sedentarism:* with two settlements, all members of the group move back and forth between their winter and summer places

- *quasi-sedentarism*: the population remains at the village all year long, except a minority of families, who move with the livestock

- *sedentarism:* the whole population stays all year round at the same place, except the shepherds who accompany the movements of the livestock during transhumance.

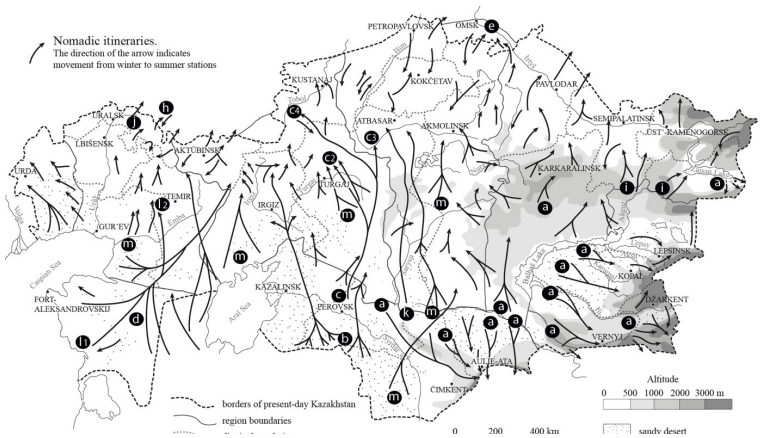

Figure 1. Kazakh nomadic itineraries (end of the 19th–beginning of the 20th century). Map ©C. Ferret. Sources: Materialy po kirgizskomu zemlepol'zovaniû…1898–1909; Dahšleiger 1980; Kurylev 1998; Erofeeva 2011

The nomadic pastoralism practiced by the Kazakhs corresponds to several of these forms. Generally speaking, the map of nomadic itineraries shows that the Kazakhs leave the most arid regions in summer. Meridian (horizontal) itineraries (marked with the letter **m** on the map), from south in winter to north in summer, are the most commonly used by the Kazakhs, and altitudinal (vertical) itineraries, from plains in winter to mountain pastures in summer (marked with the letter **a**), are found in the mountainous regions of the east and south-east.

More specifically, strict nomadism, with year-round migrations and no long stay at the same place, was rare at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, mainly present among several groups of the Youngest Horde in the west, and a few groups of the Middle Horde. These nomads kept a majority of sheep and camelids, lived year-round in yurts, and practiced neither agriculture nor haymaking (Čermak 1902). The long longitudinal nomadic routes (marked with the letter **b** or **d** on the map) of the Adai, for example (**d**), covered more than a thousand kilometres a year, from the deserts of southern Kazakhstan in winter to the wooded steppes of the north in summer, whereas most other Kazakh groups migrated only a few dozen kilometres (Dobrosmyslov 1895; Fiel'strup 1927; Tolybekov 1971).

Quasi-nomadism (where the entire group moves with the livestock, with a fixed settlement during one season**)** was the most common pattern at the beginning of the 20th century. The Kazakhs did not nomadise in winter, because the snow slowed down their movements. They stayed for several months at their wintering stations, where there were often fixed buildings. In the Atbasar District (Akmolinsk oblast) (**k** on the map), the distances travelled depended mainly on the size of the herds. For example, the *aul* (nomadic group) numbered 150, which was highly mobile and rich in livestock, spent 3 months at its winter station and travelled 1,600 km for the rest of the year, whereas another *aul* numbered 44, which was of average wealth, stayed at its winter station for 6 months and travelled 300 km per year (*Materialy po kirgizskomu zemlepol'zovaniû…* 1898–1909).

In eastern Kazakhstan (the Semirechie and part of the Semipalatinsk region), the vertical trajectories (**a** on the map), ranging from 5 to 150 km, used the Altai, Tarbagataï, or Alataou mountain pastures in summer and the foothills, or semi-desert plains or banks of Lake Balkhash in winter (Rumâncev 1912; Dahšleiger 1980). Some of these routes are still used today. In June 2012, I accompanied on foot the transhumance of shepherds and their flocks of sheep, goats, cattle, and horses to the mountain pastures over a distance of around 80 km. Later, in the data collected by Rumâncev in 1912, I found the same locations for wintering and summering places (Ferret 2018b).

Semi-nomadism (in which a minority of the group remains throughout the year at the same place, the others moving with the livestock**)** was practiced mainly by Turkmen and Kyrgyz at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century (Ferret 2014).

Semi-sedentarism, with two settlements (where the entire group moves from a fixed winter home to a fixed summer home) was then practiced notably by Sakha-Yakuts. To-

day, I have also observed this pattern in south-eastern Kazakhstan: some herder families no longer go to summer pastures, as they did at the time of the kolkhoz, but spend, for example, the summer at their spring station, and the rest of the year at the winter station.

Quasi-sedentarism is the configuration I observe today in the regions of Kazakhstan that practice mobile pastoralism: the population remains in the village all year long, except for a minority of families who move with the livestock (Ferret 2018b). For instance, in a village where I worked in South-Eastern Kazakhstan, 50 households out of 700 practice mobile pastoralism and go to the mountains with livestock in the summer.

Sedentarism (where the whole population stays all year round at the same place. Only professional shepherds may move with the herds during transhumance) is now the way of life of the overwhelming majority of Kazakhs. Most of the rural population still keeps livestock, but small herds now graze year-round around villages, larger herds and flocks around isolated farms, and sometimes go on transhumance with professional shepherds.

So, in the space of a century, the dominant pattern has changed from quasi-nomadism to sedentarism, in the majority of cases, and sometimes to quasi-sedentarism. Generally speaking, nomadic pastoralism as practiced by the Kazakhs offers a great diversity of forms that breaks with the image of a uniform and eternal nomadism (Ferret 2012). Even before Soviet sedentarisation, the *aul*s, the Kazakh nomadic units, had different forms of mobility and did not limit their activities exclusively to livestock rearing.

For example, the Kazakhs of the Uralsk District (**h** on the map) earned more than half their income from livestock farming and a quarter from agriculture. Their nomadic routes were calculated so that they could cultivate fields located 10–15 km from their winter stations at the right times of the year.

This diversity of forms of mobility has often been interpreted as reflecting different stages in a general process of sedentarisation, starting from an initial situation of strict universal nomadism and moving towards sedentarisation. Semi-nomads would have been nomads yesterday and sedentary tomorrow. But there is no evidence of such a linear and irreversible evolution. It is more likely that diversity has always been the rule. This diversity of forms seems to be constitutive of pastoral nomadism, which is a variable and flexible phenomenon.

The form, direction, and length of nomadic routes therefore varied greatly. In 1926, in the Semipalatinsk region, the average distance travelled in a year was 41 km, with more than half the *aul*s nomadising less than 32 km, but a maximum of 1,656 km (Mackevič 1929).

The degree of mobility (which can be measured in terms of the distances covered by the nomads and the number of settlements) varied, depending on local environmental conditions and on individual wealth. The owners of large herds moved more often and covered greater distances. Generally speaking, the more livestock you have, the further you go, with the rich nomadising further afield.

For instance, of the population of the Perovsk District (now Kyzylorda) (**c** on the map), a third did not leave the district despite the lack of summer pastures, 6% went to the Kalmakkyrgan river, in the Turgaj District (**c2**), a quarter summered in the Atbasar District (**c3**) and 12% nomadised as far as the Kustanaj District (**c4**) (Dahšleiger 1980).

As a rule, nomadic itineraries are stable, with people returning to the same places every year, but changes may occur depending on the current situation of each herder. Nowadays, forms of mobile or nomadic pastoralism still exist in Kazakhstan, albeit in a minority. But the recent promotion of Kazakh nomadic identity ignores them.

Promoting Nomadic Emblems in Independent Kazakhstan's Quest for National Identity

After the dissolution of the USSR, the newly independent Central Asian states had to build their own national history and create their own national identity. In the 1990s, Kazakhstan naturally turned to nomadism, which was considered to be the foundation of the nation's identity. The choice of the new Kazakhstan's coat of arms clearly illustrates this desire to root nomadism in the national identity, since it shows two winged horses framing the roof of a yurt, with its golden poles (*uyq*) and compression ring (*šaŋyraq*).

Indeed, the horse and the yurt are the two most obvious emblems of nomadism. The horse, because its domestication made the development of extensive mounted pastoral nomadism possible. Its essential role is illustrated by the Kazakh saying: *at - erdìŋ qanaty* "horses are the wings of men." The Kazakhs are one of the horse-riding peoples with the widest range of uses for the horse: they exploit its energy under saddle, as a pack animal and by draught, but also consume its flesh and milk, its skin and hair, and they multiply references to this animal in language and art, thus creating an authentic "horse civilisation" (Ferret 2009b). The yurt (kaz. *kìiz ùj*) is considered to be the perfect nomadic dwelling in the steppe, thanks to its transportability and comfort in all seasons (Vajnštejn 1991: 23–29; Stépanoff et al. 2013).

These two emblems, the horse and the yurt, contribute to what M. Krebs (2012: 403–404) calls "nation-branding," because they are easy to recognise and to reproduce. They are both used as a means of advertising. Yurts are set up in markets and along roads for the sale and consumption of *qymyz* (fermented mare's milk). The shape of the yurt is used in architecture as a reminder of national heritage, even in some immovable stone monuments. For instance, the East Hall of Akorda, the residence of the President of Kazakhstan in Astana, is built in the shape of a yurt, although trimmed with marble and granite. Despite their shape, these buildings have lost the essence of the yurt, which is mobility and transportability. The construction of immobile yurts can be interpreted as an attempt to settle nomadism.

After independence, the authors responsible for writing the new history of Kazakhstan made nomadism an essential part of the national heritage. They endeavoured to demonstrate that the Kazakhs created a nomadic civilisation. For instance, the historian M.K. Kozybaev considers that "the very rich cultural and historical heritage of the Ka-

zakh people and the role of nomadic civilisations in world history have been underestimated" (Kozybaev 2000–I: 4). Some researchers have sought to demonstrate the key role played by the Kazakh nomadic civilisation in world history, but often in vague terms, and they continue to see "civilisation" as a stage in the development of societies (for instance Šaislamov 2007).

In fact, there is continuity here rather than a break with the Soviet period, which, despite the devastating consequences of collectivisation on Kazakh pastoralism, also transformed Kazakh nomadism into folklore, thus turning a mode of production into cultural heritage (Ferret 2016). These Kazakhstani historians do not break with the paradigm of evolutionism, which assigns nomadism to a bygone past. Even Nurbulat Masanov's book, *Kočevaâ civilizaciâ kazahov: osnovy žisnedeâtel'nosti nomadnogo obŝestva* (The Nomadic Civilisation of the Kazakhs), published in 1995, which provides a detailed description of the Kazakh pastoral system, only deals with the past, implicitly assuming that collectivisation caused the Kazakhs to lose their mode of production and their nomadic culture. And the Institute of Nomadism, founded in 2005, eloquently entitled "Kazakh Institute of Scientific Research on the Study of the *Cultural Heritage of Nomads*" (my emphasis), which he headed for only one year until his sudden death, and which only survived him until 2014, was not interested in current forms of mobile pastoralism in Kazakhstan.

In fact, nomadism leaves few traces, and it is difficult to build a history without historical monuments (Cummings 2005: 93). As a result, a feeling of inferiority has persisted, related to the absence of an old written culture and the supposed backwardness of the nomadic lifestyle. This explains why Kazakh historians and archaeologists now mainly opt for a sedentary approach to Kazakh history, focusing on ancient cities, khan dynasties, and the ancient birth of Kazakh "statehood." More generally, Kazakhstan's authorities, who seek above all to present their country as a modern, industrialised state, rich in fossil fuel extraction and from which spacecraft are launched, are unable to reconcile this nomadic heritage with modernity. This is why nomadism is systematically relegated to the past. In no way does it represent a way of life that should be revived, and it tends to be confined to a few inconsequential folkloric items and events.

As far as the horse is concerned, the patrimonialisation of nomadism has been accompanied by the promotion of Central Asian equestrian games (Ferret 2008). These include the long-distance horse race (*bäjge* in Kazakh) and the game of goat-pulling (*kôkpar* in Kazakh, *kôkbôrù* in Kyrgyz).

Goat-pulling is a kind of rugby on horseback, with a dead goat used as the ball. It is played by several Turkic peoples in Central Asia and has several variants, including Afghan *buzkashi* (Ferret 2018a). These two games, *kôkpar* and *bäjge*, differ in their atmosphere, their human and equine participants, and the qualities that they must display. The *kôkpar* game is played by mature, strong men on sturdy adult stallions, who are heavily equipped; the *bäjge* game is played by frail teenagers on fine horses, both males and females, sometimes foals, without saddles, boots or headgear, who have to be as

light and as discreet as possible. I have interpreted these two games as a demonstration of strength in the case of *kôkpar*, and as a demonstration of lightness in the case of *bäjge* (Ferret 2018a; Ferret et Noûs 2020).

Figure 2. Kôkpar*, goat-pulling*. *Photo ©C. Ferret, Southern Kazakhstan, April 1997*

In recent years, there has been a growing rivalry between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan over this game. Both countries claim a nomadic heritage for themselves, and goat-pulling is presented as part of this nomadic legacy. It has become one of the highlights of the "World Nomadic Games" organised from 2014 by Kyrgyzstan. In my view, these Nomadic Games are to be understood as a "manufactured sporting event," which aims to build the country's image through a blend of sport and cultural heritage (Bessy & Suchet 2016). However, the study of the characteristics of this game, its different forms, its evolution and its transformation into a sport, has led me to assert that making it a typically nomadic game is a misunderstanding (Ferret et Noûs 2020).

By offering a caricatured theatrical representation of pastoral activity, in which virile horsemen clash violently and whose appearance fits perfectly with the stereotype of the "steppe nomad," goat-pulling offers an idealised image of the Central Asian world. Like the rodeo for the cowboy, it is an idealised production that heroises the nomadic past (Lawrence 1982: 6), while having little to do with the day-to-day realities of pastoralism.

Unlike the *bäjge*, in large *kökpar*s, the mounts of the *shabendoz* are exclusively solid stallions. But nomadic pastoralists usually ride geldings; they leave mares and stallions in free-ranging herds and devote them to breeding. Sedentary pastoralists usually ride stallions, particularly in the Iranian area of influence, and they practise a more intensive breeding system than nomads: they feed them grain and keep them in stables for part of the year.

In addition, the area of distribution of goat-pulling (southern Kazakhstan and Kyr-

gyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, northern Afghanistan) corresponds to regions with a sedentary tradition. More than the *kökpar*, it is therefore the *bäjge*, played in the centre, north and east of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the regions of Central Asian nomadism, that deserves to be described as a nomadic game. These different elements show that the game of goat-pulling, while not exactly a case of "inventing tradition" (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983) from scratch, is definitely a case of manufacturing a supposedly nomadic tradition.

Conclusion

If we sum up what we have seen in the second and third parts of this article, we arrive at the following paradox. On the one hand, we have people who claim a nomadic heritage, even though they lead a sedentary lifestyle. On the other hand, we have people who indeed nomadise, but who don't call themselves nomads. And the former totally ignore the practices of the latter. The Kazakhs whose transhumance I've shared, or with whom I've lived on summer pastures and in seasonal stations, simply say "we nomadise," but they don't call themselves "nomads." In Buryatia, Charlotte Marchina received the same answers as I did on this subject from her informants (Marchina 2019). And the historians and political leaders who boast about the nomadic heritage are unaware of the existence of these few Kazakhs who actually nomadise today.

We have seen how ambiguous the promotion of nomadism as the basis of Kazakh national identity is. This claim to nomadism isn't fully assumed and doesn't go all the way. It cannot be otherwise as long as we remain within an evolutionary paradigm that considers nomadism as an outdated stage in the linear evolution of human societies.

I propose to look at things differently: not to classify populations between nomads on the one hand and sedentary people on the other, but to consider nomadism as a variable, flexible and multiform phenomenon. In other words, to turn away from ontology, from identities, and to focus on practices. And to answer the question I asked in the title, it seems to me that yes, to be a nomad, you have to nomadise.

In fact, today, Kazakhs are not nomads, because very few of them actually nomadise. But the majority of the Kazakh rural population have livestock, at least a few head and sometimes many more. Far more than nomadism, it is pastoralism which matters in present Kazakh society (Ferret 2014; Ferret 2023).

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KYRGYZSTAN AS THE CENTRE OF THE NOMAD WORLD: Tourism And The World Nomad Games

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Abstract: This article, written in the fields of ethnography, historical source studies, historiography, and tourism studies, illuminates the nomadic and post-nomadic traditions of the Kyrgyz nation regarding sport and other games. The Kyrgyz are among the Central and Inner Asian peoples who developed and preserved nomadic traditions of sports and other games from ancient and medieval times through to the modern era. The Turkic runic-style *Bitik* inscriptions, ethnographic data in the *Diwanu Lugati t-Turk* by Mahmud Kashghari Barskani, rich information in the Kyrgyz epic of *Manas*, and other historical and ethnographic materials show that nomadic sports games were inseparable parts of community life. In modern times, sports events have helped Kyrgyz tourism reshape itself by organizing a seasonal tourism industry with nomadic topics. Sporting traditions became central to the World Nomad Games, which were launched in Kyrgyzstan in 2014. The Kyrgyz Republic hosted the games three times (2014, 2016, 2018) before passing the organization to Turkey (İznik, 29 September–2 October 2022) and Kazakhstan (Astana, 8–14 September 2024). It is hoped that the Kyrgyz Republic will host the Sixth World Nomad Games. The article demonstrates that the World Nomad Games have strengthened the modern Kyrgyz tourism industry.

Keywords: *Kyrgyzstan*, *Mongolia*, *Nomads*, Central and Inner Asia, *Manas* epic, Mahmud Kashghari Barskani, *Ordo*, Ethnography, Games, Sports, World Nomad Games, Folklore Studies, Tourism

Introduction

The nomadic peoples of Eastern, Inner, and Central Asia, as well as the vast territories of Siberia—who represent the Altay language group, including Turkic- and Mongolic-speaking peoples—have made great contributions to the culture of humanity. Research concerning the history of nomadic peoples' culture includes investigating the stages of development of their intangible culture, such as people's sports and other games. Sports and games—including hunting games, warrior games, and those held during *qurultays* (gatherings like warriors' meetings and national congresses) across nomadic Eurasia in the 1st millennium BC—were part of a shared heritage among the nomadic peoples of East, Inner, and Central Asia, and beyond.

While it is easy to claim that contemporary nations have preserved the old traditions of games, it is much more difficult to prove which ancient and medieval games have survived. Fortunately, a variety of historical and ethnographic sources document the games of the Kyrgyz, Turkic, Mongolic and other nomadic peoples, including those in Central

and Inner Asia and Siberia. It is also important that the current states of the formerly nomadic peoples in the region are preserving their unique cultural traditions and common cultural heritage by organizing cultural and sports events like the World Nomad Games.

This paper stresses that these efforts also strengthen the modern tourism industry by attracting more international audiences. In studying and analysing data from various written and other historical and ethnographic sources on this topic, we use the historical-comparative method and other methods important for the principle of historicism.

Ancient Times

The Turkic- and Mongolic-speaking peoples are among the ethnic groups that founded the nomadic civilization in Central and Inner Asia. Various types of equestrian games and other sports, which have been preserved in Central and Inner Asia since ancient times, spread widely among the nomadic peoples. The popular games have been preserved from century to century and developed according to new social and political requirements. Hunting played an important role in the life of the Central Asian nomads. Scenes of hunting appear in ancient stone drawings in *Tengri-Too* (Tian Shan), while a medieval petroglyph in the *Kok-Sai* area of the Kochkor Valley in Kyrgyzstan clearly depicts a "*Taygan*," that is, a specially bred hunting dog (Tabaldyev 2023: 60). Such scenes are depicted in ancient and medieval rock paintings throughout Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia, Altai, Siberia, and Mongolia.

In the mountainous area near the village of *Tuekta* (in the Altai language "*Tuyaqtı*") in the Onguday District, Altai Republic, Russian Federation, graffiti and inscriptions in the Turkic runic-style *Bitik* alphabet have been preserved. The drawings depict images of a horseman shooting a bow, a foot archer, running hunting dogs, and a roe deer pierced by an arrow. One of the texts (*Tuekta II*) praises the hero: "*bökä bäzädim*" ("I depicted the hero...") (Nevskaya and Tybykova 2023: 464).

Hunting was not just an individual activity among ancient and medieval nomads; its socialisation took place among different layers of nomadic society. For instance, the Kyrgyz game of "*Salbuurun*" is a preserved heritage from ancient times, when hunting games were a common practice of the nomadic aristocracy and ordinary warriors to strengthen their skills for both shooting and organizing collective social and entertaining events (Japarov and Akjolov 2016: 138). The *Salbuurun* game is also mentioned in the Kyrgyz heroic epic of *Manas* (Manas 2010: 58; Kulbarakova 2023: 109). In the encyclopaedic dictionary devoted to the epic, the term has a variant, "*Salbyryn*." There is a suggestion in the book that the term is etymologically connected with the old Mongolian word "*Salbar*," meaning "a hunting falcon" (Manas 1995: 273–274). However, the term "Falcon" is translated as "*Shumkar*" ("*Şumqar*") in Kyrgyz and "*Shonkhor*" in modern Mongolian, and the issue of its etymology is still open to debate.

The ancient collective hunting game of nomads, using both bred hunting birds and hunting dogs ("*Taygans*"), remains a popular game for the Kyrgyz, who have included it in the World Nomad Games' programmes (Burkut saluu 2022) (Fig.1). Different sports games were part of the cultural and entertaining activities during feasts, congresses, and other gatherings of the nomadic Altaic and other peoples from ancient times. Collective

games that could be watched by a large crowd were usually held at weddings or feasts of famous people. The common meetings (*qurultay*s, a kind of congress) were also appropriate times to organise such games and festivities even in the ancient nomadic states of Inner and Central Asia in the 1st millennium BC. This tradition continued during the Turkic khaganates in the early Middle Ages.

Figure 1. World Nomad Games and Falconry, © Tyntchtykbek Tchoroev (Chorotegin). Falconry is the skill and practice of hunting wild animals using a trained bird of prey. A falconer is called Bürkütchü *in Kyrgyz (trainer of the Eagle). A Kyrgyz man with a trained Eagle at Kyrchyn during the 2014 World Nomad Games. 12 September 2014.*

Some information regarding the feasts is found in the runic-style *Bitik* inscriptions in Orkhon. Thus, in the epitaph in memory of Bilge Qaghan, a powerful ruler of the Second Eastern Turkic khaganate, it was mentioned that the Khaghan died on the 26th of the tenth month in the Year of the Dog (734), and then he was solemnly buried on the 27th of the fifth month in the Year of the Wild Boar (735) (Orhon-Enisey tekstteri 1982: 115; Tugusheva 2008: 55, 64, 172). When *Kül-tegin* (Kul-tigin, AD 684–731), the leading commander of the Second Eastern Turkic khaganate, died, many foreign guests came to his commemorative feast, which was solemnly held in the Orkhon Valley. Different ambassadors and other high official representatives came from the Tang Dynasty of China ("*Tabgach*"), the Türgesh Khaganate, the Khitans (*Qytañ*), Tatabi, Soghd, Tibet, and others. Among the foreign guests was also an ambassador of the Kyrgyz Khaganate in the Yenissei River basin. The large inscription on the monument in honour of *Kül-tegin* (Northern part, lines 12–13) at the memorial complex of Khoshoo Tsaidam, Mongolia, notes: "*Qırqız qaγanta Tarduş Inançu Çor kelti*" ("The Tardush [i.e., General] Ynanchu Chor arrived from the Kyrgyz Khaghan") (Tugusheva 2008: 34, 49, 167, 185). The bust of *Kül-tegin* found at the Khoshoo Tsaidam burial site is now preserved in the National Museum of Mongolia in Ulaanbaatar.

The festivity events were followed by sports and other entertaining public games,

attended by foreign guests as well. For example, the ambassadors and other representatives of the Khitan, China, Tibet, Kyrgyz, Soghd, Türgesh, and others attended the feast in memory of the late *Kül-Tegin* in 731 (Orhon-Enisey tekstteri 1982: 81; Tugusheva 2008: 34, 49, 168). These kinds of male sports games were common among all the medieval nomadic peoples of Inner and Central Asia. Professor Chuluuny Dalai (1930–2009), a prominent Mongolian historian, wrote that at the feasts of the Mongol khans and *noyons*, the fun ended with three traditional types of male competitions: wrestling, horse racing, and archery (Dalai 1983: 61, 149).

The Turkic runic-style inscriptions in the early Middle Ages, preserved in Mongolia, South Siberia, Altai, and Tengri-Too (Celestial Mountains, or Tian Shan), illuminate some cultural events related to feasts in honour of deceased Turkic Khaghans and warriors. The early medieval Kyrgyz were also bearers of the runic-style written culture alongside the Orkhon Turks and Uyghurs and developed and expanded their own version of the *Bitik* alphabet in the vast region of Yenissei, Altai, Northern Mongolia, and beyond (Chorotegin (Tchoroev) 2023: 54; Tchoroev 2023: 434–442).

The history of the Karakhanid khaganate (also known as the Qarakhanids, Ilek Khanids) is another important period when nomadic culture was preserved and developed within a multi-ethnic and multicultural environment and in close interaction between nomadic and sedentary economies in Central Asia (Genç 1981: 372; Genç 1997: 412; Pritsak 1953: 17–68; Karayev 1983: 302; Kochnev 2005: 23; Kumekov 2010: 398–408). The nomadic and sedentary peoples in the Karakhanid state established the eastern part of the so-called Golden Islamic Era (Mets 1996: 538) in cultural and scientific development and the exchange of humanistic achievements.

This Muslim Turkic monarchy ruled some parts of Central Asia from the 10th through the early 13th century. It included most of modern Kazakhstan, some parts of modern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China, Northern Afghanistan, and the whole land of present-day Kyrgyzstan. The city of Balasagyn (Balasagun; also called *Quz-Ordu* or *Quz-Ulush*) was one of the capitals of the khaganate alongside the city of Kashghar, located to the south of the Tengri-Too (Tian Shan) mountains. The people's games during the Karakhanid epoch developed among the nomadic peoples and their neighbours in the vast Central Asian region. Even though some peculiarities of different types of games were forgotten and rejected due to historical development (for instance, the warrior games involving a participant's death, games with a slave girl as a prize, etc.), most of the people's games have been preserved until now (e.g., games with astragalus, etc.).

One of the main written sources on the sports and other people's games of the Karakhanid peoples is the *Diwanu Lughati t-Turk* ("Compendium of the [Words] of the Turkic Languages"), written in Arabic in 1072–1077 by the prominent Karakhanid Turkic scholar, Turkologist, ethnographer, folklore expert, and cartographer Mahmud Kashghari Barsqani (11th century) (al-Kāšγarī 1982–1985; Kaşgarlı Mahmud 1990: 320; Çorotegin 1997: 169). As the prominent Ukrainian orientalist, Professor Omeljan Pritsak (1953: 243–246; Çorotegin 1997: 62–91), first wrote, the author of the *Diwan* was born in the city of Barsqan on the southeastern shores of Issyk-Kul Lake between 1029–1038. He

was living around Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid Khalifate, when he finished his work in 1077. The year and place of his death are unknown.

Another important source of people's games in the Karakhanid epoch is a didactic poem entitled *Qutadghu Bilig* ("Blessed Knowledge" or "Blessed State Power"), written in 1069–1070 by Yusuf Balasaghuni (in Kyrgyz: *Jusup Balasagyn*), the prominent thinker, poet, and statesman of the Karakhanid Turks. He was born around 1015–16 in the city of Balasagyn, where the present-day Burana ruins are situated. The open-air Burana Museum is located near the city of Tokmok in Northern Kyrgyzstan. The year and place of his death are unknown (Yūsuf Khāss Hājib 1983: 281; Bartold 2002: 419–424). His poem is also regarded as an outstanding source for research on the social and cultural life of the Karakhanid khaganate.

The sources mentioned above show that the Karakhanid Khaganate was a state with developed sports and other people's games in accordance with the existing ethics and traditions of the Middle Ages. For instance, Mahmud Kashgari Barsqani, an outstanding scholar, travelled to the settlements of various Turkic and other nomadic peoples of Central Asia, studied the dialectal features and commonalities of the languages of many Turkic peoples, and translated and explained examples of their folklore to the Arabic-speaking readers of the Baghdad Abbasid Khalifate. He gave us very rich encyclopaedic data about various folk games, sports games, and children's games of the Turkic peoples of the Karakhanid era in his *Diwan*.

Mahmud Kashgari Barsqani himself was a representative of the ruling dynasty of nomadic nobles of the Karakhanids who mastered the military art of his time, including spear throwing. He noted this himself and wrote in the introduction part of his dictionary that he was "the most skilful at throwing a spear" among the Turkic nobles from Karakhanids: "I have travelled throughout their cities and steppes, and have learned their dialects and their rhymes; those of the Turks, the Turkman-Oguz, the Chigil, the Yaghma, and the Kyrgyz. Also, I am one of the most elegant among them in language, and the most eloquent in speech; one of the best educated, the most deep-rooted in lineage, and the most penetrating in throwing the lance" (Kaşgarlı Mahmud 1990: 2a; al-Kāšγarī 1982–1985: 70).

It means that Mahmud Kashghari Barsqani was a kind of insider in the ethnography of the Turkic nomadic peoples of his own time. Those Kyrgyz with whom he met within the Karakhanid state were the Tengri-Too (Tianshan) groups of the Kyrgyz who migrated from Yenissei to Central Asia during the rise of the Inner Asian Kyrgyz khaganate (in 840–925) (Karayev 1983: 55; Chorotegin 1995: 75–81). The nomadic Turkic peoples who occupied Central Asia, Inner Asia, and Siberia during this period, of course, loved the game of horse racing (Tchoroev *et al*. 2023: 433).

We can learn about horse racing from data from Mahmud Kashgari's *Diwan*. For example, there is a sentence "*ol mening birle at ozuşdı*" in *Diwan* and it was translated into Arabic in this way: "he competed with me in a horse race" (Kaşgarlı Mahmud 1990: 51b; al-Kāšγarī 1982–1985: 187). Even Mahmud Kashgari Barsqani compares his mother tongue—all the Turkic languages—to an energetic stallion shot towards the finish line,

equal to the Arabic language's "stallion" (Kaşgarlı Mahmud 1990: 2b; Çorotegin 1997: 123).

The nomadic Turkic peoples in the 11th century also played horse hockey—the game of *chavgan*. According to Mahmud Kashgari's dictionary, the ball of the game is called *tobıq* and the stick of the horse game is called *bandal*. It is noted here that if children play at night using the *bandal* as a torch, it was called "fire *bandal*" (Kaşgarlı Mahmud 1990: 121b; al-Kāšγarī 1982–1985: 358; Çorotegin 1997: 86, 260). The borderline during the game of *chavgan* was called *tasal* (Kaşgarlı Mahmud 1990: 99b; al-Kāšγarī 1982–1985: 300). By the way, the nomadic peoples of Afghanistan have preserved the game of *chavgan* until now.

Mahmud Kashgari Barsqani mentions wrestling as one of the popular sports games of the Karakhanid and other Turkic peoples. A proverb related to wrestling is also reflected in his *Diwan*: "*Qız birle küreşme, qısraq birle yarışma*" ("Do not fight with an [adult] girl, do not compete with a young mare which is not foaled yet") (Kaşgarlı Mahmud 1990: 119b; Çorotegin 1997: 42). Mahmud Kashgari Barsqani describes the method of using the foot as an obstacle to make the opponent fall in the game of wrestling ("*çalış*") (Kaşgarlı Mahmud 1990: 93a; al-Kāšγarī 1982–1985: 284). The Turkic peoples' wrestler could use his own legs to trip, lift, or execute other holds.

The Turkic nomads also competed in archery to show off their outstanding marksmanship. Archery competitions were called "*oq atyshuv*." We can read such a sentence in *Diwan* by Mahmud Kashghari Barsqani: "*Ol mening birle oq atışgan ol*" ("He used to compete with me in archery") (Kaşgarlı Mahmud 1990: 45a; al-Kāšγarī 1982–1985: 171). Various prizes were awarded in the archery competitions. For example, Mahmud Kashgari Barsqani described a competition in archery with a horse as a prize through the sentence "*Ol mening birle oq attı atlaşuv*" ("He and I competed with each other in archery in order to get a horse as a prize") (Kaşgarlı Mahmud 1990: 190a). The competitors in archery could compete to win a young unmarried slave woman ("*qızlaşuv*") as a prize (Kaşgarlı Mahmud 1990: 189a; Çorotegin 1997: 261). Shields ("*qalqan*") and spears ("*süngün*" or "*süñün*") (Kaşgarlı Mahmud 1990: 111a–111b.) were also used in heroic and other battles of the medieval Turks.

Different logic games were also widely spread among the Turkic peoples of the Tengri-Too mountains and all of Central Asia in the 10th–12th centuries. For example, Jusup Balasagin's poem *Kutadgu Bilig* mentions chess and backgammon games (verse No. 2634):

"*Yana nard-u şatranç bilur erse kez,*
Herifleri andın ölür erse kez."

The meaning of this text in Turkic is as follows: "Let's have time when we know the games of *nard* (backgammon) and chess, Let's have time when the competitor will die from them (i.e., will lose the game)" (Arat 1991: 276). The Kyrgyz people developed the logic games of *nard* in the form of "*Toguz qorgool*" (the Kazakh call it "*Toguz qumalaq*") (Çorotegin 1997: 261). Both versions of the game's name are translated similarly as "Nine Sheep Droppings" (both words—"*qorgool*" and "*qumalaq*"—exist in modern

Kyrgyz).

In addition to major sports games, many competitions and other games related to art, common social life, and children's life are reflected in the *Diwan* by Mahmud Kashghari Barsqani and other historical written sources. His *Diwan* includes different children's games and their tools such as the swing ("*yalıngu*"), doll ("*quzurçuq*"), dice (astragalus), swimming, mountain climbing, etc. (Çorotegin 2015: 242). We can also find here information about youngsters' challenges during games such as *kobuz* playing ("*qobzaşmaq*" means "competition in playing the musical instrument *kobuz*") (Kaşgarlı Mahmud 1990: 92b, 189a; Çorotegin 1997: 261). There is an interesting humorous proverb about dancing in the *Diwan*: "*Qurtğa büzik bilmäs yärim tar tiir*" ("An old lady does not know how to dance and she says that her place is very cramped") (Kaşgarlı Mahmud 1990: 279b). There were competitions in dancing, and the verb "*büzüşti*" means "they challenged each other in a dance competition". The word "*büzik*" has been preserved in the modern Kyrgyz language as "*biy*". Its modern Mongolian equivalent is the word "*bujig*" (Çorotegin 1997: 258; see also: Tryjarski 1993: 273).

There were games for children on the shore of a lake (it is assumed this might be Issyk-Kul Lake, where Mahmud Kashghari Barsqani was born) (Çorotegin 1997: 259–260). Among the children's games of the Karakhanid era were the games of astragalus. The Kyrgyz researcher, Nazgul Rysmendeeva, stresses that there are many common features in the astragalus games of the Eurasian peoples, including Turkic and Mongolian peoples. At the same time, the Kyrgyz have their own peculiar astragalus game with a political agenda, called "*Ordo*," i.e., "The Horde" (Rısmendeeva 2023: 116–139). The well-known Russian ethnographer Georgy Nikolaevich Simakov (1942–2006) from Saint Petersburg noted that folk games, on the one hand, are a rational way of spending free time, and on the other hand, they play an important role in the internal ethnic unity of the Kyrgyz people and the further deepening of their international relations (Simakov 1984: 207–215).

Most folk games of the Karakhanids' era, which existed in the 10th–12th centuries, have been preserved among several Turkic and other nomadic and sedentary peoples of Central and Inner Asia, Altai, and Siberia. Only those games that threaten the life and health of the player, such as "*Er sayış*" (the equestrian game of hitting javelin/spear by two competing horsemen against each other), have been removed from the ranks of modern sports (Çorotegin 2015: 243). We also have folklore, ethnographic, and other historical sources of the Kyrgyz and other nomadic peoples to compare what has been preserved within the last millennium regarding people's games. The extensive media coverage of the World Nomad Games in 2014–2022 has helped to study the contemporary stage of the preservation and development of the Eurasian people's games.

The Kyrgyz Epic of *Manas*

The heroic epic of *Manas* is regarded as an outstanding, encyclopaedic collection of the oldest oral folklore heritage of the Kyrgyz nation. The special episode entitled "The Feast to Commemorate Kökötöy Khan" narrates a medieval Olympic-style gath-

ering of nomadic games, where the Kyrgyz invited all their historical neighbours, even former foes, from Central, Inner, and East Asia. The epic contains numerous stories involving people's games, including horse-riding competitions, archery, national forms of wrestling, and logic games. These games are not only integral to Kyrgyz history and ethnography but also form part of the shared heritage of Central Asian, Siberian, and Inner Asian nomads. The *Manas* epic gives special attention to horse racing, especially the "*Alaman bayge*"—a large-scale horse race for a major prize, prominently featured in "The Feast of Kökötöy Khan." In the version told by the *manaschi* (epic teller) Sagynbay Orozbaq-uulu (1867–1930) (Orozbaq-uulu 2022: 34; Orozbak uulu 2022: 5b), Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Uzbek, Chinese, Mongolian, Jungarian, Manchurian, and other warriors compete in horse races, jousting, and wrestling during the commemorative feast.

Some Preserved Nomadic Games of the Kyrgyz: *Toguz Korgool*, Astragalus

Kyrgyzstan has managed to preserve its national sports games even during the Soviet era (1918–1991). These games remained part of seasonal celebrations among kolkhoz and sovkhoz herders and other workers. Among the most popular were *Qız quumay* ("Catch up with your bride"), horse racing, *Kök Börü* ("Blue Wolf" or "Grey Wolf"), wrestling, and others. There are also logic games such as the Kyrgyz *Toguz Korgool* ("Toguz Qorgool"—"Nine Sheep Droppings") (Toguz Korgool 2022), which does not appear in written sources from the earlier Karakhanid era. The game is known as *Togyz Qumalaq* in Kazakh and *Toguz Kumalak* in Kyrgyz.

The first *Togyz Qumalaq* World Championship was held in November 2010 in Astana, Kazakhstan, with participants from 14 countries, including China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Russia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Since 2014, *Toguz Korgool* has been officially included in the World Nomad Games. Various astragalus games are still popular in modern Kyrgyzstan and have developed further among Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, Mongolians, and others. Nazgül Rysmendeeva's new book *The Astragalus and Ordo Games* (Rısmendeeva 2023: 73–97) compares these traditions among Eurasian peoples.

World Nomad Games and Modern Tourism

During the second decade of the 21st century, Kyrgyzstan, as a modern state with preserved nomadic traditions, introduced a new practice: organising Olympic-style sports and ethnographic events known as the World Nomad Games (Rakhman 2018) (Fig.2). This international competition is dedicated to preserving and developing ethnic sports practiced in Central and Inner Asia since ancient times and includes cultural and ethnographic activities promoting the intangible cultures of various post-nomadic Eurasian peoples.

As Kyrgyz scholar Azamat Maksüdünov found, Kyrgyzstanis viewed the World Nomad Games positively, reporting that the games benefited local cultures, promoted the host country, and improved Kyrgyzstan's image (Maksüdünov 2020). The first three World Nomad Games took place in Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan (2014, 2016, 2018); the fourth was held in İznik, Turkey (September 2022), with over 3,000 athletes from 102 countries. The fifth took place in Astana, Kazakhstan, in September 2024 (Amjad 2023;

Nurmagambetova 2024).

The Kyrgyz equestrian game *Kök Börü* ("The Blue Wolf" or "Gray Wolf") was included in the 2024 World Nomad Games after negotiations between Presidents Sadyr Japarov (Kyrgyzstan) and Kassym-Jomart Tokayev (Kazakhstan) (Omirgazy 2024). The Kyrgyz National *Kök Börü* Federation, founded in 1998, plays a key role in promoting and safeguarding the sport.

Figure 2. World Nomad Games and Cultural Events, © Tyntchtykbek Tchoroev (Chorotegin). The World Nomad Games have become a platform for demonstrating traditional sports of nomadic nations and their intangible cultural heritage. Some cultural and sports events were held at the Kyrchyn summer pasture, east of Cholpon-Ata on the northern shore of Issyk-Kul Lake, Kyrgyzstan. An episode from the Kyrchyn ethnographic events. 12 September 2014.

In 2024, Astana opened a special Ethno-village (*aul)*, "Nomadic Universe," where visitors could experience Kazakh culture and the cultures of other participating countries. After 21 sports and athletes from 89 countries, the games closed with a show at the Ethno-village. The President of the World Ethnosport Confederation, Bilal Erdoğan, said: "The World Nomad Games prove once again that our traditional sports are more than just a competition" (Akhmetkali 2024a).

Scholarly events are held alongside all World Nomad Games. In Astana, 75 researchers from 12 countries attended an international conference on nomadic cultures and sports. There, it was announced that the Sixth World Nomad Games will be hosted by Kyrgyzstan in 2026, and the nomadic games symbol—the *torsyk* (traditional leather vessel)—was passed to Kyrgyz Minister Altynbek Maksutov (Akhmetkali 2024a).

All five editions of the World Nomad Games clearly demonstrate the preserved nomadic heritage of peoples in Western, Central, and Inner Asia. UNESCO fully supports these events, regarding them as a new driver for rapprochement between nations and cultures through nomadic traditions (UNESCO 2016).

World Nomad Games are also included in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List. In September 2024, Ms. Simona-Mirela Miculescu, President of UNESCO's General Conference, said in an interview: "I think that the fact that you had this year 89

countries, including countries who don't have a nomadic population—this tells a lot about how these World Nomad Games, and especially the cultural values that they represent, resonate with ever more countries around the globe" (Akhmetkali 2024b).

World Nomad Games and Tourism

The World Nomad Games have also contributed to the transformation of tourism in Kyrgyzstan by inspiring a seasonal tourism industry centred on nomadic themes. Today, modern yurts with electricity and other comforts are found throughout the high mountain valleys, catering to both international and domestic tourists during the summer. A recent trend is the rise of glamping camps, where stylish yurts with modern amenities are set up in scenic mountainous areas (Fig.3). Some foreign travel companies have promoted the World Nomad Games and related events to international tourists (Simmons 2024). As a result, Kyrgyzstan has established itself as a leading tourism centre in the Nomad World (Fig.4).

Figure 3. Glamping is a New Trend in Kyrgyzstan, © Tyntchtykbek Tchoroev (Chorotegin). The new English word "Glamping" (from "glamorous" and "camping," coined 2005) has become a trend in Kyrgyz tourism. At the glamping site "As a Nomad" near Naryn. 8 July 2024.

Figure 4. A Tourist Camp near Tash-Rabat, © Tyntchtykbek Tchoroev (Chorotegin). Thanks to the World Nomad Games, the influx of foreign tourists to remote areas of mountainous Kyrgyzstan has increased. Mr. Sabyrbek Aiylchiev owns the "Yurt Camp" glamping site with a sauna and café near the medieval Tash-Rabat caravanserai, At-Bashy district, Naryn region. 7 July 2024.

Conclusion

Research into preserved nomadic values reveals many aspects of the intangible culture of the nomads of Central and Inner Asia. The nomadic games of the Kyrgyz, including ethnic sports and entertainment, are well-documented in Kyrgyz and Turkic ethnographic and written sources. Early medieval runic-style *Bitik* inscriptions, Karakhanid-era texts such as Mahmud Kashghari Barsqani's *Diwan*, folklore including the *Manas* epic, genealogies, and modern ethnographic data all demonstrate that the Kyrgyz have preserved ancient and medieval cultural heritage in the form of sports and games.

Moreover, modern Kyrgyz games serve as a cultural bridge, linking ancient, medieval, and present-day Kyrgyz with their historic neighbours across Central and Inner Asia, Altai, and Siberia. The five World Nomad Games (Kyrgyzstan 2014, 2016, 2018; Turkey 2022; Kazakhstan 2024) have played a crucial role in promoting the sports-related intangible cultures of nomadic and post-nomadic Eurasian peoples. These traditions, and the World Nomad Games themselves, have significantly boosted tourism in Kyrgyzstan and fostered international cooperation among post-nomadic nations. Above all, the World Nomad Games are open to the entire world.

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PASTORALISM, HERITAGE, AND THE POLITICS OF SCALE

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Abstract: In recent decades, China has implemented a series of policies ostensibly designed to improve the country's degraded grasslands. Ethnic minority pastoralists, blamed for causing desertification through overgrazing, have been resettled away from the grasslands, or subjected to restrictions on their animal-based livelihoods. In this paper, I show how ethnic Mongols in Alasha—in western Inner Mongolia—have contested the stigmatisation of pastoralism by adopting the discourse of local heritage protection to defend camel husbandry. In doing so, however, they have also had to rescale pastoralism away from its association with the Mongol nationality, in line with the economic and nation-building priorities of the Chinese state. I thus argue that the reimagining of pastoralism as heritage is shaped by particular political contexts.

Keywords: Pastoralism, heritage, Inner Mongolia, ethnic minorities, China, Camel husbandry, scale, assimilation

Introduction

Today, mobile pastoralists who live in the world's drylands face numerous challenges. Modernising states have long seen them as an obstacle to development, and have pursued campaigns of sedentarisation as well as resettlement, to facilitate projects of agrarian expansion (Regassa *et al.* 2019), or in the name of grassland conservation. Many of those pastoralists who remain on their grazing lands must contend with infrastructure projects (Enns 2019), resource extraction (Ahearn and Sternberg 2023), as well as the intensifying effects of climate change (Scoones 2023).

In response to these challenges, an international pastoralist rights movement has developed in recent decades, which has allowed pastoralists in multiple countries to forge strategic connections with the more established global indigenous peoples' movement (Upton 2014). But beyond such rights-based forms of political mobilisation, advocates of pastoralism have also looked to the discourses and institutions of heritage conservation as a way to protect pastoralist land use. While notions of "nomadic" heritage have existed for decades, particularly as part of post-socialist nation-building projects in Central Asia, these have often focused on symbolic emblems of nomadism (such as yurts and horses), rather than actual practices of pastoralism (Ferret 2016). By contrast, recent framings of pastoralism as heritage have included rituals that are an integral part of pastoralist animal husbandry, as well as pastoralist mobility itself.

In this article, I draw on my ethnographic research in the west of Inner Mongolia, China (White 2024), to discuss how ideas of pastoralism as heritage have been mobilised to defend pastoralism. In recent decades, China's pastoralists have been blamed by

the Chinese state for causing desertification through overgrazing, and they have been subjected to a range of measures, including enclosure, stocking limits, and resettlement (Yeh 2009). Given the context of "authoritarian environmentalism," and the political impediments to rights-based advocacy, heritage has provided a language to counter the stigmatisation of pastoralism as backward and environmentally destructive. However, I argue that discourses of heritage have important scalar qualities, with an emphasis on particular localities, and that in contemporary Inner Mongolia, these scales are in tension with older ideas of pastoralism as characteristic of the Mongol nationality (C. *minzu*; M. *ündüsten*). I then show how the scales of heritage resonate with the recent intensification of assimilation under Xi Jinping, and the deemphasising of the scale of nationality that this has involved. I thus highlight the complexities of heritage as politics.

Pastoralism, Heritage, and Scale: Some Background

Since the early 21st century, certain elements of pastoralism in various parts of the world have begun to be classified as intangible cultural heritage. In 2005, for example, the transhumance festivals of pastoralists in Mali were inscribed on the UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This international status provided a means for herders to defend transhumant cattle herding (Leblon 2016). In northern Kenya, a customary institution for the management of grazing on communal lands, known as the *dedha*, has also recently been promoted explicitly as a form of heritage. This invocation of heritage is also a form of politics, which seeks to defend pastoralism in the context of the state's infrastructural development projects in the region (Cormack 2016). In 2015, the Mongolian coaxing ritual for camels (to encourage a female camel to allow a calf to suckle) was inscribed on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, noting that this culture was threatened by increasing migration to urban centres in Mongolia.[1]

While these conceptualisations of heritage focus on the rituals and institutions of pastoralists, more recently, pastoral mobility has itself been recognised as intangible cultural heritage. This is significant, because it is mobility that has often been seen by modernising states and international organisations as the primary obstacle to development in pastoralist communities. In 2023, transhumance was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Bindi 2022). This was a transnational bid involving ten European countries.

It is not simply UNESCO, and its concept of intangible cultural heritage, that is involved in the classification of pastoralism as heritage. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) now recognises certain sites as Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS), a concept that was first promoted in 2002. A GIAHS is defined as "a living, evolving system of human communities in an intricate relationship with their territory, cultural or agricultural landscape or biophysical and winder social environment."[2] Several of these recognised GIAHS involve pastoralism, including Oldonyonokie/Olkeri Maasai pastoralist heritage in Kenya, the Engaresero Maasai pastoralist heritage area in Tanzania, the Thale Noi Wetland pastoral buffalo agro-ecosystem in

[1] https://ich.unesco.org/en/USL/coaxing-ritual-for-camels-01061
[2] https://www.fao.org/giahs/background/en/

Thailand, and the Ar Khorchin Grassland Nomadic System in Inner Mongolia, China.

It is thus evident that across the world, pastoralism is now not simply regarded by states and international organisations as a backward form of land use that should be replaced with more productive forms. In certain parts of the world, pastoralism has been revalorised as various forms of heritage, whether "intangible" or as part of "agricultural heritage systems." Heritage classification is not merely a tool of governance through which states seek to manage populations (Oakes 2012; Rippa 2020); instead, it can be a tool that enables marginalised communities to assert their interests (Peutz 2018; Herzfeld 2021).

However, in this article, I argue that this political dimension to heritage classification must be understood in relation to questions of scale. I thus build on work by scholars in geography (Oakes 2007) and heritage studies (e.g. Harvey 2015; Debarbieux and Munz 2019) but also go on to analyse how the scales of heritage matter in the particular context of China's nation-building project (Bulag 2021). While heritage has long been a tool of nationalist projects (Ferret 2016; Winter 2015; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), some have argued that the well-established notion of the nation-state as the "container" of heritage is on the wane (Harvey 2015). Indeed, this is evident in the case of the UNESCO inscription of transhumance as intangible cultural heritage, since this was recognised as an explicitly transnational item of heritage. In what follows, I discuss how emergent scales of heritage intersect with more established ideas of nation in the context of contemporary China.

Pastoralism and Mongol Identity in Inner Mongolia

In the 1950s, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) embarked on a programme of nationality classification (C. *minzu shibie*) in order to manage the diverse population that was now under its control (Mullaney 2011). In the case of the Mongols, pastoralism came to be seen as fundamental to their status as a distinct nationality (C. *minzu*; M. *ündüsten*), a boundary marker separating them from the agricultural Han Chinese (Bulag 2002). This was despite the fact that a significant population of agricultural Mongols existed in eastern Inner Mongolia (Borjigin 2017). Inner Mongolia came to be divided for the purpose of policy implementation into "pastoral areas, agricultural areas, and semi-pastoral, semi-agricultural areas," with pastoral areas (C. *muqu*; M. *maljikh oron*) considered the Mongol heartland (Bulag 2004: 103).

In contemporary Inner Mongolia, pastoralism remains central to Mongol identity. The imagery of pastoralism is found throughout the region as a means of signifying the Mongol nationality. In the capital Hohhot, for example, certain buildings are decorated with yurt-like forms, and in wedding videos, even those produced for urban and agricultural Mongols, grassland scenes and yurt interiors predominate (Baioud 2021). In the homes of Mongol herders across the region, it is common to find posters of lush grassland scenes on which have been superimposed herds of the "five kinds of domestic animal" (M. *tavan khoshuu mal*), even where such idealised grasslands or herd composition bear little relation to local realities, where ecological conditions mean only certain kinds of animals can be raised.

While such posters illustrate an association of Mongol identity with multispecies pastoralism and a particularly verdant form of the grassland (M. *tal nutag*),[3] in the rest of this article I show how new understandings of pastoralism as heritage have involved an emphasis on the distinctiveness of certain localities within Inner Mongolia, and the livestock associated with them. While these have not yet superseded older associations of pastoralism and the Mongol nationality, they have become increasingly prominent in recent years.

China's Camel Country

Since the start of the 21st century, across China's western regions, many largely ethnic minority herders have had their lives and livelihoods upended both by projects of resource extraction, but also in the interests of conservation, since their livestock have been blamed for causing desertification and the sandstorms that plague northern China (and the capital Beijing) in the spring. Pastoralists have been subjected to a range of measures, from grassland enclosure and fencing, stocking limits, and even resettlement away from the grasslands. Some scholars speak of "coercive environmentalism" (Li and Shapiro 2020), arguing that environmental measures are being used to do un-environmental things: namely, to bring about the end of minority lifeways and bind minorities more closely into the Chinese nation.

In the face of these top-down environmental policies, however, certain forms of minority agency have emerged. In Inner Mongolia, for example, some herders have adopted tactics of everyday resistance, such as grazing animals at night to avoid detection (Fu 2016). Mongol cultural elites have also pushed back against the stigmatisation of pastoralism that coercive environmentalism has entailed, using song, film, and literature to present alternative environmental narratives (Baranovitch 2016, 2021). At the local level, Mongol officials, herders, and cultural workers have also sought to frame pastoralism as heritage, as a form of revalorisation.

The 21st century witnessed the emergence of what scholars have referred to as "cultural heritage fever" in China (Harrell 2013). On the one hand, the rapid pace of development in the country created concerns over cultural vanishing, but at the same time, cultural heritage was seen as a way for China to regain its rightful place on the world stage, through international fora such as UNESCO. This cultural heritage fever provided local Mongol elites with the language and institutional support to celebrate certain elements of pastoralism, in the face of the state's environmental policies targeting pastoralists.

This deployment of heritage to defend pastoralism has been particularly evident in Alasha, in the far west of Inner Mongolia (White 2024). In the early 21st century, Alasha became notorious as the source of the sandstorms which plagued northern China and beyond. In 2000, the Chinese government launched the Open Up the West (*Xibu Da Kaifa*) development strategy, a major initiative aimed at addressing the uneven economic growth that had emerged during the era of Reform and Opening Up (*Gaige Kaifang*) that began in the late 1970s. This strategy was designed to connect the poorer western regions of China more closely to the economic centre, which had largely favoured eastern and coastal areas (Goodman 2002). As part of these reforms, various policies were

[3] Such grasslands are in fact only found in certain parts of Shilingol and Hulunbuir leagues.

introduced to tackle environmental challenges in the west, where rapid economic development had led to significant ecological issues.

In response to these concerns, the Chinese state implemented a series of destocking policies under the framework of Removing Livestock and Restoring Grassland (RLRG; *Tuimu Huancao*). While goats were primarily blamed for ecological degradation, other livestock, including camels, were also adversely impacted. Reports circulated of entire herds of camels being slaughtered as local officials rigorously enforced these policies. In some areas of Alasha, herders were forcibly resettled from grasslands, facing the challenge of finding new employment—part of a broader policy known as ecological migration (C. *shengtai yimin*) implemented across the country (Ptackova 2020).

By the early 2000s, the camel population in Alasha was deemed to be in crisis. Local and national media picked up on the story and lamented the impending extinction of the Alasha Bactrian Camel (Jiang et al. 2002; Cui 2002). According to many Mongols in Alasha, state policies had played a significant role in the dwindling of the camel population. By the late 1990s, much of Alasha's rangeland had been privatised, with land contracted out to individual households. This shift was part of a broader trend towards a socialist market economy that began in the early 1980s. However, this privatisation of tenure was particularly detrimental to camel husbandry, as camels require vast areas to roam, and herders were used to allowing them access to collectively owned lands.

Pastoralism has long been a central pillar of Mongol identity in Inner Mongolia. As environmental policies, and recurring drought, pushed herders into the city, anxieties over the disappearance of distinctively Mongolian lifeways crystallised around the Alasha Bactrian Camel. In 2005, retired and serving government officials and livestock technicians formed the Alasha Camel Society (C. *Alasha Luotuo Xiehui*) dedicated to the conservation of this animal. As a result of their efforts, in 2006 the Alasha Bactrian Camel was listed as a "nation-level livestock genetic resource protected breed" (C. *guojiaji chuqin yichuan ziyuan baohu pinzhong*).

In 2008, local Mongols who worked in the cultural bureaucracy succeeded in having the "Camel Husbandry Practices of the Mongol Nationality" inscribed as part of China's national intangible cultural heritage (ICH). This comprised three elements: camel racing, the craft of camel tack, and camel veneration rituals. Rather than being a backward form of land use which needed to be replaced, pastoralism was thus partially revalorised as valuable cultural heritage.

The idea that Alasha had a distinctive camel-based cultural heritage was not simply a result of the initiative of local Mongols. It was also shaped by the conditions of possibility provided by the broader structures of the Chinese state and its political economy. The camel, and camel heritage, provided an ideal "brand" for Alasha, as it sought to market itself to tourists and investors. In 2012, Alasha was officially declared "China's Camel Country" (C. *Zhongguo Luotuo zhi Xiang*) by the national Ministry of Agriculture. This is characteristic of an emphasis on local branding and regional specialisation that has been a key part of China's reform era (Oakes 1999).

As camel husbandry has been reframed as heritage in Alasha, this local scale has been

increasingly emphasised.

But while camel husbandry has been revalorised as heritage, the same is not true for other elements of pastoralism in Alasha. Throughout the first decades of the 21st century, the herding of sheep and goats was subject to increasing restrictions in the form of stocking limits, which led herders to question the continued viability of pastoralism in Alasha. While herders received some compensation in return for reducing their herd size, this was not equal to the lost income from the sale of cashmere. What is more, herders worried that they would no longer be able to provide themselves with the meat that was a central part of their diet. The framing of pastoralism as heritage, then, has been only partial, with consequences for the livelihoods of herders in Alasha.

Emergent Scales of Culture in Inner Mongolia

In the early twenty-first century, Mongol intellectuals developed the concept of "grassland culture" (C. *caoyuan wenhua*) in response to the promotion of nomadic civilisation across the border in Mongolia (Bayar 2014). This concept aims to challenge enduring stereotypes that portray nomadic peoples on China's periphery as barbaric and in need of civilising (Harrell 1995). Grassland culture is considered one of the three foundational elements of Chinese civilisation, alongside Yellow River culture and Yangtze River culture (Bayar 2014: 450). This idea reflects broader intellectual trends in reform-era China that emphasise the importance of frontier regions, both steppe and maritime, in shaping Chinese identity, rather than viewing civilisation as a central phenomenon radiating outward (Dirlik 2006).

However, grassland culture also serves to define the Mongols within the confines of Chinese civilisation and the contemporary Chinese state, downplaying connections with other Eurasian nomadic groups. Furthermore, it is characterised as explicitly multiethnic, encompassing all nationalities residing in the grassland region and including elements of hunting, farming, and industry (Bayar 2014: 450). Proponents argue that grassland culture is not tied to a specific nationality but is defined by its geographical context. As noted by a member of the Inner Mongolia Academy of Social Sciences, "Grassland culture is a regional culture [C. *quyu wenhua*] formed in the particular natural environment of the grasslands" (Shi 2011).

While grassland culture reconfigures traditional hierarchies and narratives of Chinese civilisation and Inner Asian barbarism, it also obscures the impact of Han Chinese colonisation in Inner Mongolia. This is particularly evident in local cultures that are conceptualised as part of or intersecting with grassland culture. For instance, Bayannuur Municipality to the east of Alasha now brands itself as the home of Yellow River Bend culture (C. *Hetao wenhua*), named for the river's detour into Inner Mongolia, which facilitates irrigation in this arid area. This culture is described as a product of the "blending [C. *jiaorong*] of grassland culture and agrarian culture" (Ba 2005). Such descriptions mask the contested processes through which Chinese counties were established from Mongolian banners (Bulag 2017) and agriculture began to supplant pastoralism in much of the region.

One of the framings of local cultures that has emerged in relation to the superordi-

nate concept of grassland culture is "Alasha Culture." According to one of the Mongol intellectuals involved in elaborating ideas of Alasha Culture, the distinctive environment of this arid region played a key role in the creation of this local culture. He pointed to "Alasha Camel Culture" (C. *Alashan Luotuo Wenhua*), which he said had been formed by a long process of interaction between people in Alasha and these animals, which had themselves developed "unique biological characteristics" (C. *shengwu tezheng dute*) in response to their environment. One Mongol member of the Alasha Camel Society explained that culture consisted of the survival skills acquired in a particular environment and was not something that was the property of any particular nationality. He pointed out that Han Chinese could become skilled camel herders, insisting that "culture is the product of the natural environment."

Ideas of pastoralism as heritage, then, have been shaped by discourses of culture in Inner Mongolia which emphasise the role of the particular environments in creating distinctive local cultures. However, other scales of culture have been mobilised in recent years to reframe pastoralism in Alasha. In 2013, Xi Jinping launched the Belt and Road Initiative, which is portrayed as a revival of the ancient Silk Road(s) across Eurasia. This has involved an alternative scaling of China itself, now imagined not simply as a nation-state confined by territorial borders, but as what geographer Andrew Grant refers to as a "civilisation-state," which seeks to exert its benign influence across a continent (Grant 2018).

In the wake of the launch of this initiative, ideas of the Silk Road were quickly adopted in Alasha. The region could now portray itself as an important node on historical trade routes, rather than as a remote backwater. In these discussions of the Silk Road by local intellectuals, the camel was portrayed as a vector of cultural exchange: "It was camels that travelled the Silk Road, the Porcelain Road, the Tea Road, bringing agrarian and nomadic civilisations together and helping them to blend, causing Eastern civilisation and Western civilisation to influence one another" (Liu 2017).

In a local museum in Alasha, a display reads, "Camel husbandry has an ancient pedigree. It not only supported the ceaseless development of the local economy but also nourished a camel culture with distinctive regional and ethnic characteristics, and a historical and contemporary Silk Road culture, manifesting the traditional charm and contemporary value of grassland civilisation." Here we can see how older ideas of the ethnic (C. *minzu*) associations of pastoralism are combined with more recent understandings of the local scale of culture, as well as the civilisational scaling device that is the Silk Road.

The Scale of Agricultural Heritage Systems in the Xi Jinping Era

In 2022, the Ar Khorchin Grassland Nomadic System in Inner Mongolia was recognised by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation as one of the world's Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems. In one sense, when it comes to the defence of pastoralism, this conception of heritage is more robust than the ICH deployed in Alasha, since it explicitly involves land use and mobility, whereas in Alasha the understanding of pastoralism as heritage was limited to rituals, races, and objects. In the context of the longstanding denigration of pastoralist mobility by the modernising Chinese state, this

understanding of heritage is quite striking, and shows how heritage can enable the defence of marginalised forms of land use.

The concept of agricultural heritage has become increasingly prominent in China in recent years (Schmalzer 2019), and the country has also compiled a list of nationally important agricultural heritage systems. One of these now includes the "Gobi Red Camel Herding System" in Urad Rear Banner, in western Inner Mongolia, bordering Alasha. As in the case of Alasha, heritage here is selective, focused on a particular animal (a local breed of camels that Alasha Mongols say is in fact identical to the Alasha Bactrian camel).

What both these examples of pastoralism as "agricultural heritage" also reveal is the foregrounding of locality—pastoralism is scaled to the level of a banner rather than nationality. Chinese descriptions emphasise the connection between a distinctive form of pastoralism as heritage and a particular place:

> The Gobi Red Camel Herding System in Urad Rear Banner is rooted in (C. *zhigen yu*) the arid grassland ecological environment of Urad Rear Banner and co-exists with the flora and fauna of the arid grasslands and Gobi environment (National Agricultural Exhibition Centre 2020).

While it stresses an ecological understanding of herding and celebrates pastoralist mobility, this description makes no reference to the Mongolian nationality.

What we can see here is the way that the scaling characteristic of agricultural heritage, with its focus on the distinctiveness of place, conceived of bioculturally, comes to resonate in a political context in which the scale of nationality is increasingly seen as problematic. Xi Jinping has presided over an intensification of assimilationist policies towards China's minority nationalities, most notably in Xinjiang, where Muslim minorities have been subjected to mass detention, surveillance, and securitisation (Byler 2021). In Inner Mongolia, assimilationist policies have focused on education, with Mongolian-medium teaching being replaced by Chinese (Atwood 2020).

These policies were supported by a propaganda campaign in Inner Mongolia which emphasised the idea of the "Chinese nation" (C. *Zhonghua minzu*) (Baioud and Khuanuud 2023). This concept has gained increasing prominence in China in recent years at the expense of the concept of minority nationality. It has been accompanied by the promotion of the term "ethnic group" (C. *zuqun*)**,** which is seen as depoliticised and subordinate to the "Chinese nation" (Bulag 2021). So rather than China being a multinational state, made up of 56 nationalities, including the majority Han Chinese, it is now increasingly presented as a state made up of a singular Chinese nation, with some subordinate diversity acknowledged at the level of "ethnic group." It is in this context, I suggest, that we must situate the use of heritage discourses to defend pastoralism in China. Their emphasis on the local scale, and on human-environment interaction, is politically expedient at a time when the scale of nationality is increasingly downplayed.

Conclusion

Across the world, heritage classification has provided pastoralists and their supporters with a way of asserting the value of pastoralism in the face of land grabbing, resource extraction, infrastructure construction, and state environmentalism. While heritage classification in many contexts (including China) has often been a top-down process and has been deployed by states as a tool of nation-building, it can also afford marginalised groups a language to assert the value of traditional forms of land use. In China, pastoralists have often been presented in the scholarly literature as passive victims of the state's brand of authoritarian environmentalism. However, in certain pastoral regions, discourses of heritage have been deployed to defend pastoralism against the accusation that it is a backward and environmentally destructive form of land use.

In this article, I have sought to highlight the scalar aspects of heritage which have implications for the politics of culture and nation-building. Cultural heritage fever in China has operated at certain scales, which do not always correlate with the scale of minority nationality established in the 1950s. In Inner Mongolia, subregional administrative units have been encouraged to develop their own distinctive cultural brands. This has been accompanied by an emerging understanding of culture which stresses the conditioning role of particular environments, as well as a recent emphasis on the civilisational scale of the Silk Road. It is at these various scales, rather than simply that of the nationality, that pastoralism is increasingly framed in contemporary Inner Mongolia. This must be understood in the context of the increasingly assimilationist policies in Xi era China, which have significantly reduced the discursive and political space for the concept of minority nationality.

Concepts like Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems can provide important resources for the defence of pastoralist mobility. But in Inner Mongolia they have been implemented not at the level of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, or even the "pastoral area" of this region, but at that of the individual banner. So, while the deployment of such concepts shows that mobile pastoralism in Inner Mongolia can sometimes be embraced by officials rather than simply denigrated, it is increasingly seen as confined to a few limited areas. If the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region has long been divided into "pastoral, agricultural, and semi-agricultural, semi-pastoral areas," today the partial, localised recognition of pastoralism as heritage in a few parts of these pastoral areas bears witness to the diminishing territorial extent of this form of land use over recent decades.

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SUSTAINABLE CASHMERE AS DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE IN MONGOLIA

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Abstract: Whereas the marketing of cashmere apparel has traditionally highlighted luxury and indulgence, global fashion labels have increasingly adopted sustainability as an element of their branding. Recent marketing initiatives have involved significant entanglements with development practice, through engagements with multilateral and non-governmental development aid agencies and their affiliates in setting standards for "sustainable" cashmere. We propose a critical reading of these initiatives through a post-development lens, highlighting universalist assumptions related to political-economic priorities, cultural change, and ethics. Through ethnographic research investigating the ways in which Mongolian herders perceive and navigate sustainable branding and certification initiatives, we find that the concept of "sustainable cashmere" brings a narrow, technical scope to the political economy of pastoralism. Herders' own political concerns, often articulated with reference to the safeguarding of nomadic pastoral cultural heritage and identity, may be captured more effectively in international branding through concepts related to cultural sustainability.

Keywords: Mongolia, cashmere, postdevelopment, branding, overgrazing

Introduction

When we think of cashmere, as international consumers, we are most likely to imagine extremely soft, luxurious scarves, sweaters, and other garments. A recent online listing for a sweater designed by The Row (Fig. 1) highlights some of what the consumer might be expected to associate with cashmere: a very high price; warmth (captured in the invocation to "embrace colder weather"); simple and understated design; luxury, fashion, wealth, and celebrity (The Row is a luxury label established by Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen). Absent from this text are messages about where the cashmere comes from, or who produced it. But this branding has been challenged over the past decade by a succession of articles sounding the alarm about rangeland degradation and desertification in Mongolia, issued in scientific publications (Berger *et al*. 2013; Dorj *et al*. 2013; Eitel 2020) and the mainstream media (Chan 2023; Dalton 2019; Davis 2020; Ferry 2017; Schmitz 2016). Herders are represented in these texts as destructive, reckless, and driven by an uncontrolled desire to increase goat herds to satisfy global demand for cashmere. This narrative of unsustainable overgrazing has been embraced over the past two decades by international development organisations including UNDP, SDC, AVSF, and others, who have seen an opportunity to "improve" herders by building capacity for more intensive, more scientifically managed, and more coordinated livestock produc-

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tion and rangeland management. (For an overview of "sustainable cashmere" projects in Mongolia see Okamoto and Jamsranjav 2019.)

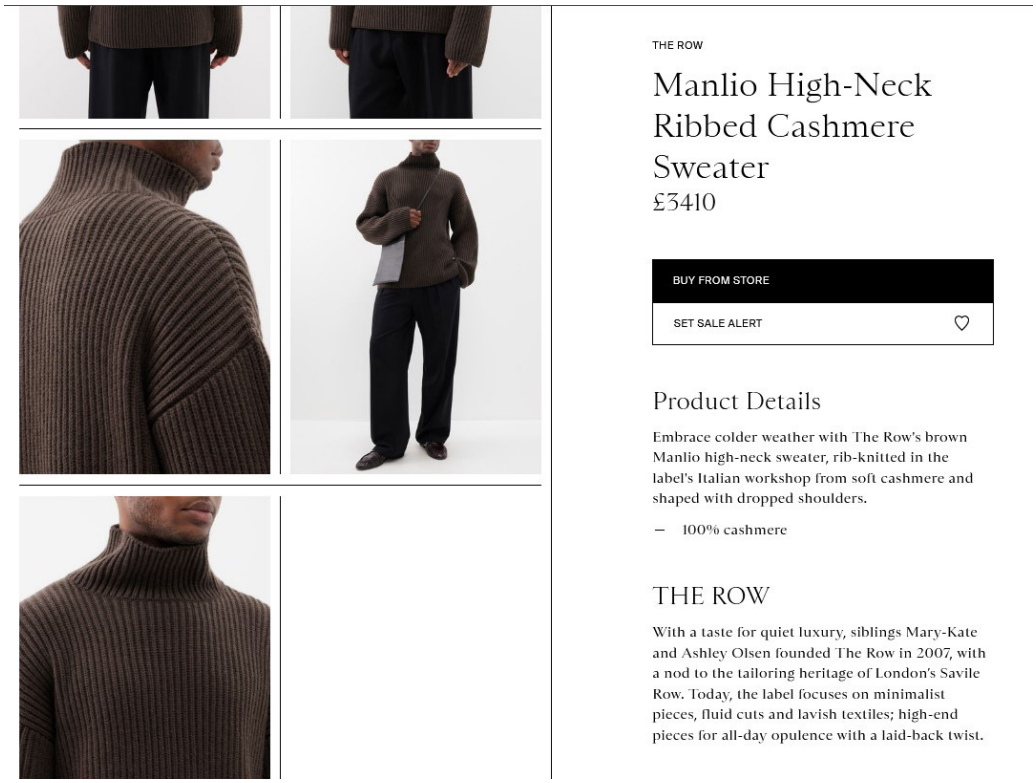

Figure 1: The Row, Manlio High-Neck Ribbed Cashmere Sweater, £3410 (THE ROW Manlio High-Neck Ribbed Cashmere Sweater in Brown, 2023)

Figure 2: With this image accompanying the online version of an NPR story, the caption reads: "In the place where Bish has pitched her ger, or tent, the effects of overgrazing are obvious. Sand dunes appear where grass used to grow…" (Schmitz 2016).

Figure 3: Screenshot from a video published by the Sustainable Cashmere Project in Ömnögovi, funded by Kering and Rio Tinto. Taking up the narrative at the point before the project experts stepped in to help, this herder states: "In the past thirty years our livestock has become private capital. We herders started to have the right to manage our own herd size. The government does not manage it anymore. So, the size of our herds started to increase without limits. But, as the herd amount increases, the carrying capacity of the pasture suffers." (Natural Capital Project (NatCap) 2019)

Another version of the story, which is not as familiar to an international audience, is told in policy documents issued by the Parliament and Government of Mongolia—including such texts as the National Cashmere Program (2000), the Actions to Support Wool and Cashmere Industry (2022), the Industrialisation 21:100 Program (2018), and the Alsyn Kharaa 2050 (2020) strategy document (Kh. Narantsatsral & Thrift 2024). Here, cashmere and wool are held up as the only top-50 export commodities in Mongolia that are based on a renewable resource, and are presented as a key alternative to unsustainable, extractive resource-based development. As shown in Figure 4, resource extraction accounts for 23 percent of Mongolia's overall GDP; coal and copper are responsible for about 70 percent of Mongolia's total export revenues. In the narrative of our own research, undertaken in partnership with UNESCO-IISNC and the Ministry of Culture in Mongolia and driven by an interest in safeguarding cultural heritage (S. Mijid *et al*., 2024), we point out that cashmere supplies up to 80% of herders' cash incomes and subsidises a wide range of cultural practices—such as dairy production, or interactions with sacred sites—that are not economically viable on their own, but are considered essential components of cultural identity and well-being.

Ethnographically, we are drawn to cashmere as it is full of apparent contradictions: organic yet unsustainable, being a fully natural, renewable resource-based commodity whose production is also alleged to be a primary driver of land degradation; modern yet

traditional, as a commodity that requires industrial processing but depends on nomadic pastoralists for its raw material; and a symbol of extreme wealth yet also of extreme poverty, situated at the intersection of the affluence of the wealthy urban consumer and the austerity of the nomad. Cashmere also provides a strategic point of engagement with globalised commodity chains, as well as an opportunity to investigate the real-world impacts of branding, by thinking through the ways that the branding of cashmere-as-commodity simultaneously brands the herders who produce it. Finally, as we discuss in this article, cashmere allows us to continue to explore herders' efforts to make sense of internationally funded rangeland management initiatives, some of which have recently re-branded themselves as focusing on "sustainable cashmere."

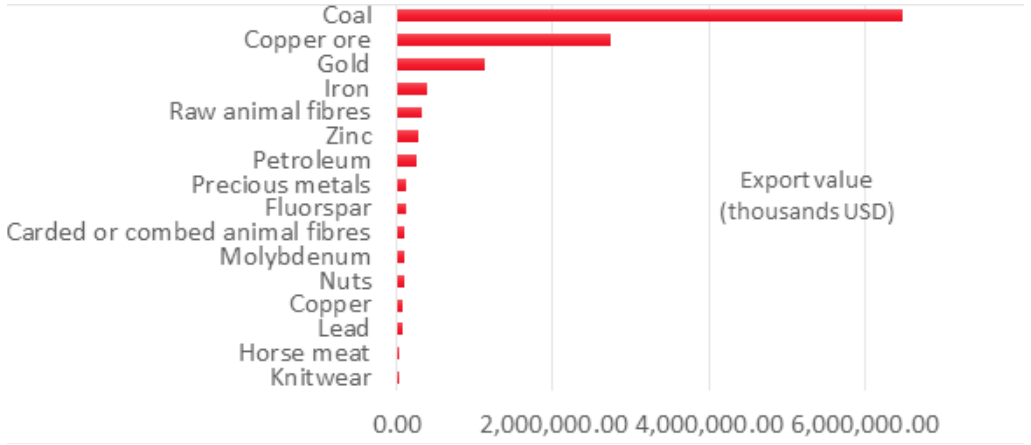

Figure 4: Annual value of top export commodities from Mongolia (Mongolian Customs Agency 2024)

The starting point for our anthropological analysis is a broad interest in the critique of mainstream development, reflected in the postdevelopment approach taken by scholars including Escobar (1995), Ferguson (1990), Li (2007), and Rist (2014). Within this approach, "development" is interpreted as a discourse that asserts the universal value of economic growth and material progress on the model of the Global North, and which serves to justify modernising interventions in the Global South by actors and institutions from the Global North. The ideological foundation of development discourse is considered problematic by postdevelopment theorists, since it assumes a single, linear development pathway for all societies, with limited accommodation for cultural and ethical pluralism. Moreover, given that development is predicated on the articulation by international experts of necessary cultural and behavioural changes, it is viewed as inherently colonial. More recent iterations of the postdevelopment critique have suggested imaginings of multiple, diverse, and inclusive pathways to development, as captured by Escobar's (2018) concept of the "pluriverse"—a "multiplicity of worlds" that admits diverse ways of living and knowing.

Following this example, we have sought to apply a postdevelopment critique to discourse at the intersection of branding and development practice in Mongolia's cashmere sector. We begin by establishing some discursive connections between commercial

branding and development in the cashmere sector, then describe the applicability of two major critiques from postdevelopment theory to this case study. In doing so, we borrow conceptual terminology from Li (2007, 2011) and others, specifically what Li has called the "rendering technical" of political economic and governance problems, accompanied by measures to position herders as self-regulating subjects marked by a "will to improve." We then draw out comments from our interviews with nomadic pastoralists, which evoke forms of value that are poorly captured within mainstream development discourse, and which could form a basis for imagining alternative development pathways that put "nomadic culture" at their centre.

This article draws on information gathered through mixed-methods research on sustainability discourse in Mongolia's cashmere sector. Our research has included a discourse analysis of marketing and social media mentioning "sustainable cashmere" (Thrift & Thrift 2022), an analysis of cashmere sustainability standards and certifications (Thrift 2023), a compilation of cashmere sector statistics (Undral 2023), a legislative and policy review (Narantsatsral & Thrift 2024), an extended literature survey of Mongolian academic publications on cashmere (M. Pagmadulam *et al.* 2024), and coded interviews with herders in three *aimag*s (provinces) where distinct "sustainable cashmere" initiatives have been put in place—Bayankhongor, Arkhangai, and Ömnögovi (Thrift *et al*. 2023).

Brands and Development Discourse

As articulated in postdevelopment theory, "development" is fundamentally a discursive formation: through texts that produce knowledge about the Global South, development discourse constructs the Global South subject as "underdeveloped" and in need of expert intervention. In the case of cashmere, participation in development discourse precedes formal interactions between brands and development agents, such as the projects and certification initiatives discussed below. The discourse of "sustainable cashmere," broadly speaking, constructs the Mongolian herder as engaged in destructive overgrazing, caused mainly by an overabundance of cashmere goats, which may be resolved through the introduction of better rangeland management and breeding practices. The association of pastoralism with unsustainability forms part of a wider narrative of land degradation, which often presents a sequence of increased consumer demand for inexpensive cashmere, overproduction by herders to meet that demand, overgrazing by increasing goat herds, and ultimately desertification. The degradation narrative has been reproduced in news reports published by respected sources including the *New York Times* (Allington 2023), *Wall Street Journal* (Dalton 2019), BBC (Timmins 2020), NPR (Schmitz 2016), *Science* (McLaughlin 2019), and *Forbes* (Ng and Berger 2017), typically drawing on the expert commentary of scientists and development practitioners. These English-language sources, in contrast to typical Mongolian news articles, tend towards alarmist language such as "decimation," "destruction," "ruin," "overgrazing," "threat," "irreversibility," and "desertification." In an article from the *Wall Street Journal*, for example, herders are represented as destructive, reckless, and uncontrolled; a sharply rising graph highlights an unchecked increase in the number of goats in Mongolia (Dalton 2019). The underlying message is that this trajectory towards desertification will

not stop unless someone—perhaps a brand such as H&M or Stella McCartney—steps in to intervene. In a more recent example, a headline on CNN asks: "Cashmere demand is threatening Mongolia's steppe. Can the industry go sustainable?" (Chan 2023) (The suggested answer: perhaps, but everyone should think about pivoting to yaks.)

Environmentally conscious fashion brands have positioned themselves within this degradation narrative in several distinct ways, which is evident from the diverging approaches to cashmere marketing taken by three international brand actors—Loro Piana, Naadam, and Kering. The first of these three brands, Loro Piana, is an Italian luxury menswear producer that specialises in cashmere and wool garments and has sourced much of its cashmere from Alasha in Inner Mongolia. Loro Piana's marketing materials present an ecological primitivist story of isolated nomadic herders living since time immemorial in "harmony with the natural cycle," depending on traditional knowledge transmitted "from generation to generation," until the balance of their untouched culture is "disrupted" and "threatened" by "forces beyond their control" (Loro Piana 2019; *Wall Street Journal* Paid Program 2020). This story is supported by a commissioned film by naturalist-filmmaker Luc Jacquet, director of *March of the Penguins*, whose film *Cashmere: The Origin of a Secret* (Jacquet 2019) offers a cinematic vision of sustainable luxury cashmere originating from goats—and herders—who are effectively part of nature. The text accompanying this film describes an inhospitable climate, positioning Mongolian pastoral culture as an adaptation to ecological extremes:

> Long, dry winters stretch on for months, reaching extreme levels of cold and bringing frequent blizzards. Spring is milder, but with it comes vast, dangerous sandstorms and during summer, the sun is scorching, rain is rare, and water and food are scarce. (Loro Piana 2019)

Both goats and herders are repeatedly described as living in "harmony" with this extreme environment, structured in the text by a parallel between the biological adaptation of *Capra hircus* goats and the cultural adaptation of nomadic herders. This state of primitive balance is threatened by crisis, however: "Recently," the text declares, "the intensification of breeding has disrupted a century-old ecological balance, causing desertification of the territory and a reduction in the quality of the fibres." At this point Loro Piana steps in—enduring "years of struggle" to establish partnerships with herders "in harsh, rugged landscapes"—to establish the "Loro Piana Method," a "pioneering" form of manufacture that is rooted in ecological and cultural conservation. Driven by scientific experts from institutions in Italy and China, the initiative proposes to enable herders to earn higher prices for premium-quality cashmere produced from smaller and more intensively managed herds.

The second brand, Naadam, was launched through a Kickstarter campaign in 2014 as a direct-to-consumer "sustainable cashmere" start-up (Scanlan 2014). While its most recent marketing materials have shifted away from specific claims about interventions in support of herder communities, Naadam continues to promote its "origin story" as a disruptive intervention. As documented in a slickly produced YouTube video (NAADAM 2017) and a series of podcast interviews (e.g. Jenkins 2017), the protagonist of Naadam's story is Matt Scanlan—a disillusioned young Wall Street banker who went

backpacking through Mongolia in search of new purpose in his life, and saw the potential to bring dignity to Mongolian herders by applying his marketing skills to "disrupt" the cashmere value chain. Following Mongolia's transition to a market economy, the story goes, supply chains had broken down and fallen into the hands of extractive middlemen (known in Mongolia as *chenj*), leading herders to become captive to a market in which prices were kept artificially low. Herders found themselves effectively indentured to these middlemen, which prevented them from accumulating capital or investing in livestock health—things they recognised as important, but could not afford. Given these artificial constraints on growth and innovation in the pastoral economy, younger generations saw no future for themselves as herders. To address these issues, Scanlan founded Naadam Cashmere through a Kickstarter campaign as a company that would design and sell "sustainable cashmere." Naadam's intended business model was to buy up raw cashmere at a premium directly from herders, circumventing the middlemen, while partnering with local NGOs and development organisations to support livestock insurance, veterinary care, and other community needs. Naadam targeted millennial consumers through innovative marketing campaigns and a direct-to-consumer (DTC) sales model, aided by social media influencers. Ironically, as we learned from our field research, Naadam actually set up its business with Olziibodijav, one of the most successful middlemen in Mongolia, who subsequently established his own factory (Bodios) as an independent label and current supplier to global luxury brands. Bodijav is also the *de facto* leader of the Tsagaan Yamaat cooperative in Bayankhongor, which has rebuilt the former collective on a privatised basis. While Naadam has taken credit for building a park and stadium in Bayangovi *sum*, the local herders we interviewed had no knowledge of the American company but instead praised Bodijav as a virtuous patron-facilitator of the initiative.

Our third example, Kering, is a luxury fashion group based in France, owner of brands Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent, and formerly Stella McCartney. Kering's involvement in sustainable cashmere marketing began through Stella McCartney, a designer who focuses on environmentally conscious and ethically produced apparel. McCartney's brand story draws directly on the overdemand—overgrazing—desertification narrative frame advanced by rangeland scientists, beginning with the claim that increased consumer demand has prompted increased cashmere production—and hence increased goat herds—well beyond the carrying capacity of Mongolia's grasslands. McCartney's website notes that it takes four goats to make enough cashmere for just one sweater, and those goats require significant vegetation and water inputs in a relatively arid region—not to mention the damage they cause to soil and to vegetation roots with their hooves—leading to the potential for irreversible desertification (Stella McCartney 2020). Kering, the luxury fashion conglomerate with which Stella McCartney was affiliated at the time, meanwhile announced that it had an obligation to help prevent the environmental catastrophe brought about by fast fashion. The company developed an open-source environmental accounting method, called Environmental Profit and Loss (EP&L), to measure and adjust the environmental impacts of its own supply chain (Kering 2021). Using this method, Stella McCartney determined that the label's use of cashmere accounted for 42% of its total EP&L impact at the raw material stage, despite making up only 0.1% of

material usage (Stella McCartney 2015). To reduce this impact, Stella McCartney opted to use only recycled ("re-engineered") cashmere in the supply chain. Concurrently, Kering partnered with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Stanford University, the mining conglomerate Rio Tinto, and other organisations to implement a "Sustainable Cashmere Project" in Mongolia—subsequently renamed the "South Gobi Cashmere Project"—to enlist herders in conservation efforts and minimise the ecological impacts of cashmere production (Kering 2019).

All three of these brand stories can be viewed as development narratives, inasmuch as they identify unmet needs in Mongolia that are to be resolved through reforms brought about by outside, expert interventions. Loro Piana and Kering both take a conservationist lens, suggesting that former models for subsistence have become unsustainable in the modern world, and propose science-based strategies to be developed by groups of technical and academic experts and subsequently taken up by herders. Naadam's brand story frames problems in terms of a poorly structured market, the experts in this case being former Wall Street brokers, who are able to bring disruptive venture capitalism to the world of Mongolian herders. In each instance, the attributive claims about processes leading to catastrophe are framed by the identities of those who come to help, and what they are actually positioned to offer—value in the luxury market (Loro Piana), control of a value chain (Kering/Stella McCartney), or untied cash (Naadam). Although Kering offers the most direct example of collaboration with mainstream development organisations, all three brands frame their commitment to sustainability with reference to their sponsorship of organisations that are locally or internationally involved in development practice.

Wicked Problems and "Rendering Technical"

In their marketing of "sustainable cashmere," these and other international brands and retailers have engaged with multilateral and non-governmental development aid agencies and their affiliates, in supporting sustainability production standards or capacity-building interventions. To interpret these development actions, we draw on Li's concept of "rendering technical" as a means of describing the discursive reduction of complex governance problems into solvable technical ones. Governance problems often begin as "wicked problems" (Rittel and Webber 1973): these are problems for which there is no clear solution, stakeholders cannot all be satisfied equally by any plausible course of action, the problem itself can be defined in multiple possible ways, and any attempt at resolution may create further problems. In dealing with such complex problems, there is often a need for negotiation among stakeholders rather than expert planning, acknowledging that alternative solutions to each problem will reflect different ethical values, or ideas about what is "right" or "wrong," and different priorities. Attempts to resolve a wicked problem through science and engineering alone demand that the problem be defined reductively, in a way that ignores its connections to other issues and elides a fundamental property of problems of this type: the formulation of the problem is the actual problem itself (Rittel and Webber 1973).

The problem of defining "sustainable cashmere" can thus, in our view, be considered a wicked problem. A basic technical diagnosis of the issue—the number of goats in

Mongolia exceeds rangeland carrying capacity—may be accurate in a descriptive sense; however**,** when taken as a full assessment of the problem, this diagnosis supports technical interventions to limit herd sizes by optimising the efficiency of livestock production, improving rangeland management, and increasing the economic return on cashmere. As the three brand narratives described above suggest, however, the ultimate causes of overgrazing—or overdependence on goats—can also be interpreted in different ways. Loro Piana defines the problem as an intensification of low-productivity goat breeds, suggesting the need for better breeding through its eponymous scientific breeding "method." Naadam's association of "sustainable cashmere" with higher herder incomes, connected to its diagnosis of herder indenture to middlemen, implicitly defines the problem as overproduction to service debts, suggesting the need for economic restructuring to increase direct cashmere revenues that are returned to herders. Kering and Stella McCartney define the problem as poor resource utilisation, suggesting in part the need for training and institutionalisation of scientific resource management through the South Gobi Cashmere project.

Beyond this difference in interpretation of proximate causes, each of which suggests its own range of potential solutions, the "overgrazing problem" can be viewed as part of a much larger set of socio-political issues. The implied claim that *Mongolian herders are not currently able to achieve a moderate livelihood from the income generated by a sustainable number of goats*, within development discourse, suggests the need for increased productivity, but the poverty of herders can also be viewed as a symptom of a further set of wicked problems. For herders to achieve social inclusion within the broader socio-economic context, they must work against limits to material income (dictated largely by the maximum herd size that can be reasonably managed by a single household); stereotypes that position herders as simple and uneducated; and a lack of access, dictated by the nomadic lifestyle, to the material comforts of modern society—including running water and improved sanitation, which are elsewhere regarded as basic necessities. Considering that the "more developed" culture of the city is itself arguably unsustainable, financed largely by mineral exports and international loans, it is impossible for herders to meet the double standard of sustainable production and social inclusion, where social status is indexed to material overconsumption. Maximising herd sizes can, in this context, be a strategy for mobile herders to achieve status through markers independent from material consumption.

Over the past century, anthropologists have repeatedly questioned colonial and development claims that nomadic pastoralists have an "irrational" fixation on maximising herd sizes with little regard for productivity (Ferguson 1990; Herskovits 1926; Nyima 2014). Yet the logic of herd maximisation in Mongolia, as in other pastoral societies, is often performative, aiming in the present context to assert a form of prosperity and status that is competitive with that of the successful urbanite. Mongolia's system of state awards and prizes continues to include the title *myangat*—literally "with a thousand," meaning "herder whose animals have surpassed one thousand"—as a recognition formally bestowed on herders at the local (*aimag* or *sum*) level. Historically, the national "Good Herder" award (*sain malchin*) directly acknowledged herd size as a mark of achievement, as evidenced by honorific gifts offered to recipients from the mid-1940s

onwards, marked with silver characters indicating "1000 animals" or "5000 animals" (e.g. Mönkhzul 2021; Jargal 2021). In recent years, development planners have pushed to have Mongolia reframe its national-tier awards to promote intensification and "responsible" herding, following on their perception that titles and awards celebrating large herds encourage overgrazing. This perspective is partially addressed in the 2021 regulations for the "Champion Herder" (*Avarga malchin*) award, which now include criteria recognising the combination of modern, technical improvements with traditional herding methods, and success in maintaining herd sizes within rangeland carrying capacity (Ulsyn Avarga Malchin 2021). Nonetheless, *myangat* remains a powerful symbol of herder prosperity and success. Importantly, while the criteria for the award make overtures to intensification strategies, the "Champion herder" or "Good herder" continues to be accepted as one who keeps all or most of the five core species of livestock—sheep, goats, cattle or yaks, horses, and camels—rather than specialised breeds that require intensive management. In the same vein, we find that herders, large and small, routinely keep horses specifically for status purposes, even though the economic return is low, and despite complaints from development planners that horses are a driver of overgrazing.

A "rendering technical" of Mongolia's nomadic livelihoods and culture leads to the reduction of a wide range of concerns to simply-defined issues, such as the "overgrazing problem," that may assume a simple logic of utility maximisation (i.e. income optimisation). These concerns are complicated by contradictory goals and values, as seen in the tensions between environmental protection and economic development. A value chain actor privileging environmental sustainability might avoid virgin cashmere altogether, as designers such as Stella McCartney have already done (Stella McCartney 2020); meanwhile, an actor privileging sustainable livelihoods would endeavour to provide greater incomes to herders, as Mongolia has attempted, by increasing the value of the cashmere they produce (e.g. Nooluur 2020). Similarly, although we might agree to the proposition that cashmere production has contributed to land degradation, mining can be much worse, as cashmere-producing herders emphasised in their interviews with us. We might also ask, would it be ethically preferable to use less land for textile production by using intensively cultivated organic cotton, or to preserve biodiversity by using fibres from animals grazed on natural grasslands, as suggested by proponents of "regenerative wool" (Fibershed 2024; Hashempour 2023)?

Political Economy of Development

The connection between branding and development has been concretely operationalised through a range of "sustainable cashmere" development projects and programmes, including two product certifications in Mongolia operated by the Sustainable Fibre Alliance (2024) and AVSF (2020), and a third in Inner Mongolia run by the Aid by Trade Foundation (2024). We met with herders in three *aimag*s where distinct "sustainable cashmere" initiatives have been put in place, led by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Agronomes & vétérinaires sans frontières (AVSF), the Sustainable Fibre Alliance (SFA), and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS): Bayankhongor (SDC, ADB, AVSF, SFA), Arkhangai (SFA, ADB, SDC), and Ömnögovi (ADB, SDC, WCS). Our initial goal was to assess

how herders perceive and navigate these overlapping initiatives, and how participation in the development projects influenced or contrasted with their own understandings of sustainability. We found that while some herders who had assumed coordinating roles within local projects spoke positively of the initiatives, most of our interviewees claimed limited knowledge of the development interventions. When speaking more generally about pastoral livelihoods, herders described broad, political-economic factors as determinants of sustainability, challenging the development projects' assumption that sustainability can be managed successfully at the herder level.

Sustainable cashmere certifications suggest that collective action or non-state governance institutions are necessary in order to achieve effective rangeland management, and on that basis may require participation in herder groups or Pasture User Groups (PUGs) as "common pool resource management institutions." This approach is partly a continuation of prior development work, introduced by SDC, to implement rangeland management collectivities in Mongolia based on the premises of Commons Theory (Ostrom 1990). In practice, there are several challenges in implementing a Commons Theory-based model in Mongolia, notably that decision-making in the pastoral economy is not always guided by a logic of income maximisation for the individual household as a bounded unit. We observe frequent instances of keeping "non-productive" livestock because they are held on behalf of extended family members who live in town, because they provide status—as described above—and allow for culturally important activities such as dairy production or racehorse training, or because the animals can be allowed to roam with limited human intervention, accommodating fluctuating labour availability. A simple model of cash income optimisation, which might predict a preference for goat-dominated herds, is undermined by figures that, while admitting an overall increase in livestock population, also indicate a declining proportion of goats within overall herds over the past 15 years (Fig.5).

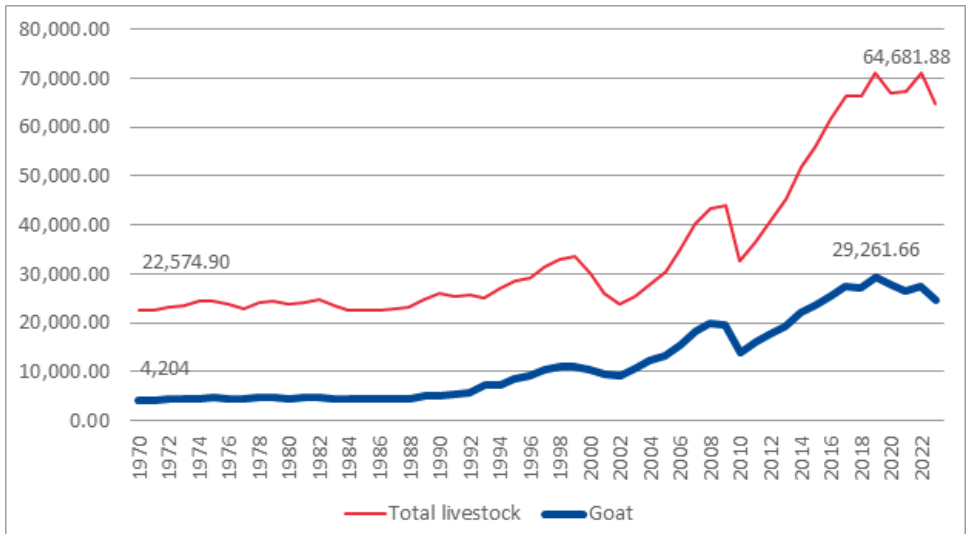

Figure 5: Number of goats against total livestock in Mongolia (x1000), 1970-2022 (Undral 2023)

In terms of larger-scale factors affecting sustainability, herders we interviewed frequently pointed to commodity pricing. Although sustainable cashmere projects and certifications assume that herders will be incentivised to promote "quality over quantity," such an approach is predicated on a stability model with predictable market outcomes, that may not align with a volatile and uncertain economy, and that can be undermined by the lack of grade-differentiated pricing for raw cashmere and other commodities. Herders point out that sudden price fluctuations present challenges to their lives:[2]

Ноолуурын эдийн засгийн хувьд үнэ хэлбэлзэхгүй тогтмол байвал болчихно. Яг жил болгон тогтсон үнэ дээр байж байвал малчид сэтгэл хангалуун болно. Тэгэхгүй нэг их үнэтэй гарч ирээд л, огцом унаад л байвал хэцүү шүү дээ.

As far as the economics of cashmere are concerned, it would be fine if the price were stable, without fluctuating. If it could be at an exact price set for each year, herders would be satisfied. Otherwise, it's obviously hard if the price keeps shooting up, then suddenly falling.

(Ноолуурын ханш) маш их хэлбэлзэж байна шүү. Хэлбэлзэлтэй. 6-7 жилийн өмнө нь тогтмол 80 мянга байхад нэг их өсдөггүй, нэг их унадаггүй л байсан. Тэгэхэд бид нар нэгэнт мал байгаа юм чинь, мөнгөө авахын тулд ямаагаа самнаад өгдөг л байсан. Харин одоо бол нэг өндөр гарч ирээд л, нэг бол буугаад л тогтворгүй болчхож байгаа.

[The price of cashmere] fluctuates a huge amount! It fluctuates. Six or seven years ago it was steady at 80-thousand [tugriks], not rising much and not falling much. At that time, since we had the animals anyway, we would just comb the goats and sell the cashmere, to get the money. But now, the price suddenly rises or falls, but is never stable.

Ноолуур сүүлийн үед үнэтэй байхдаа сайхан байсан ч энэ жил огт ахисангүй. Мөнгөний ханш хоног, хоногоор унаад малын ханш өсөхгүй. Малаар амьдардаг бид нарт хүнд тусаж байна. Өргөн хэрэглээ, бензин түлш, дэлгүүр хоршооны бараа аймар үнэтэй боловч малын бүтээгдэхүүн хямд. Жишээ нь малын арьс авч байгаа газар алга. Бид нар уг нь малынхаа мах, ноос, ноолуур, арьс шир, цагаан идээ гээд л бүх юмыг нь хэрэглэж, ашигладаг байлаа. Харин одоо энэ арьс шир ямар ч үнэд хүрэхгүй хээр гадаа хаягддаг боллоо.

It is nice that the cashmere price has been high in recent years, but this year it hasn't risen at all. The value of our money decreases day by day, but the price of livestock doesn't increase. It's hard for those of us who live by our animals. Everyday goods, fuel, shop items are all extremely expensive but livestock commodities are cheap. For example, no one is buying animal hides anywhere. In

[2] These and subsequent herder quotes are taken from field interview transcripts in Bayankhongor, Arkhangai, and Ömnögovi provinces.

the past we made use of the meat, wool, cashmere, hides, milk, dairy, basically everything from our animals. But now the animal hides are worthless, and end up simply discarded, outside on the ground.

Our statistical report (Undral 2023) confirms considerable year-on-year average price volatility, rising or falling by 50–80% of its value from one year to the next (Fig. 6). If we focus on intra-year variability, we can see dramatic and unpredictable increases and decreases in cashmere prices from one month to the next (Fig. 7). In 2021, the price doubled from just under 60,000 MNT per kilogramme to about 120,000 in March, declined to under 100,000 over the summer, fell suddenly in November to under 50,000, then rose again.

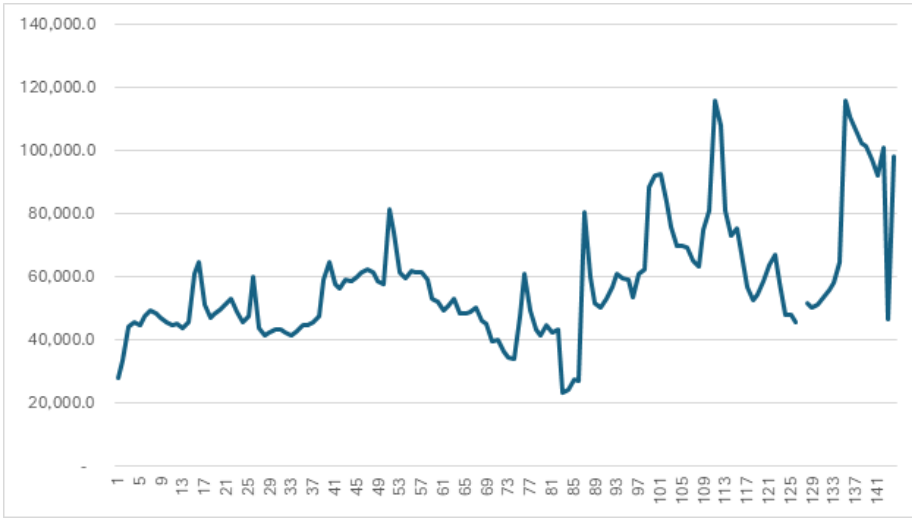

Figure 6: Fluctuations in cashmere prices (x1000 MNT), 2011-2021 (Undral 2023)

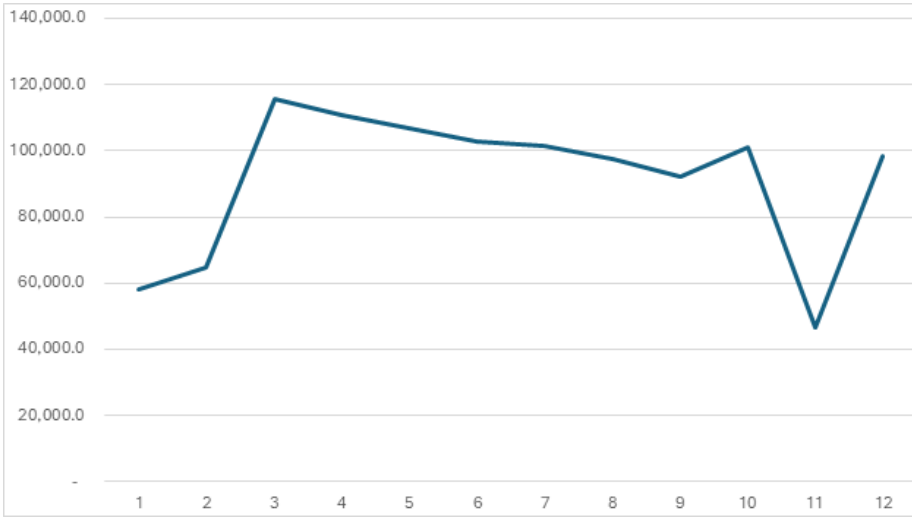

Figure 7: Fluctuations in cashmere prices (x1000 MNT), 2021 (Undral 2023)

There have been efforts in Mongolia to streamline cashmere trade, with the establishment of the Mongolian Agricultural Commodity Exchange in 2013, price premiums to incentivise herder enrolment in cooperatives, and pilot single-desk buyer systems in some districts. These interventions have not created a futures system with guaranteed floor prices for herders, and do not address pricing inequalities by region or time in the season. An ADB single-desk pilot with Sor Cashmere, for example, brought only a 2% improvement over the market price offered to herders (Kimura, Sedik, and Ayurzana 2022). Additionally, policy interventions in Mongolia can only have a limited impact on domestic commodity prices, which are heavily influenced by global markets.

Herders point out that they have minimal control over sustainability in and of the broader pastoral economy. As the herder quoted above notes, animal products such as hides are now being discarded, but not out of a lack of "will to improve" on the part of herders. While development projects and resource management interventions, drawing on the insights of Commons Theory, attempt to promote sustainable resource use by matching herder communities to rangeland resources under their own direct control, such efforts are of limited use in addressing structural constraints to sustainability.

Herders frequently raise concerns about larger-scale, more powerful resource actors—notably mines—whose actions negatively impact the sustainability of mobile pastoralism. Roads, railways, and transmission lines serving mines transect the landscape, introducing risks of vehicle-livestock collisions or covering entire valleys with dust, preventing grazing by livestock. While these forms of linear infrastructure do not necessarily occupy large amounts of space, their impact on mobility can be significant. Even at a distance from mines, herders complain of polluted water supplies, depleted aquifers, reduced precipitation due to cloud seeding allegedly undertaken to reduce dust at mine sites, livestock being startled by repeated explosions, as mentioned in the quotes below, and desertification brought about by mines—pointedly not by livestock:

Хэцүү байна. Энэ говь руу уурхай гарах гээд байгаа. Тэрнээс болж энэ цөлжилт болж, бороо ус орохгүй байна.

It's tough. Here in the Gobi they are trying to develop mines. As a result, there is desertification, there isn't any rain.

Манай энэ говь цөлжилт их явагдаад байгаа. Тэрнээс болж бороо хур бага орж байж магадгүй. Уул уурхай, үүл соролт гээд л янз бүрийн зүйлээс л болдог байх. Сүүлийн үед бороо орохоо байлаа. Манай сум урагшаа их элсэрхэг. Уг нь дэрс их урт ургадаг байж байгаад цөлжилт их явагдсанаас болж элсэндээ дарагдаад бараг харагдахаа больсон.

We are experiencing a lot of desertification in the Gobi here. It's possible that we are getting less rain because of that. It's probably due to a lot of things, like mines and cloud seeding. In the past few years it has stopped raining. Our district is very sandy in the southern part. Before, tall feathergrass used to grow there, but with desertification it has been buried by the sand, and you can hardly

see it anymore.

Ямааны ноолуур төдийгүй маш олон зүйлд уул уурхай нөлөөлж, амьтны таваарлаг чанарыг бууруулж байгаа. Эндхийн салхины дээд талаас Идрэнгийн нуруу, Цагаан богд зэрэг газарт уул уурхай эрхэлж, байнга тэсэлгээ хийж байгаагаас шалтгаалаад агаар асар муухай болж байгаа.

Mining affects not just cashmere, but many other things, making it less comfortable for animals. Upwind from here, at Idrengiin Nuruu and Tsagaan Bogd, there is mining with constant explosions, which is causing the air to be extremely bad!

We did not specifically ask about climate change in our interviews, but several herders in Ikh Tamir brought it up, asserting that "we don't have a real summer any more":

Бараг 2 улиралтай болчих гээд, зуны улирал гэж байхгүй болоод байгаа юм биш үү. Яагаач үгүй намар болчхоод, өвөл нь ч мэдэгдэхгүй, хавар нь ч мэдэгдэхгүй. Зун бол 6 сард л нэг жаахан нар үзэх юм даа. Тэгээд буцаад хүйтрээд өглөө, оройдоо сэрүүхэн. Бороо ч гэсэн шал өвөр, оройтож орно.

It's almost as though we have only two seasons now, aren't we no longer having summers? We definitely have autumn, then winter is unnoticeable, spring is also unnoticeable. With summer, we see a little bit of sun in June. Then it starts to get colder again, cool in the mornings and evenings. The rains are completely different too, coming too late.

Such herder observations are consistent with Mongolia's Third National Communication to the UNFCCC, which reports a decline in average annual precipitation of 7% over the period 1940–2015 and an average temperature increase of over 2 degrees, but with more intensive precipitation and heat events, and significant regional variation representing high standard deviation in these outcomes (Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Mongolia 2018). These changes put Mongolia at much higher risk than the global average of drought, vegetation loss, and extreme wintertime weather events, contributing to a reduction in the resilience of grasslands to livestock grazing at current stocking levels and the likelihood of biomass and biodiversity loss. From this perspective, outsider claims that herders themselves are "decimating" rangelands may be perceived as disingenuous.

Some herder comments also reflect an ethics-based interpretation of climate change, as in the following quote, which references "wrong relationships" with nature:

Маш их өөрчлөлт гарсан. Нэг жил сайхан гарсан байхад намар нь цав цагаан болчихдог, нэг жил гантай байхад намар учиргүй бороо нүдээд унадаг. Байгаль, цаг уурын өөрчлөлт маш их байна. Бороо ороод байдаг ч газар нь дэвтдэггүй, тэгээд элсээр эргээд байдаг. Энийг би малын тоо толгойн асуудал гэж боддог. Хоёрдугаарт байгаль орчинтойгоо буруу харьцаж байгаагаас болж байна гэж бодож байна. Учиргүй мод түлээ

тайрдаг, хаана юу байна бүгдийг нь ухдаг нь их буруу. Өмнө нь амьдарч болоод байсан газраа одоо амьдарч болохоо байчхаад байна шүү дээ. Хоорондоо тэрсэлдэх зан Монголчуудад маш их гарч байна.

There has been a lot of change. One year starts off nicely, then by autumn everything is white, in another year it starts off with a drought then in fall torrents of rain come down. There are huge changes in nature and in the climate. It rains but the ground doesn't get saturated, instead it swirls around as sand. I think this is due to livestock numbers. But it is also caused by people having a wrong relationship with nature. It is wrong that people cut down trees everywhere, and dig up whatever they can find in the ground. We used to be able to live here, but can't anymore. Conflict-seeking behaviour is growing among Mongolians.

Similar themes are reflected in comments on the future of pastoralism and the role of the younger generation within it. On the one hand, several herders reported that their children were tightly integrated into the herding economy, notably coming to help with combing goats and similar work during weekends and school breaks. On the other hand, many herders expressed ambivalence about the future in ways that directly indicate a sense that nomadic pastoralism, as a way of life, is becoming less and less sustainable:

Ээ мэдэхгүй. Ер нь энэ нүүдлийн соёл, аж ахуй л гэж яриад байна. Яваандаа фермер лүү л орох болов уу гэж бодож байна. Бэлчээр гэж байхгүй болно.

I'm not sure. We talk about nomadic culture and pastoralism. Eventually I think we will all shift to farming [sedentary livestock production]. There won't be any rangelands left.

Income from cashmere supported investments in university tuition and apartments in the city, supporting children's shift into urban life:

Бага хүү одоо 6-р ангид орно. Энэ малчин болгон гээд би болгохгүй гээд байж л байна. Аав хурдан морь уядаг болохоор ген нь байдаг юм байлгүй хурдан моринд их дуртай. Тэгээд хөдөө гаргана, гаргахгүй гээд л байна даа.

Our youngest son is starting grade six. [My husband] wants to train him to be a herder, but I say we shouldn't. His father trains horses so he probably has it in his genes, he likes racehorses. So we are discussing whether to send him out to the countryside or not.

Ethics

Through our field interviews, we considered how conceptions of ethics within Mongolian pastoral society, and virtue ethics specifically, might contrast with the ethical frameworks that underpin so-called "sustainable cashmere." Virtue is broadly captured in the Mongolian concept of *buyan*. This term derives from *puṇya*, Sanskrit for "merit,"

an important element of Buddhist ethics, where it refers to the beneficial results, including happiness, that accrue through virtuous deeds and thoughts. In various ways, herders established an association between prosperity and *buyan*, abundance and merit:

Малын буянд зарим нь аймаг, сум, хот хүрээндээ байр савтай болж байна

Thanks to the *buyan* of the animals, some people have been able to acquire apartments in the *aimag*, *sum*, or city.

Хоршооны буянаар энэ жил ноолууpаа сайхан өндөр үнэтэй борлуулсан

Thanks to the *buyan* of the cooperative we were able to sell our cashmere at a nice, high price this year.

Дээр үеийн хүмүүс ямааг буяны аргамж гэдэг байсан. Тийм учраас бүр мөсөн арилгахгүй.

The old people used to call goats *buyany argamj*, merit-tether, which is why we must still keep them.

In a more literal, religious sense, herders expressed *buyan* as connected with a spiritually inflected landscape, with monuments constructed to maintain visible ties with the ancestors and the other-than-human inhabitants of the place. The following interviewee described the importance of Amarbuyantyn Khüree, a monastery that has been restored in recent years, during a visit to a ceremony and festivities involving herders from across the province:

Одоо энэ 108 суваргыг бол сүүлийн 2 жилд ган гачигтай, цаг төр хэцүү байсан ч гэсэн нутгийн зан олон тал талаас нь дэмжээд, хүний буян сүсэг гэдэг бол хүчтэй юм. Дан суварга гэлтгүй хашаа барьсан юм байна. Би анх удаа ирж байна. Бид нарын өвөг дээдсийн дурсгалд зориулаад бас сувargууд босгосон байдаг, тэрэндээ мөргөх гэж ирж байгаа юм.

These 108 stupas here [i.e., the Monastery], even though times have been tough these past couple of years, with drought and so on, the people of this homeland (*nutag*) have supported it in all ways—people's *buyan* and belief are that strong. It isn't just stupas, they also built a wall [around the Monastery]. This is my first time coming here. There are also stupas here that have been built to honour the memory of our ancestors, and we have come here to offer our prayers to them.

Liberality (*ögöömör bayan*) was repeatedly evoked as a virtue by members of Bodijav's cooperative in Bayangovi, who praised both Bodijav's accumulation of wealth and his selfless redistribution of earnings within the community. In a Weberian Protestant-capitalist virtue ethics, wealth is generally associated with virtue if it comes about through ongoing hard work, thrift, and efficiency. In Mongolia, however, we see strong semantic associations of wealth—including livestock—with natural abundance and the

inherent "virtue" of animals themselves (*malyn buyan*). From a semiotic perspective, it is significant that one in twenty-five Mongolian place names, by our calculation, include some variation of the word *bayan*, the Mongolian term for "rich" or "plentiful." *Bayan* forms part of compound terms meaning desert oasis (*bayan bürd*), a large and prosperous family (*önör bayan*), a sheep's uterus (*bayan sav*), a good autumn (*bayan namar*) or good year (*bayan jil*), and a secure and prosperous life or condition (*bayan tsatgalan*). Mongolian ideas of wealth thus fit within a broader category of semantic associations with abundance and pleasure as something that is positive, auspicious, and fundamentally natural.

Prosperity, natural abundance, liberality, and good relations with the non-human world thus come across in some of our interviews as indicators of virtue and happiness that are inherent to nomadic culture. Mongolian herder commentaries suggest that cultural sustainability, driven by a sense of living a virtuous life, is a central element of well-being. Put even more strongly, some of our respondents suggested that herders were the sole bearers of virtue in Mongolia, with people in the city turning their back on the land, their culture, and the "good ways" of living respectfully in the world.

Happiness is often directly tied to place. For example, this older woman from Bayangovi expresses a connection to place through her parents and ancestors, the sacred mountain that protects her and her children, and the happiness of being together with livestock:

> *Нутаг орноороо бахархалгүй яах вэ дээ. Манайх чинь говь, хөдөө хосолсон сайхан нутагтай. Энэ сайхан Богд ууландаа их бахархаж байдаг. Үеийн үед өвөг дээдсийн минь амь нь оршуулсан, алтан өлгий нутаг. Сүү саалиа өргөөд, үр хүүхдээ даатгаад байх нь миний ганц бахархал байгаа юм даа. Нас ахиад ирэхээр хэдэн мал хариулаад ингээд явж байх нь хөгшин хүнд сайхан юм даа. Хэчнээн бүжиг наадам, дуу хуур, тоглоом ирж байсан ч ер нь тэгээд мал хараад явж байх шиг сайхан юм байхгүй юм аа. Нүд мудаад, чих дүлийрээд ирэхээр тэгэх юм.* (Bayangovi, b 1948)
>
> Of course, I am proud of my homeland! We have a nice homeland, with gobi and grassland together. I am proud of this fine Bogd mountain. This here is my golden cradle, where generations of my ancestors have been buried. The one thing I take pride in is being able to give offerings of milk, for the protection of my children. As I get older, [I think] it is nice for someone old like me to be able to look after a few animals like this. No matter how many concerts and festivals and games there are, really there is nothing as nice as being able to go along looking after the animals. As your eyes get worse and your ears get a bit deaf, that's what it's like.

Others spoke of well-being in terms of the natural environment, mentioning that happiness was seeing the vegetation in the desert after the rain, or the combination of mountains and rivers in the *khangai*:

> *Бороо хур сайхан орвол говь нутаг ч ургамал ногоо нь сайхан л даа.*

If we get a good rain, even in the Gobi the vegetation is nice! (Bayangovi)

Манай нутаг бол уул, ус нь тэгширсэн арын сайхан хангай нутаг. Манай энд бол бүх юм нь бүрэлдсэн сайхан газар. Үүгээрээ л бахархдаг.

Our homeland is the fine northern *khangai*, a perfect combination of mountains and waters. This place of ours is a nice land, that has everything. We take pride in that. (Ikhtamir)

Finally, we see a connection between happiness, culture, and sustainability in comments on the material, archaeological heritage of the landscape. In the following quote, a herder comments that they are happy to live alongside cultural monuments from the past, suggesting they are inspired by this heritage but also consider themselves stewards of these diverse monuments that date back to the Bronze Age and have remained intact, due to the low-impact nature of nomadic pastoralism, to this day:

Одоо бид нарын энд харж байгаа хүн чулуун хөшөө нь бид нарын амьдралтай зэрэгцэн оршиж байгаа нэг хэсэг гэж байгаа байхгүй юу. Хөдөө тал нутаг Их Тамирын соёлын хөшөөнүүд Архангайд их байна, тэгээд 582 онд Чонон хөшөө гарч ирсэн тэгэхээр энэ газар нутаг, хүн амьтан байгалиа их сайхан хамгаалж байна, түүх соёлынхоо өвтэй зэрэгцэн оршиж байна, түүх соёлоо хамгаалаад явж байна гэдэг талаар сурталчилбал гоё болно. (Ikhtamir)

The ancient [turkic] statues we see around here are a one part of the world around us, that we live in. There are many monuments from the Ikh Tamir culture located in the steppe in Arkhangai, then there is the Wolf Monument discovered from the year 582. So it would be nice if we could advertise that the people in this area are protecting nature well, that they live alongside their historical and cultural heritage and are protecting their history and culture. (Ikhtamir)

Cashmere in the Pluriverse

This brief exploration of "sustainable cashmere" in Mongolia suggests several issues that can be highlighted through a postdevelopment approach. These include the discursive representation of Mongolian herders as part of brand narratives that describe underdevelopment and a need for improvement; the framing of the "overgrazing problem" as a technical issue to be solved by expert planning, rather than as an aspect of a wicked problem for governance; and the obscuring of both political-economic and ethical concerns that are widely discussed by herders, but absent from a discourse that is primarily controlled by outsiders. As postdevelopment theorists argue, development organisations tend to have a fairly narrow view of what "development" means—mainly, poverty reduction through economic growth—which typically ignores the cultural factors that actually give meaning to our lives. Yet the broader social context reveals that the actual ethical or sustainability challenges are not technical at all, so much as political, ethical, and cultural, and at a broader scale than the individual herder, household, or community.

A reframing of development (and sustainability) with reference to local conceptions of ethics, virtue, and well-being is consistent with the "design for the pluriverse" approach advocated by Escobar, and may empower nomadic herders to seek social inclusion in ways that go against the grain of status construction through unsustainable patterns of urban consumption. Our field research indicates that herders themselves often identify cultural sustainability with issues of culture change and perceived culture loss—such as the widely cited abandonment of oxcarts, in recent years, in favour of trucks for moving the yurt and livestock between camps (Mijid *et al*. 2024). We see this disappearing oxcart technology listed among the properties on Mongolia's national list of Intangible Cultural Heritage, but we also see a wide range of other practices that remain vibrant and deeply rooted in "nomadic culture" (Mongolia, Minister of Education, Culture, Science, and Sport 2019). Some of these are relatively new, "invented" traditions perhaps, like camel races and camel polo. Others, like felt art and embroidery, are flourishing in commodified form. These elements are arguably unrelated to goats and cashmere, or to sustainability and "development" for that matter, but as living traditions they are intertwined with nomadic livestock production and the intangible forms of well-being it provides. Celebrating this cultural heritage suggests itself as a potential "counter-branding" strategy for self-representation and the assertion of cultural value within and alongside market channels, not just by small-scale cashmere labels, but also by communities, NGOs, governments, and other collectivities. Ultimately, a postdevelopment approach encourages us to imagine a world after development, grounded by culture and well-being.

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INTRODUCING THE MONGOLIAN MEAT STANDARD: WHAT CAN MONGOLIA TEACH THE WORLD ABOUT MEAT PRODUCTION?

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Abstract: As global demand for meat increases, so, too, do anxieties about the way animals are raised and exploited in industrialised meat production systems. Questions of ethics, sustainability, health, and climate impact make meat a highly valued but ambiguous foodstuff. This paper asks what Mongolia might offer a world plagued with meat production issues and ever-homogenising tastes. Instead of looking to meet foreign standards—as meat and livestock producers in Mongolia are generally encouraged to—this paper flips the script to imagine a world where Mongolia leads the way in setting the standard for ethical and sustainable meat production. In this reimagining, the Mongolian Meat Standard becomes the certification that meat producers around the world aspire to attain.

Keywords: Mongolian Meat Standard; regenerative agriculture; nomadic pastoralism; livestock revolution; sustainable meat production; meat certification; rangeland management; animal welfare

Reimagining the World

The inspiration for this paper comes from the space between the world that we live in today and another potential world, one that exists in the authors' imaginations. Regardless of whether this imagined world ultimately comes to be or not, like all imagined worlds it still has the capacity to have concrete effects on the "real world." For, as people act in anticipation, they generate particular futures; they start to make them happen (Da Col and Humphrey 2012; Empson 2020; Fox 2019). The potential world the authors imagine is one in which the drive to make global meat production more ethically and environmentally sustainable leads entrepreneurs, governments, and farmers to look to Mongolia for an example of a longstanding, holistic, regenerative livestock agriculture system. Furthermore, this is a world in which consumer tastes for meat prioritise *terroir*, variety, and texture, and the leading concern in farmed livestock welfare is respect for animals' independence and sociality. In this imagined world, Mongolian meat stands as a beacon of taste and quality, and nations around the world look for ways to reproduce Mongolian meat production methods at home.

Fragments of our imagined world do already exist in the real world. Many activists and consumers are discontented with the industrialised farming system that dominates global food production. Meat eating is reported to be one of the most climate-unfriendly

activities humans undertake in their daily lives (FAO 2006); environmentalist movements routinely encourage people to reduce or even remove meat from their diets (Garnett et al. 2017). While a wholesale global shift to vegetarianism is beyond the realms of possibility, questions of ethics and environmental impact do already feature in consumers' decision making, and international environmental target setting has prompted states to initiate more green-focused agricultural policies (EIT Food 2024).

On the other hand, as the "livestock revolution" continues, overall demand for meat around the world shows few signs of slowing and Mongolia is beginning to awaken to the role it could play as a meat producer on the international market (UNCTAD 2021a; UNCTAD 2021b). Already home to a favourable ratio of animals to humans, with approximately twenty times more heads of livestock than people (FAO 2024; World Fact Book 2024), private and state-led initiatives to revitalise the meat export sector and intensify meat production have begun to pick up steam (Adiya 2022; AKIPress 2024). The models for this new era of Mongolian meat production invariably come from abroad, with international consultants of all kinds being brought in to teach Mongolian farmers and businesspeople how to raise, fatten, and process animals to various international standards. The aim is to produce meat that fits international consumers' expectations and to encourage already-changing domestic tastes, particularly in urban centres, towards farmed meat, foreign cuts and new cooking methods.

Without seeking to disparage the importance of the revitalisation of Mongolia's livestock sector, nor its significant potential in the necessary work of diversifying the country's economy away from today's overreliance on mineral extraction, this paper nevertheless makes the observation that the rush to adapt Mongolian meat production to foreign standards and tastes could risk throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. We suggest that Mongolia first recognise that it is already producing a distinctly valuable type of meat that is brought into being through a particular arrangement of ecological conditions and dedicated labour. Unlike the various schemes that certify the production conditions and qualities of other Mongolian products of animal origin, such as cashmere and wool, we note that no such standard exists for meat in Mongolia. This paper thus outlines what Mongolia might offer to teach the world when it comes to sustainable meat production and presents a working draft of what a Mongolian Meat Standard could constitute.

Methodology

If the inspiration for this paper comes from imagining another world, the research it is based on is anything but imaginary. For the past two years, this paper's authors have dedicated themselves to understanding Mongolia's meat industry from as many angles as possible. Over the course of five months of dedicated field research, we have interviewed herders, middlemen (*mahni chenj* [often women]), slaughterhouse workers, veterinarians, market traders, farmers, international consultants, and more. We have visited a range of sites involved in the meat trade, including rural and urban livestock and meat markets, feedlots and finishing centres, herder's encampments, crop farms and agriculture departments. We have also spoken to meat consumers from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and of various ages. Our findings draw on hours of semi-structured

recorded interviews and days of participant observation with our interlocutors**.** Over the course of our research, we have encountered a range of opinions regarding livestock production, pasture management and the future of the meat industry. There is great debate over how to revitalise the Mongolian meat sector; this is a contribution to that debate.

Mongolia and the Livestock Revolution

The history of modern Mongolia is often framed in reference to its three major political revolutions: the revolutions of 1911 and 1921 during which the country first threw off its Qing colonial administrators and then established itself as the world's second people's republic, and the revolution of 1990 when young professionals and intellectuals led protests that brought down the socialist government, ushering in the present era of democracy and market capitalism. Each of the three revolutions brought major changes to Mongolia's social organisation and land and livestock management (Sneath 2003). In the pre-revolutionary period, grazing rights of nomadic pastoralist commoners were administrated by local lords; under socialism, the pasture belonged to the state and livestock were collectivised; in today's "age of the market," private herds graze on public pasture. Widely praised as a democratic "oasis" wedged between autocracies, Mongolia's post-revolutionary political system has thus far stood the test of time. Nevertheless, as is the case around the world, a new revolution is also taking place in Mongolia: a livestock revolution.

The phenomena known as the "livestock revolution" was first identified in 1999 and refers to the growth in demand for food of animal origin that accompanies population growth, rising *per capita* incomes, and urbanisation, particularly in "developing" countries (Delgado *et al*. 2001). The International Food Policy and Resource Institute (IFPRI) report that coined the term referred to the situation as a *revolution* to highlight the fact that this growth in demand for meat, dairy and eggs would—and already was—having significant and transformatory consequences for agricultural production systems around the world. Seeking to meet ever-growing dietary demands has seen global meat production quadruple since 1961 (Ritchie *et al*. 2019; OECD/FAO 2023). This growth has been particularly significant in Asia, where demand has not only skyrocketed but meat production has risen to 15 times its 1961 level (Ritchie *et al*. 2019).

Mongolia's role in the global livestock revolution thus far has been relatively limited. Prevented from exporting most raw meat products due to an absence of disease-free status among other logistical barriers, the country has not yet managed to truly capitalise on its neighbours' demands for more meaty diets (IMF 2019). Nevertheless, with a population of 70 million animals and a quarter/a third of the citizenry already making a living through livestock husbandry, the incentives and nascent possibility for Mongolia to develop a viable meat industry that can overcome current export challenges are substantial. While Mongolia may not yet have reached its potential when it comes to meat export, awareness of international demands is already generating a livestock revolution in Mongolia.

Mongolia's contemporary livestock revolution differs from those of its neighbours mostly due to contrasts in starting conditions. Firstly, Mongolian diets have long been

heavily reliant on food of animal origin and secondly, livestock production in the form of extensive pastoralism has always been the bedrock of the domestic economy. In other words, due to longstanding environmental and cultural factors, the central aspects of the livestock revolution were already present in Mongolia: meat and dairy-centric diets and a focus on raising livestock as a food source. Given this, Mongolia's domestic livestock revolution is taking a rather particular form. This is because it is driven primarily by the effects of increasing urbanisation and the impact of urban demands for meat to be available year-round, less chewy, and include Western-style cuts of meat like steaks, and, secondarily, by the goal of re-establishing a large-scale meat export sector at some point in the future. The result is a shift from extensive to intensive livestock production, from pasture- to fodder-finished animals, and from native to imported or cross-bred animals.

Recent trends in the Mongolian Livestock Sector

At this point, Mongolia's livestock revolution remains relatively limited in scale, as nomadic pastoralism and traditional butchery continue to dominate the meat market. Mongolia currently has 98 slaughterhouses and 80 meat processing factories, operating at less than 10% of their installed capacity (Lhagvadulam 2023). Over the last five years, an average of 35.7 thousand tons of meat have been processed using industrial methods, which accounts for 6.2% of the meat prepared from agriculture. Nevertheless, a growing number of farms are being set up across the countryside, including two large beef farms established in the past five years by the country's biggest commercial groups, MCS and Tavan Bogd, respectively. Furthermore, in 2022 the Mongolia president, U. Khurelsukh, launched his flagship initiative: the Food Revolution (*Hünsnii Huvisgal*), a programme which aims to fully satisfy Mongolia's domestic needs in 19 main food products and to position Mongolia as an exporting country in the region. The Food Revolution also includes a focus on the development of intensive animal husbandry near urban and agricultural areas, with the goal of increasing the number of cattle in the country by 30%, including 50,000 beef cattle and 50,000 dairy cattle (https://hunsniihuvisgal.mn).

Whatever Mongolia's industrial livestock sector currently lacks in terms of scale—current data suggests there are about 35,000 cattle in 350 beef farms and roughly 35,000 sheep in 90 farms—it certainly makes up for in terms of widespread interest, enthusiasm, and potential. A recent conference set up by the Ministry of Agriculture on beef farming that expected to attract 100 or so attendees was completely overrun when over 500 businesspeople and aspiring entrepreneurs descended in their Landcruisers on the event. If the business scene of the 1990s and 2000s was dominated by an explosion in mining companies, these days it's said that anyone who has made money from mining is now turning to the meat industry.

Urbanisation factors into this trend in a number of ways. Urbanites, whether individual consumers or food businesses, demonstrate increasing demand for the softer, more-marbled meat that farmed, fodder-finished animals produce, and for Western-style cuts of meat, particularly steaks. Furthermore, recent regulatory changes, such as the incoming law (Parliamentary Resolution 224, 2022) that requires all schools, kindergartens and government offices to serve meat processed in a factory (Lhagvadulam 2023), for example, are further incentivising the formalisation and industrialisation of Mongo-

lia's meat sector.

While there are plenty of incentives for Mongolians to pursue the rewards promised by the global livestock revolution, a wholesale shift to industrialised, intensified meat and dairy production risks causing the country to overlook another significant trend in global farming: regenerative agriculture.

Regenerative Agriculture

Industrial agriculture has undoubtedly enabled greater numbers of people to access the vital nutritional benefits of foods of animal origin than would otherwise be possible (Leroy *et al.* 2023). Innumerable innovations in crop production, veterinary health, farming technologies, and plant and animal genetics have made the livestock revolution possible. The bodies of animal species have been radically transformed to maximise their capacities as food for human consumption, while the science of livestock feed pushes new boundaries in the search to shave margins off the costs of livestock production (Kessler *et al*. 2023). Without these advances there is no doubt the world would be a hungrier place. And yet, despite these important benefits, there is a growing recognition that intensive agriculture comes with serious costs. Indeed, the environmental effects of industrial livestock production may be so severe that the sector's contribution to the ongoing climate crisis eventually undermines its capacity to produce food. As a recent report stated, "there is a recognition that our conventional agriculture system is on the verge of collapse, while also threatening the health and availability of our natural resources" (EIT Food 2024: 4). Among the numerous critics of contemporary industrial agriculture, one is particularly relevant to the Mongolian livestock sector: the recognition that industrial livestock production relies, in fact, on an inefficient use of land and other resources.

This is the claim made by proponents of an alternative model to industrial farming, namely regenerative agriculture. They point out that using 38% of the world's arable croplands to grow feed for animals is not only nutritionally inefficient but also compounds the negative environmental effects of intensive agriculture (from pesticide use/overuse to topsoil destruction by aggressive ploughing) with the climate impacts of industrial meat production (which accounts for 15% of global emissions) (Ritchie and Roser 2019). Rather than advocating meat-free diets, regenerative farmers argue that instead of packing animals into farms and feeding them grain, livestock can be an integral part of sustainable, environmentally responsible agriculture. These conditions include: using pasture or rangeland that is ill-suited to cropping for the rotational grazing of livestock, allowing animal droppings to act as natural fertilizer on the grasslands to support soil biodiversity, and raising native breeds that are well-adapted to local climates and require fewer veterinary interventions.

For many of the world's nations who have long been reliant on industrial agriculture, moving to regenerative models represents a daunting and costly enterprise, even if the benefits are potentially great. For Mongolia, the situation is quite the opposite. The principles outlined above, of course, simply reiterate what Mongolia's nomadic pastoralists are already doing.

The Tastes of Mongolian Meat

Interviews conducted across Mongolia reveal a few key trends in how people feel about meat. Some opinions are practically universal: meat is a central foodstuff in Mongolian people's diets, meat produced from animals raised by herders in the countryside is Mongolian meat, and Mongolian meat tastes the best. Mongolian, herder-raised meat is considered to taste the best because it carries the taste of the pasture: the traces of the herbs and grasses that the animal grazed for its lifetime. These tasty traces, enjoyable in their own right, are also widely seen as evidence of meat's nutritional value—as a means for humans to access the health benefits of the pasture's multitudinous grasses, which would otherwise be inaccessible via our human digestive systems. That said, people vary greatly in terms of which herby tastes they appreciate in their meat, and how strong or subtle they prefer such flavours to be. In general, in Mongolia taste preferences are not expressed with references to specific plants or herbs, but in terms of *where* the meat originates. That is because it is common knowledge in Mongolia that meat from different regions tastes different.

The fact that the vast majority of Mongolians are aware that meat from different regions tastes different, that most are able to identify at least a couple specific regional grasses and herbs that produce distinct flavours in meat, and the fact that preferences for the presence or absence of herb flavours shapes people's meat consumption habits demonstrates the unbroken link between the country's pastures and its meat production system. As they grow up, Mongolians develop preferences for meat with particular regional flavour characteristics, often preferring the meat of their rural homelands (*nutag*). This is a connection that has arguably been lost in countries with long industrialised meat production histories, where questions of animals' domestic grazing locations certainly do not feature as highly in consumers' concerns.

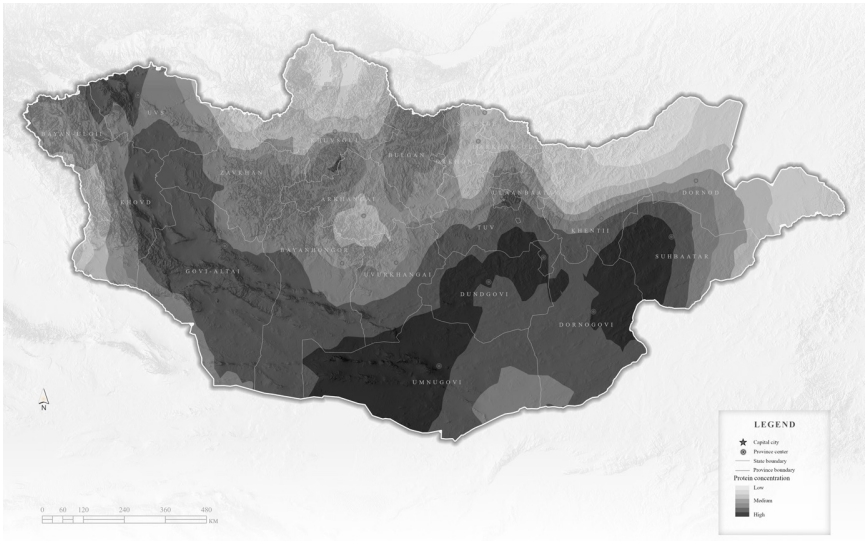

Figure 1: Protein Concentration in Livestock Dung (following Gombosuren and Sainbayar 2012)

As seen in Figure 1, scientific research in Mongolia supports what people already know: the reason why meat from different areas of the country has distinctive flavours is because the composition of the plants on which the animals graze differs, depending on the area's ecological zone, elevation, rainfall, and numerous other factors. Analysis of the dung of livestock demonstrates an inverse relationship between fibre and protein in the animals' diet depending on where in the country they graze (Gombosuren and Sainbayar 2012).

Figure 2 (below) combines these insights about the relative protein content of the livestock's rangeland diet with broadly-held opinions about the strength of the taste of meat from different areas. The map divides Mongolia into three broad ecological zones: mountainous regions where forbs and grass dominate and the meat is described as mild, dry steppe grasslands which produce neutral tasting meat, and shrub-dominated desert regions where the meat tends to be considered stronger tasting. As the map demonstrates, grazing lands which support plant life with a higher protein content seem, in general, to produce more intensely flavoured meat than those where the animals have a more fibrous diet. Certain herbs that grow in the Gobi Desert, such as wild onion (*taan*), also give the meat a very particular taste, sometimes described as sour and pungent.

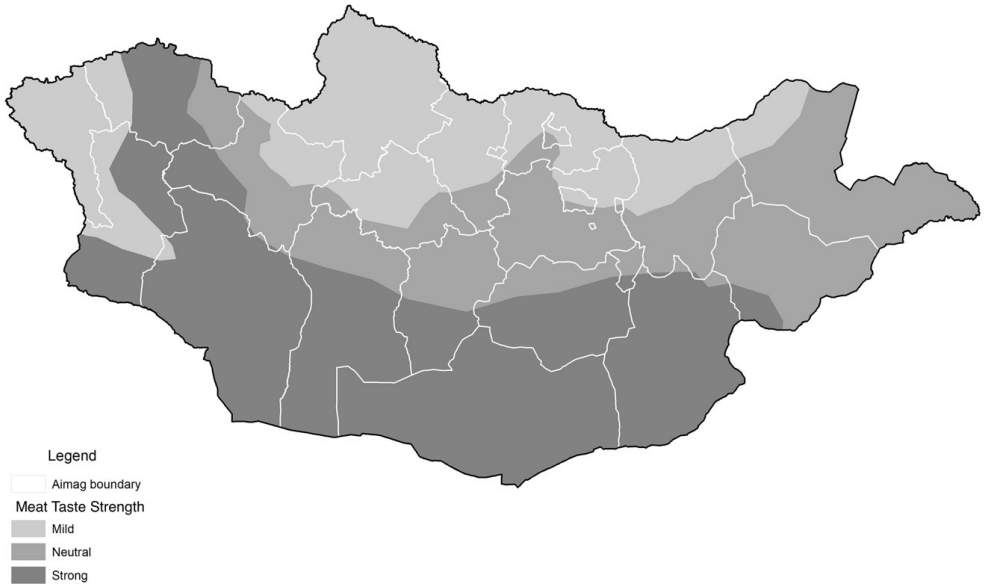

Figure 2: Mongolian Meat Taste Map

The reason that the flavour of animal products from the country's various pasture-lands remain distinctive is because Mongolia's grazing lands are *rangeland*: "natural grasslands composed largely of native wild vegetation" (FCRN 2017: 21). Although the term pasture serves as a useful catch-all for the various lands where livestock graze (and is a common translation for the Mongolian term *belcheer*) it is important to distinguish the Mongolian *range* from other planted and cultivated pastures that are grown and maintained around the world. Until further research can be carried out to evaluate claims

that the biodiversity of wild, native rangeland gives the meat of the livestock that graze it special nutritional, medicinal properties, *flavour* serves as a primary marker of the difference between even pasture-raised and range-raised meat.

Meat Standards in Mongolia

Around the world, innumerable local and international certification and standards regimes exist for foods of animal origin. Some are broad international standards (e.g. HACCP/ISO22000), while others are tied to regional marketing schemes (e.g. AUS-MEAT/Red Tractor); some provide customer assurance regarding religious prohibitions (e.g. Halal/Kosher), while others are aimed at consumers with particular health or ethical concerns (e.g. Organic/Free Range). As Mongolian meat businesses compete on the domestic market, seek out existing export opportunities, or prepare themselves for a future in which the country plays a larger role in the global livestock revolution, they tend to turn to this patchwork of international certification schemes in order to set themselves apart. This paper, however, imagines another world in which international meat producers seek instead to emulate Mongolian animal husbandry and rangeland management in order to produce a product that is as environmentally sustainable and delicious as the meat Mongolia can already produce. If that much of the argument is based on a thought-experiment, the resulting Mongolian Meat Standard is firmly rooted in actual practice. It aims to be a working draft that could plausibly be put forward as a guideline for a form of meat production that offers solutions to the ethical and environmental challenges facing today's intensive meat industries.

Before turning to the general principles of the new meat standard we propose, we must first pause to address what is meant by the term "Mongolian" in Mongolian Meat Standard. Primarily, Mongolian is not intended as a certification of the meat's geographical origin (i.e. it is not a geographical indication [GI] scheme), nor does it circumscribe the ethnic or national identity of the meat's producers (i.e. Mongol/ian people). Instead, Mongolian is used here to refer to the fact that Mongolia is a place where the practices of animal husbandry and meat processing relevant to this study have a long history and continue to be widely practiced. The ethnographic material upon which the Mongolian Meat Standard is based has been collected within Mongolia's borders, but we aim for the standard to transcend Mongolia and to be part of an imagined future where many places in the world produce "Mongolian" meat by adopting the standard's principles.[1]

The Mongolian Meat Standard

The Mongolian Meat Standard is a mark of quality and welfare-assurance that can be applied to meat produced from a range of livestock animals, including cattle, sheep, goats, camels, horses, and yaks. The standard's primary function is to certify that the meat in question comes from an animal that was born and raised on native rangeland and that was cared for in both life and death in accordance with

1 In that sense, the Mongolian Meat Standard is comparable to a Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG) scheme which certifies traditional aspects of a food or agricultural product's composition or production method, without tying it to a specific geographical area. (See https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/farming/geographical-indications-and-quality-schemes/geographical-indications-and-quality-schemes-explained_en#traditional-speciality-guaranteed)

principles of animal husbandry exemplified by Mongolia's nomadic pastoralists. Unlike other cultural contexts where dominion forms the basis of humans' relationships with animals, the Mongolian Meat Standard prioritises respect for the rights of animals to an existence independent of their capacities as meat producers for human consumption. The rights of livestock to graze, socialise, and experience care based on mutual respect are protected. Furthermore, the standard's commitment to range-grazing provides assurance that the meat will deliver the nutritional and taste benefits of being born and raised on wild, native pastureland.

Seven Principles (*Doloon Höl*)

Inspired by traditional Mongolian butchery which divides an animal into seven parts (*doloon höl*), the Mongolian Meat Standard is divided into seven core principles.

I: Natural Reproduction

The Mongolian Meat Standard requires animals to be born and raised on rangeland. Selective breeding is permitted but only via natural insemination. The standard respects the rights of animal mothers to bond with and feed their young, and to live together.

II: Rangeland Diet

The central principle of the Mongolian Meat Standard is to ensure that meat is produced from animals that have eaten a natural and wild-growing diet, and that they have grazed at will on the rangeland, following rotation grazing patterns.

III: Mutual Respect

The Mongolian Meat Standard draws its welfare principles from nomadic pastoralists' long-standing methods of balancing human, animal and environmental co-existence. Animals have the right to a family and social life, to perform their natural behaviours, and to receive lifelong care and respect from their keepers.

IV: Safe and Healthy

The Mongolian Meat Standard provides assurance that animals are free of disease and unnecessary medical intervention. This precludes routine antibiotic use, hormonal growth promotants, and the administration of medicines without veterinary supervision.

V: Humane Slaughter

The Mongolian Meat Standard builds on traditional slaughter welfare principles: it should be fast and cause minimal suffering. Animals must be treated with respect and not subjected to violence during transport or lairage. Where necessary, pre-slaughter stunning must be efficient and humane. Hygiene requirements for slaughterers include regular handwashing, the use of freshly

sharpened knives, and a cleaned or covered "killing floor."

VI: High Quality Processing

The Mongolian Meat Standard recognizes that the treatment of a carcass following slaughter has significant consequences for the quality and taste of the meat. Traditional processing techniques provide the basis for the standard's post-slaughter requirements, especially the vital chilling stage which must take place in a cool and protected environment.

VII: More-than-just-meat

The Mongolian Meat Standard recognises that animals in Mongolia are more than just meat-producers. Livestock bring other material, nutritional, and spiritual benefits to their caretakers, beyond meat. Activities including dairying, riding, racing, spiritual consecration, and use for transportation, are protected.

Steps to Which Future?

The Mongolian Meat Standard outlined in this paper is at once an ethnographic portrait of non-industrial meat production in Mongolia, a genuine suggestion for policy consideration, and a fantasy that highlights "the best" of what the Mongolian meat industry has to offer. It could act as much as an ideal for meat producers in Mongolia, as their foreign counterparts. The motivation to develop the standard is not only to draw attention to what already makes Mongolian meat distinctive, but also to voice our concern regarding the currently trajectory of Mongolia's pursuit for a greater share of the livestock revolution. We suggest that chasing forms of industrialisation whose damaging effects are already well-documented may see Mongolia miss out on alternative futures that are perhaps a better fit for the country's existing ecological and social conditions. We note the irony that just as farmers and policy makers in Mongolia are looking to intensify their meat industry away from its longstanding, regenerative form, some of the world's biggest corporations are pledging their commitments to sustainable agriculture (EIT Food 2024: 11). If the demand for organic, regenerative, and ethical meat products continues to grow, we suggest that Mongolia would do well to anticipate instead the role it could play in this future. Establishing a standard for the range-grazed meat Mongolia already produces, as we have attempted here, could help safeguard vital aspects of nomadic pastoral meat production without precluding efforts to increase its environmental and social sustainability. We suggest that issues such as overgrazing, pasture degradation, animal suffering during transport and at slaughter, and financial precarity among herder households can be addressed in conjunction with support for the existing industry and the unique flavourful meat it already produces.

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HOW CLEAN IS THE STEPPE?
From Nomadic To Modern Ways Of Utilising Various Types Of Waste And Modern Technological Solutions

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Abstract: Traditionally, Mongolian people have lived harmoniously with their surrounding nature. This tradition stems from a nomadic way of life, requiring individuals to live without harming their environment. The United Nations has identified ten challenges facing humanity, including water contamination, human rights violations, climate change, health issues, and access to food, among others. Among these, the challenges posed by the increasing volume of various types of waste from human activity are among the most pressing issues for Mongolian society. Utilising these wastes is a critical factor for the sustainability of cities. It is essential to find sustainable methods for managing these wastes.

In Mongolia, waste volume has risen annually, reaching a staggering 3.3 million tonnes in 2019. Only 7% of this waste is reused or exported, despite more than half being recyclable. Various ashes account for a significant portion of solid waste. In winter, 50% of the solid waste generated in the Ger district consists of coal or briquette ashes. Thermal power plants in Ulaanbaatar city consume 5 million tonnes of coal annually, resulting in over 500,000 tonnes of coal combustion by-products each year.

This paper discusses challenges facing the Mongolian economy and human development, such as air and soil pollution caused by increased waste, including thermal power station and Ger district ashes from coal and coal briquettes. Fly ash, pond ash, or briquette ashes can be utilised in producing geopolymer-type building materials or as adsorbents for hazardous substances in wastewater treatment.

Keywords: Sustainable development, waste, various ashes, value-added utilisation

Advantages of the Nature-Centric Nomadic Culture in Mongolia

An environmentally conscious and respectful approach is the cornerstone of sustainable development in Mongolian society. The rapid growth of a democratic society and a market economy has caused significant shifts in traditional Mongolian values, leading to negative environmental impacts. This issue is central to current discussions, as these changes threaten the ecological balance historically preserved by nomadic culture.

Mongolian nomadic traditions, rooted in long-standing cultural values, offer significant advantages for promoting an environmentally sustainable and orderly way of life.

The primary drivers of Mongolian nomadic culture include the region's highly vari-

able climate across four seasons, low soil fertility, and limited grassland resources. Mongolian scientists note that "prolonged settlement by herders in one location causes soil erosion, rendering the land unsuitable for future use and posing significant risks of ecological degradation. Seasonal migration, aligned with the natural rhythms of the four seasons, has traditionally been the most effective way to mitigate this threat" (Sumya 1999: 74). The key to social and economic development in Mongolia's nomadic pastoral system is the ability of herders and their livestock to live in harmony with natural ecosystems. The sustainability and prosperity of this economy depend on herders' understanding, anticipation, and adaptation to natural laws. Greater knowledge and responsiveness to environmental conditions enhance the system's sustainability. This context shaped Mongolian knowledge, religious practices, customs, rituals, education, traditions, lifestyle, state ethics, and civilisation.

Mongolians developed a unique culture of environmental interaction, based on the worship of heaven, belief in the animistic nature of the environment, and spiritual traditions like shamanism and Buddhism. This cultural framework is reinforced through rituals and a sacred duty to honour the land of their ancestors and the waters they used.

Mongolians have traditionally used natural resources sustainably, guided by a cultural ethos that avoids superstition but strictly prohibits excessive exploitation or environmental destruction. This mindful approach to the environment, natural phenomena, and life events fosters a balanced mindset and lifestyle rooted in creativity and thoughtfulness, which persists in contemporary society.

The seasonal cycles of a nomadic lifestyle—winter, spring, summer, and autumn—do not produce the same negative environmental impacts, such as air pollution, as densely populated urban areas. Although the Mongols established many settlements along the basins of major rivers like the Orkhon and Selenge, their ancestral culture of environmental respect prevented the ecological degradation seen today, including waste accumulation and large-scale pollution. Article 26 of the *Ikh Zasag* (Yassa) states that "anyone capable of maintaining a clean and orderly household can also manage their property responsibly" (Ikh Zasag Khuuli 2006). Several customary norms were codified into law, such as Article 119, which mandates severe punishment, including execution of an individual and their family, for digging holes and setting fire to pastures once the grass has greened. Article 133 of the *Ikh Zasag* prohibits dipping hands directly into water, requiring a dip-bucket to ensure water hygiene. The *Khalkh Juram* included stringent provisions to protect the environment. For example, Article 126 prohibits cutting dry or wet trees or killing animals in or near areas where fences have been repaired. Article 176 mandates that, in case of a fire, each individual, regardless of their number, must provide a horse (Khalkh Juram 1995). These regulations reflect a strong commitment to preserving natural resources and communal responsibility.

Ancient texts, such as *The Secret History of the Mongols* (Mongolyn Nuuts Tovchoo 2004), show no evidence of formal recycling practices among the Mongols. However, this does not mean Mongolians produced no waste. By destroying excess garbage without harming the environment and valuing cleanliness, Mongolia's nature retained its pristine condition. Pastoralism's minimal environmental impact has helped preserve the

original condition of Mongolian lands for millennia.

The most significant aspect of Mongolia's nomadic heritage is the traditional practice of prohibition (taboo, *tseer*), the primary method for fostering habits of living in harmony with nature and maintaining cleanliness by minimising waste. Taboo evokes awe and fear, deeply influencing individuals' cognitive processes and memory. Thus, Mongolians developed a deep respect and reverence for natural phenomena, which became a fundamental motivator for a clean and orderly lifestyle.

Mongolians have historically used natural raw materials—wood, stone, grass, and leather—in daily life, helping prevent waste accumulation. For example, "items like straw sinks, leather shoulder straps, and leather garments, if discarded intact, would persist as waste and pollute the environment. When cut into smaller pieces, these materials decompose more readily through natural processes involving sun, wind, and rain, then leach into the soil" (Erdenetuya 2009: 35).

The belief that celestial entities observe human actions deters environmental harm. This discourages practices like polluting land and water with various wastes, including red and white refuse, or destroying rare plants and wildlife. The notion that "heaven will be angry" fosters a cultural imperative to cultivate a compassionate relationship with nature, instilling knowledge and ethical principles for protecting the environment.

Our ancestors recognised that environmental pollution disrupts nature's balance, adversely affecting human life. They established taboo customs concerning earth, mountains, water, plants, and animals. Violators were believed to incur harm from the "spirits of the land and water" (*lus savdag*). This belief system has fostered a cultural ethos of living in harmony with nature, a fundamental aspect of Mongolian civilisation today.

Nomadic families follow a ritual of leaving no waste on previously occupied land, an unwritten law rooted in custom and Mongolia's intangible cultural heritage. "Herders avoid leaving garbage on their former property or others' land to maintain cleanliness and protect nature. They repurpose waste, sort it, incinerate unnecessary items, and bury the ashes on the old land. This ritual ensures environmental cleanliness" (Nurzed 2015: 171).

For horse stakes, Mongolians primarily use wooden stakes due to their minimal impact on soil integrity. When a stake is removed, the hole is filled with earth to mitigate "land erosion" and restore the soil. During relocation, Mongolians perform rituals to honour nature, cleaning manure, drawing a zero with a stick on the former land, leaving a small amount of ash on a pillar, and offering tea or milk to the earth and sky. These practices reflect reverence for nature. Improper ash disposal is believed to pollute the earth, anger the guardian spirit, and curse the new land. Leaving bones and hair is thought to reduce livestock and prosperity, leading to poverty. These beliefs aim to prevent environmental pollution and littering. Disposing of unclean items—hair, fingernails, mucus, excrement, garbage, ashes, blood, and dirt—is prohibited, as it is believed to anger the "spirits of the land and water," causing harm. Thus, Mongolian nomadic traditions promote environmental sustainability, adherence to natural laws, and a clean, minimal lifestyle. These practices, rooted in traditional beliefs and validated by observation and experience, are

crucial for safeguarding modern civilisation.

Civilisation is a system of values aligned with humanity's collective interests, evolving in response to material and intellectual needs.

What is valuable to one person may not be to another, as items may fulfil one person's needs while exceeding another's. Items exceeding personal necessity should not be indiscriminately classified as waste but assessed based on humanity's broader interests.

In traditional Mongolian culture, "garbage" is the result of human actions that disrupt the natural world and contravene principles of cleanliness, both mental and physical. This is reflected in folk wisdom like "the World's Three" and "the World's Four":

Байдаг ч гэсэн баас нэг бохир
Байгальд ч гэсэн хог нэг бохир
Байшинд ч гэсэн нус нэг бохир
Балайд ч гэсэн мунхаг нэг бохир

Even if common, faeces are still dirty
Even in nature, trash is still dirty
Even in a house, mucus is still dirty
Even in madness, ignorance is still dirt (Sodnom 1964: 190)

Байгаль ертөнцөд новш нэг бохир
Байшин гэрт хог нэг бохир
Баяр наадамд хов нэг бохир

In the natural world, filth is dirty
In the home, trash is dirty
At celebrations and festivals, gossip is dirty (Galsan 2002: 54).

In this oral tradition, beyond physical waste, human ignorance is intellectual garbage, and gossip is emotional garbage. Thus, "garbage" has broad and deep meaning, referring to anything against human and natural nature.

Nature and culture are distinct but interdependent. Nature is the material world evolving independently of human influence. Humans, part of the organic and inorganic worlds, have developed cultural concepts with multifaceted values through evolution. As Choimaa (2012: 128) notes, "Nature and culture are closely connected, even amid conflicts." Without nature, civilisation and human existence would be inconceivable. "Mother" Nature is the foundation of civilisation's origins, survival, evolution, and progress.

Mongolia's wild nature, combined with unique livestock herding practices, has shaped the unique identity and distinct characteristics of Mongolian national culture. However, this tradition is increasingly adapting to modern civilisation. Significant garbage dumps near Ulaanbaatar and other regions highlight that many industries cannot effectively recycle waste, causing environmental degradation. This is driven by human greed, resource misuse, and declining moral standards. The erosion of ethical values has adversely affected nature and society. Morality involves maintaining appropriate

relationships. While human discourse has focused on interpersonal ethics, it has neglected respect for nature, contributing to the ecological crisis. Choimaa (2012: 129) observes, "Humans are both natural and social animals. Today, communication with nature, non-human animals, water, plants, and soil is paramount."

The historical relationship between Mongolians and nature reflects a highly advanced civilisation compared to modern impacts. This is embodied in Mongolia's intangible cultural heritage, involving adoration, respect, and protection of nature, safeguarded by legislation, including the Laws on Culture (1996, 2021) and Cultural Heritage (2001, 2014). In 1990, Mongolia acceded to the "Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage" (UNESCO 1972), committing to preserving global natural and cultural diversity, pressing issues today.

The rapid erosion of cultural traditions in Mongolia is tied to shifts in population values. To promote positive transformations and mitigate negative changes, fostering a minimalistic, simple, and clean lifestyle, preserving Mongolian wisdom for generational education, and enhancing citizens' consciousness of protecting nature will support social sustainability.

The Present Situation and Solutions for Sustainable Waste Utilisation in Mongolia

As discussed earlier, the shift from nomadic to urban lifestyles and economic development has increased various types of waste, including coal combustion by-products from electricity production. This section presents results from Mongolian researchers focused on sustainability and industrial waste utilisation. According to Ulaanbaatar's waste statistics, waste dumping reached 3,353,548 tonnes in 2018, a fourfold increase since 2008 (Ulaanbaatar Household Waste Composition Study 2019). Table 1 shows the annual composition of solid waste in Ulaanbaatar.

In winter, most household waste in the Ger district is ash, unlike apartment areas, where food waste predominates year-round. In summer, 26.5% of Ger district household waste is ash, rising to 75.2% in winter. Research shows these ashes can adsorb hazardous substances from wastewater (Oyun-Erdene *et al*. 2021).

Another major waste type, deposited in ash ponds, is coal combustion by-products. Mongolia, with up to 160 billion tonnes of coal reserves, relies on coal as the cheapest raw material for electricity production. Coal-fired thermal power stations generate over 90% of Mongolia's electricity. Five power plants in the centralised energy system produce heat and electricity, with three in Ulaanbaatar producing over 80% of the nation's electricity (Temuujin 2014).

Mongolia produces over 40 million tonnes of coal and consumes over 8 million tonnes annually, releasing over 800,000 tonnes of coal combustion by-products (Temuujin, Munkhtuvshin, and Ruescher 2021). Utilising this waste aligns with Mongolia's 3R strategy (Reduce-Reuse-Recycle). Waste management trends prioritise prevention, minimisation, recycling, reuse, biological treatment, incineration, and landfill disposal, as shown in Fig. 1.

Table 1. Annual Composition of Solid Waste in Ulaanbaatar in Winter and Summer
(Ulaanbaatar Household Waste Composition Study 2019)

Waste Type	**Percent by Weight**
Food waste	15.7
Glass	9.6
Bathroom waste	5.6
Paper	5.3
Bottles	3.6
Plastic bags and packaging	3.0
Hard plastic (HDPE, LDPE, PVC, etc.)	1.7
Fabric and woven products	1.3
Metal	1.0
Tetrapak cartons	0.8
E-waste	0.2
Other	4.0
Ash	48.2

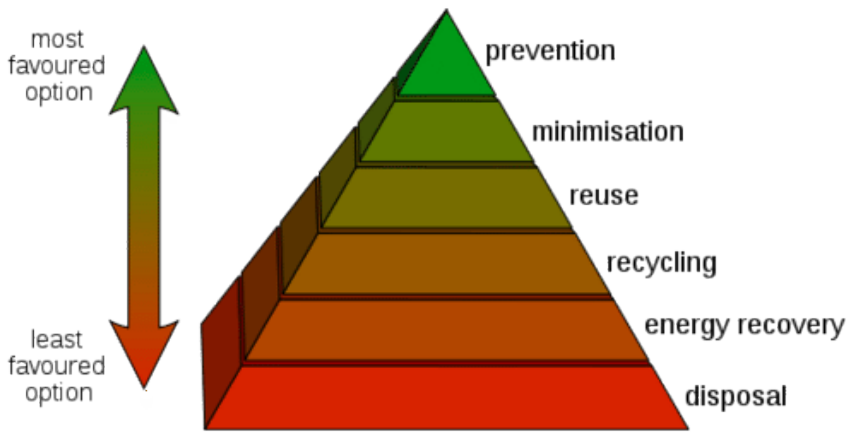

Figure 1. Preferred Strategy of Waste Management (Temuujin 2023).

However, coal combustion by-products, resulting from 90% of electricity production, leave recycling or disposal as the primary strategies. This section highlights results from using coal combustion by-products. Fig. 2 shows the locations of operating thermal power and thermal stations in Mongolia, with six in Ulaanbaatar producing 500,000 tonnes of coal combustion by-products.

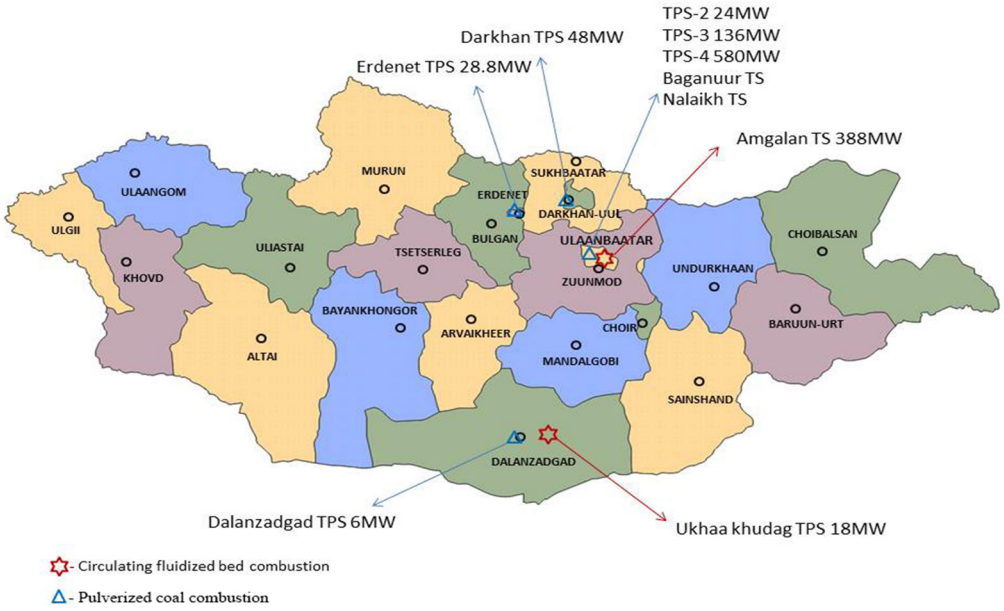

Figure 2. Thermal Power and Thermal Stations Operating in Mongolia

Globally, about 70% of coal combustion by-products are used in building materials like concrete. In Mongolia, fly ashes are primarily used as supplementary cementitious materials. Ordinary Portland cement (OPC) concrete production is environmentally unfriendly due to its carbon footprint, contributing 7% of human-made CO_2 emissions. Thus, alternative uses for fly ash in building materials are needed. Fly ash has two key properties for the building materials industry:

- Its spherical shape improves cement slurry's rheological properties, reducing water content.
- Its amorphous aluminum silicate content reacts with calcium oxide, forming a calcium aluminosilicate phase that enhances concrete strength.

However, fly ash use is inefficient without understanding slag and fly ash structure, combustion temperature, and technological processes. Fly ash generated at high combustion temperatures is generally suitable for the concrete industry.

Use of Fly Ash for Concrete Production

Since the 1930s, following the Hoover Dam construction, fly ash use in the concrete industry has been well-established (ACI 1996). In Mongolia, its use was restricted by strict standards on fly ash radioactivity. However, based on extensive data, Mongolian fly ashes are safe for concrete production if fly ash comprises up to 20% of the concrete mixture's weight (Temuujin *et al*. 2019).

Our research team conducted studies using raw and mechanically activated fly ash. The benefits of mechanically activated fly ash were assessed by comparing compressive strength between raw and activated fly ash-added concretes (Temuujin and Ruescher

2022). Fig. 3 shows compressive strength changes over time for non-fly ash, raw fly ash, and mechanically activated fly ash specimens.

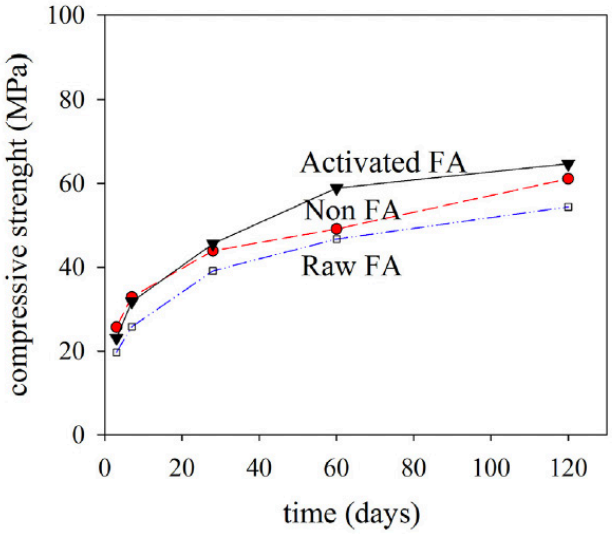

Figure 3. Change of Compressive Strength of Concrete Specimens with Time (Temuujin and Ruescher 2022).

Concrete with activated fly ash shows significantly higher compressive strength at 28, 60, and 120 days compared to non-fly ash concretes. Mechanically activated fly ash substantially enhances concrete strength. Field-trial measurements using core-drilled samples confirmed these findings. Concrete panels (2400 x 1800 x 30 cm) were tested outdoors in winter. Fig. 4 shows the panel as prepared and after winter exposure.

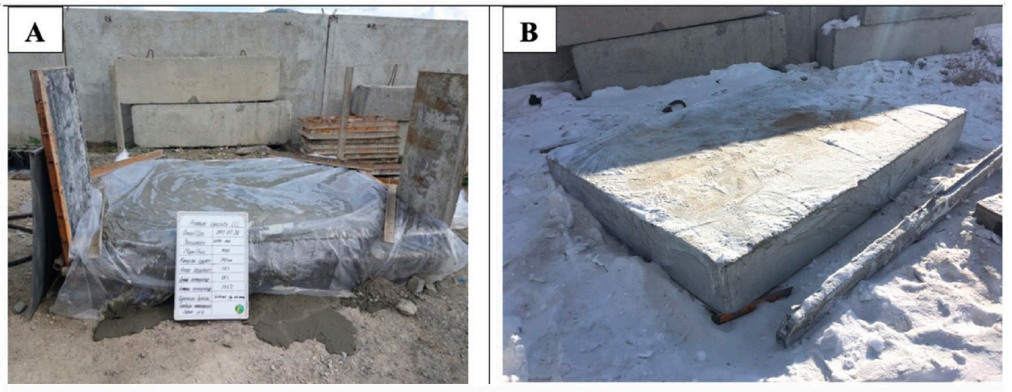

Figure 4. As Prepared Concrete Panel (A) and After Winter Exposure (B) (Temuujin et al. 2021).

Based on long-term results, we revised the National standard for fly ash use in concrete (Temuujin *et al*. 2014), allowing unrestricted use in building materials and saving concrete producers 3–4 billion tugrik annually.

Effective utilisation of coal combustion by-products was also demonstrated in glass ceramics (Bayarzul and Temuujin 2018), zeolite preparation (Rentsennorov et al. 2021), and geopolymer production (Temuujin *et al*. 2023).

Conclusions

Mongolian nomadic culture promotes a low-stress, minimalist lifestyle, supporting environmentally friendly living. Mongolia's wild nature and unique livestock husbandry have shaped its national culture, but this tradition is evolving under modern civilisation's influence. To support positive changes and mitigate negative ones, promoting a minimal, simple, and clean lifestyle, preserving Mongolian wisdom for education, and fostering respect for nature will ensure social sustainability. One of Mongolia's largest wastes, coal combustion by-products, can be recycled for building materials like concrete and geopolymers, as well as advanced applications like zeolite and glass ceramics.

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