HARNESSING FORTUNE
Personhood, Memory, and Place in Mongolia

by
Rebecca M. Empson

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stages and Bat-Ireedui allowed for my affiliation to the National University of Mongolia. I thank them for their support at that vulnerable time. Roseanne, Taivan and Manduhai, Jan, Alan and Wendy, and Huyagaa and Buyant were always welcoming when I needed a break from fieldwork and a space to reflect.

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Permission to reprint or draw on published work

I gratefully acknowledge permission to reprint or draw upon papers published elsewhere:

Rebecca Empson, 'Enlivened Memories: Recalling Absence and Loss in Mongolia', in *Ghosts of Memory: Essays on Remembrance and Relatedness*, ed. Janet Carsten, Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, pp. 58–82.

Rebecca Empson, 'Separating and Containing People and Things in Mongolia', in *Thinking Through Things: Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically*, ed. Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell, London: Routledge, 2007, pp. 113–40.

Note on the Text

Transliteration

The transliteration of Mongolian words appears in italics. Transliteration is from the Cyrillic spelling of the Halh (Khalkh) Mongol dialect and follows Lessing *et al.* (1960). In the case of relatively well-known Mongolian names and words I have used the spelling that is most widely accepted in the English literature, such as *Hori* for *Hor'*, *zaya* for *zayaa*, and *hiimori* for *hiimor'*. I have made changes to the Lessing *et al.* (1960) system in order to allow for a fully Romanized script:

О as O
Ө as Ö
У as U
Ү as Ü
Ё as Yo
Э as E
Е as Ye
Ы as Y
Я as Ya
Х as H
И and Й as i
ь and Ъ as '
Ю as Yu/Yü (depending on conjunction with front/back vowel)
The Buriad use of the letter 'h' has been transliterated as 'h'

Words in the Buriad dialect have been indicated with the shortening 'Bur.' prior to a word. As with many dialects, systems of transliteration differ. In English the term 'Buriad' is often transliterated as 'Buryat' or 'Buriat'. This is a transcription from the Russian Buryat Cyrillic spelling. I have chosen to follow the transcription common in Mongolia, 'Buriad'. This is how the

Introduction

It was the middle of the night in the summer of 1999. I was knee-deep in mud searching for a piece of wood or a large stone to place under one of the tyres of our Russian jeep to lever it out of the swamp. Finally, my boot knocked against a large rock. I called out to Bataa. We submerged our arms into the cold mud and lifted out the rock, wedging it underneath the tyre. He pressed down hard on the accelerator and in one mud-splattered second we were out of the swamp and off again. Just a week earlier I had met Bataa on a street corner, close to the central post office in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia's capital. Bataa owned a Russian jeep and that day in Ulaanbaatar, he convinced me that I should survey a beautiful area for a potential field site along the north-east Mongolian–Russian border where he had many 'friends' to whom he would introduce me. In the late 1980s, Bataa had been the official driver to the provincial governor and because of this he assured me that he knew the area like the back of his hand. His 'friends', I was to find out, were mainly jovial middle-aged women—the postal woman, the nurse, or the kindergarten teacher—who resided in the district centres, the small administrative hubs that are dotted across the vast Mongolian countryside. Needless to say, we made a few detours before I got to what I only later realized was my destination.

After an initial visit to Mongolia, I carried out my PhD fieldwork there over sixteen months in 1999–2000. Subsequent visits took place in 2001, 2003, 2005, and 2007. Before I set off on my journey with Bataa in 1999, I had been scurrying between towering Soviet-style apartment blocks that were crumbling on the vast semi-arid steppe in an eastern Mongolia mining town. The flat, open landscape caused persistent dust storms so that people scuttled between looted apartment blocks, previously inhabited by Russian and Ukrainian miners. One weekend I was invited to visit a small border town on the north-east Mongolian border. We travelled out over the steppe that rippled with herds of wild gazelle before entering the cool luminous-white birch forests, arriving at a small district centre perched on a hillside. My trip to the countryside that weekend forced me to reconsider my research plans. Instead of working

for part of the time in a city, and then moving to the countryside, I decided to base all my research in the countryside. After visiting Bataa's many friends along the north-east Mongolian–Russian border, we set off on our last journey to a small district called Ashinga, in Hentii Province, where his in-laws lived.

The district

More than two thousand residents live in Ashinga district. According to local government statistics for 2000, the population is made up of over 70 per cent Buriad people (also commonly spelt Buryat or Buriat). The Buriad are an ethnic minority who migrated to Mongolia in the early 1900s from a republic in Siberia called Buryatia. The rest of the population are recorded as Halh Mongols, the dominant nationality in Mongolia. The district is divided into four areas. The first is Norovlin, the administrative centre (*sumyn töv*), where a thousand or so people live on a semi-permanent or permanent basis. The surrounding countryside, populated by herding households, is then divided into three sub-districts—Barh, the area to the west, with 462 inhabitants, Onon, to the north, with 363, and Hurh, to the south, with 450. The area as a whole is registered as having 570 households, and 32,000 heads of livestock. During the socialist period these sub-districts formed brigades where herders tended to cattle, goats, sheep, horses, and sometimes camels for the local 'Strength Co-operative' (*Batjil negdel*) and people still refer to the areas designated into brigades using the term '*bag*' (a small administrative unit). Before the district was established in 1952, Ashinga had been under the authority of a district to the south-east and was referred to as 'Eg' after the name of the river running through the main valley.[1]

Because of its dominant Buriad population, Ashinga is linked to other Buriad districts along the border where many people have family members residing. In 1925 the whole area was administered by the 'Onon River Banner' (*Onon golyn hoshuun*; the term Banner refers to an administrative unit) in Tsetsen Han Province.[2] When the Buriad families migrated here

[1] I have used a pseudonym for the name of the district and for all personal names. The name Ashinga comes from the name of a local river and from a monastery located here before the district centre was established (variously spelt 'Ashanga', 'Ashinggin', 'Ashingyn', or 'Hashing', and referred to as a monastery '*hüree*', or a small temple '*dugan*').

[2] Prior to this, it was under the authority of Hövchiin Daichin Jonon Vangiin hoshuun (Van Jonon's banner, warrior of the whole mountain range and forest). In 1926 the province comprised 87,498 residents but by the 1930s was recorded to have only 7,278. The dramatic decrease in the population can be linked directly to political persecution in the area, but it is mostly due to the redefinition of the province boundaries.

from Russia, between 1909 and 1927, they passed through a border crossing and made their way west towards Ashinga. In 1931 the provincial border was redefined and Tsetsen Han Province became Han Hentii Province with a total of twenty-four districts. It should be noted that while people do use the names of provinces, districts, and sub-districts, in the way I have been describing them, it is also, in some senses, distorting. During the socialist period, people were forced to inhabit areas defined by administrative borders. Today, these borders still exist, but people move across them and have links with relatives that traverse these boundaries. Their relationship with this landscape also has a history that pre-dates current administrative boundaries. Although this book focuses on a particular district, the relations it explores span beyond its boundary to other districts, provinces, and cities. In this sense, it would be more accurate to refer to this place as an area *along* the north-east Mongolian–Russian border.

In 1952, the district was established in the north-western part of Hentii Province and renamed Ashinga. The landscape of Ashinga is wooded but open, hilly but seldom craggy (although some peaks reach over 2,000 metres above sea level). The district centre is located in an open valley surrounded by forested hills. With its large rivers (which include the Onon, Eg, Barh, Bayan, and Balj) and abundance of wildlife, the area is renowned for its natural beauty. Following the establishment of the district administration, a primary school and medical and veterinary centres were formed, and, in 1958, the local co-operative was founded. In addition to the Buriad who came here in the early 1900s, some two hundred workers from western Mongolia were sent to work in Ashinga in 1960 at the newly established sawmill, to the east of the district centre.[3] During this period, people in the surrounding countryside came to the district to deliver dairy products, meat, and timber to the co-operative and the sawmill, to attend meetings at the cultural centre, and to visit the clinic, government building, or the post office. They also came to collect their children from the school's boarding house (for eight to sixteen year olds), and procure provisions and clothes from the state-run shop.

With the end of state-run co-operatives in the early 1990s and the introduction of an open market economy, Mongolia's countryside changed dramatically. At first, life was economically hard. All the services that had regularly distributed produce through the state suddenly came to a halt. No more Czechoslovakian high-heeled boots, no more flour from the western provinces, no more fluttering red ribbons for one's daughter's hair at pioneer

[3] Most of these non-Buriad residents had moved away from Ashinga by 2007.

meetings. In the late autumn of 1991, my friend found that she was without winter boots, something everyone had previously been able to purchase from the state-run shop. Her mother took out an old pair of Buriad antelope-skin boots which had been given to her on her wedding day by her own mother. Slowly and carefully she took them apart to see how they were made. She then made an exact replica for her daughter, being careful to decorate the heels with the same pattern as her mother had done. When I first visited this area in 1999, I was told that the early 1990s had been incredibly difficult. The great economic and political change did not just mean a loss of jobs and services; people's basic survival and security had been challenged. Some households had gone without adequate food and clothing.

In response to this great change, many families formed their own herding groups, often based around the animals they acquired through redistribution from the co-operative. They moved out to the pasturelands, with men claiming winter encampments where their parents had herded. In order to secure a means of subsistence, most people in Ashinga are now herders. They move, sometimes up to four times a year, with their cattle, sheep, goats, and horses, which make up the main livestock in the area. This household-based subsistence economy is, therefore, something that has emerged out of the economic and political shifts that began in the early 1990s. Increasingly, some people are turning not just to herding as a form of survival, but as a strategic choice to ensure they raise the means by which their children can achieve a different kind of life. For instance, many people in their forties and fifties continue to herd livestock in order to acquire the means to pay for education and goods (such as flats and cars) that will offer a different kind of future for their children.[4] This has meant that there is increasing social stratification between those households that are able to diversify their activities and incomes and those that cannot.

Despite this emerging diversity, the district centre still provides the main administrative facilities for those who live in the district. The government building, stadium, post office, cultural centre, and petrol station are all still located here. In addition, two local businessmen have acquired the previously state-run sawmills. It is the continued (although by no means constant) activity of the local sawmills that has generated limited opportunities for employment in the area. While government salaries are infrequent and

[4] The ability to pay university fees, for instance, is often generated by selling dairy products, such as dried curds and cream. School and university graduations are huge occasions, with different relatives donating money for outfits, feasts, hair-extensions, make-up, shoes, etc. The graduation and the photographs taken during these events conceal the fact that most graduates will be hard pressed to secure a job as a result of this education.

many teachers and doctors have turned to herding, there is still a school, kindergarten, and medical centre in Ashinga's district centre and many people live here. Several young female entrepreneurs, who procure goods from the provincial capital, have also opened a variety of shops and kiosks.

Many local people acquire goods from these shops through a credit system, whereby the name of the person and the product they take is noted by the seller. The entry is deleted when the person brings something to the kiosk owner in exchange for the products they have taken. Sometimes, money is exchanged. Pension books are often taken as a form of security and returned once the pension has arrived. Forms of barter are also common, especially with high inflation in the cost of everyday goods. Produce, such as meat, dairy products, skins, pine nuts, and berries from the surrounding countryside, is frequently exchanged at district centre kiosks for sunflower oil, cigarettes, vodka, sugar, flour, soda, school textbooks, and other items brought to the district from markets around the country. Herding families may also exchange produce (such as cream or butter) with others in return for favours or the use of some crucial equipment. Barter of this kinds tends to occur between people who know each other well, not least because the exchange of goods is often delayed.[5] The main kiosks in the district centre are each run by three young female traders (*naimaachin*), and their partners.[6] Such kiosks also purchase berries, pine nuts, and animal parts, especially antlers, which the female kiosk owners' male contemporaries, who left school in their early teens, spend many hard and often dangerous months hunting and gathering in the surrounding forests to earn an income. Animal parts, such as antlers, are then sourced by middlemen who sell them to city traders for medicinal purposes in China and Korea.

The district centre is essentially an in-between place—it is neither a town nor is it truly the countryside. It has the feel, at least initially, of a forgotten remnant of an unfinished Soviet project. There is no real meeting space apart from public areas, such as the school, the post office, and the kiosks, and the intimate space of people's homes (cf. Humphrey 1999: 7 on Soviet Russia). Areas of past productive activity, such as the milk-collecting depot, the co-operative storehouse, or the sawmill's workers houses, are

[5] On the familiarity of exchange partners, Humphrey (1985) notes that delayed barter 'can only occur when there is a large amount of information about partners (or other social pressures for repayment)' and that '[p]art of the calculation is the extent to which people can trust one another' (Humphrey 1985: 52, 60).

[6] The term '*naimaachin*', meaning trader, has replaced the term '*panzchin*', meaning travelling merchant, speculator, and pedlar. This was a derogatory term used during the socialist period for a person who sold privately owned goods, outside of the co-operative.

slowly left to crumble, or rust away. But slowly, as the district centre begins to remake itself as a place on its own terms, this sense of stasis is changing. For those who live here, wealth and status is immediately visible in the clothes one wears, the wooden house one builds, and the political networks one is able to sustain. It is hard to live here, in part, because one's activities and relations are under permanent surveillance and judgement by others. When leaving their houses, for example, people spend a substantial amount of time getting dressed and making sure that they look presentable, for appearances are everything. Equally, when visiting a neighbour, one must go with news of some kind so as to appear to have a purpose. This preoccupation with outward appearance is not confined to people—houses in the district centre have also become the 'agentive artefacts' that display to others, through innovative extensions and additions, their occupant's ability to accumulate economic wealth and social prestige.

Location in a household

Before Bataa left for Ulaanbaatar, he made sure I was safely housed in the one-roomed family home of a man named Bat-Ochir, who was one of the local sawmill owners as well as being a wealthy herder. There had been some debate about where and with whom I should stay. Local government officials had intervened and recommended that I stay with this family because 'they do not drink and are hard-working people'. It was only later that I came to realize that this recommendation was highly political and a manifestation of the kinds of favours that were exchanged between people who held power in the district centre. Bat-Ochir was a dedicated and successful herder and because of this, he did not usually live in the district centre. This year was to be the first winter the family had spent there since his wife had left her job as a primary school teacher in the late 1980s. They had to be in the district centre this year because they needed to oversee the construction of three large wooden houses which had been commissioned by wealthy clients in the city. They had hired local people to build the houses using machinery acquired when the local sawmill collapsed in the early 1990s. Their young son was to attend kindergarten for the first time, and their daughter, who normally stayed with relatives in the district during term time, would be living with us too. Like me, they were nervous about staying there. But we had different reasons for feeling apprehensive.

While I was concerned about my fieldwork, Bat-Ochir and his family were anxious that their recent economic activities and obvious accumulation

of wealth might provoke jealousy and unwanted attention. Arson attacks in the district centre had been happening for three years before I arrived in Ashinga in 1999. By 2005, a total of fifty-five buildings had been targeted. Few people had been hurt in the fires, but tensions between people created a sense of unease that flickered in people's eyes as they interacted in public. Speculation as to the possible cause of the attacks was varied, but the response was uniform: people sought to avoid any form of confrontation or direct accusation that might spark jealousy and anger in the form of arson.

During this first period of my fieldwork, I stayed in the district centre with Bat-Ochir for just over six months. I worked at the local kindergarten in the mornings and spent my afternoons with the young women who ran the local kiosks and with the district centre's grandmothers who gathered with unfailing regularity to play cards and gamble at each other's houses. It was through contact with these people that I learnt about the migration of the Buriad, who fled from the Russian Revolution and the war in Russian Buryatia to Mongolia in the early 1900s, and the subsequent persecution, violence, and destruction that these people experienced in Mongolia in the 1930s (*helmegdliin üe*), when most of the adult male members of the community were either taken away or killed in terrifying night raids. Throughout much of the twentieth century, I learnt, the Buriad had felt marginalized by the Mongolian state (Buyandelgeriyn 2007; Empson 2007a). During this period I also got to know the local diviner, Burgaasnii Oyunaa (lit. Oyunaa who lives by the willows), and shamans, as Bat-Ochir and his wife visited them frequently with concerns that people were speaking ill of them and spreading malicious gossip (*tsagaan / har hel am*) about their entrepreneurial activities which caused boils to appear regularly on Bat-Ochir's face and his cattle to become ill. It was the shaman and diviner who told me that, because of the persistent threat of arson, people were keen to avoid public disputes of any kind.

The more connections I made with people in the district, the more I realized that I was very much defined by being 'elder brother Bat-Ochir's person' (*Bat-Ochir ahyn hün*). Increasingly, people I met outside the house began to comment about the family I was living with and what this must mean for me. They would ask me questions about them and their activities. At the house, the family were similarly curious about my movements. They wanted to know who I was visiting and what had been talked about during my visits, but they rarely introduced me to anyone. Instead, I had to make my own connections while they deliberately kept themselves away from people and got on with managing the construction of their wooden houses and increasing their herds. Like other foreign anthropologists who have worked

in rural Mongolian district centres, I began to realize that the people I lived with played an important role in determining the kind of connections I was able to make (Højer 2003). My own position in the family was that of an object to be viewed from a distance and certainly kept at arm's length. At the same time, I also acted as a mirror. By asking how people had received me, they were able to gauge how people in the district were viewing and perceiving them. In this sense, I was an active extension of who they were.

After the Lunar New Year celebrations, I began to realize that by basing myself within this family, my ability to move among different people was severely restricted and that I must try to find another host family. My close friend Tsendmaa, a young married woman of my own age who lived on and off in the district centre, helped me to leave. She suggested that I stay with her in-laws in the countryside. One evening, her husband met me at the gate of our house to negotiate the logistics of my move. It felt dramatic and I was warned that the situation would have to be handled delicately. Moving to a different household could be interpreted as my wish to sever links with Bat-Ochir and his family and as my rejection of them as people. In fact, when I had raised the issue with Bat-Ochir a few weeks earlier, he became extremely agitated and concerned about what other people might think of him if I did leave. He told me that they would view my move as an indication that he and his family were 'bad' people and he tried, for several days, to prevent me from going. In the end, my friend's husband was able to borrow a small tractor on to which we could pile my belongings. Before I left, we agreed that I would stay with Bat-Ochir and his family again in the summer, once they had returned to the countryside. Bat-Ochir appeared moved by my departure and said 'Now that the spring birds are arriving, Rebecca is leaving us.' But as we were about to leave, he held on to the frame of the tractor and, leaning towards the driver, murmured to him in a hushed but angry voice: 'Why are you taking my person?' (*Yagaad manai hüniig avsan be?*) The implication was that he was the 'master' (*ezen*) of the household and I was under his custody and should not be separated from him in this way.

The countryside

Arriving at Tsendmaa's in-laws' winter pasture, I found myself quickly but firmly placed in the position of daughter (*basgan*) and expected to take part in the activities of an extended family. I was handed an old dirty Mongolian coat (*deel*) and was shown how to wear my Mongolian black army boots

(*bakaal*) partially folded down in the style currently fashionable among the younger herders. Their winter pasture was located on the edge of the deep taiga forest, with a small stream nearby and large mountains behind. The wooden cabin, which consisted of one room with a fire in the centre, was messy and chaotic. Visitors were frequent and there were many guns and large knives lying around. At night, the dogs would bark at the wolves while the wind made shuddering sounds as it wound itself around our house. Every morning, I would jump on to a horse and, pulling a small cart with a metal container attached, would ride across the steppe and down through the bare shrubs to a stream where I was taught how to break the ice so that I could collect our water for the day. I also worked with the other women, milking cattle and feeding them with the hay that had been collected in the late summer. Slowly, I learnt how to identify the cows through their personal names and to milk them, even in the frozen landscape at –30°C. I helped with sewing boots and gloves for sale, preparing food, and making sure that tea was always available for visitors and hunters as they returned from the forests.

Figure I.1 Setting off to collect water for the day.

Tsendmaa's in-laws were known as a generous, vibrant, and giving family who were a frequent source of advice and help to their friends and neighbours. Renchin, the father of the household, was a larger-than-life,

charismatic man who spoke in a thick melodic Buriad dialect and tended to recount the history of the Buriad and sing a lot when he drank. When sober, he could carve almost anything from wood and was an excellent hunter and storyteller. These skills, along with his large but slightly bent figure, meant that people often referred to him as the 'King of the Eg River', after the name of the river that runs through their summer pasture. Delgermaa, his wife, was from a poor family and had few relatives in the area, but her hard-working socialist attitude meant that she was without pretension, could relate to all kinds of people, and greatly valued her many friends. Renchin and Delgermaa had three sons and one daughter. While both of their parents had been herders, they themselves only became herders in 1990. Prior to this, Renchin had been a woodwork teacher and Delgermaa had worked for the co-operative. While Renchin welcomed the political reforms of the 1990s and was a staunch democrat, Delgermaa was more nostalgic for the socialist past and the possibilities it had created. My friend, Tsendmaa, was married to their eldest son, Bayar, and they had one daughter.

In terms of livestock, Renchin's brother was currently looking after their sheep and goats as they focused their attention on their cattle and horse herds. Renchin and his sons prided themselves on their horses (*aduu*), geldings (*mor'*), and stallions (*azraga*). They were a source of prestige, particularly as they lived close to the forests where there was the persistent threat of wolves and horse thieves. When not tending to things at the encampment, or in the forest hunting, they would check that the animals were all right or bring them closer to the encampment (*aduundaa yavna*). This might take an afternoon, depending on how far the animals had gone, but territorial boundaries between different stallions meant that it was rare for them to go too far, unless a wolf-attack had scared them. Horses were sometimes broken in for everyday use, for hunting trips, and for hay collecting, as well as for horse races, but mostly they were left to graze in the meadows and pastures nearby. In contrast, women had a closer relationship with the cows. It was mostly they who milked and cared for them, ensured they had enough food at winter, and transformed their milk into different kinds of produce.

Throughout the late autumn and during most of the winter, Renchin's three sons were away hunting and collecting pine nuts in the forest. They returned intermittently, often in the middle of the night, with different kinds of meat, such as elk, wild boar, and deer, which sustained us throughout the winter. Sometimes, their daughter-in-law was also absent as she worked for part of the time in the district centre at the kindergarten and Renchin's only daughter was also away at school in Ulaanbaatar. At such times, it was common for there to be only four of us at the encampment and the repetitiveness of each other's company and daily routine was broken only intermittently by some passing visitor, or an event to do with the animals. At the autumn and spring encampments we were sometimes a few more. In contrast, up to sixteen members of the extended family gathered at the summer encampment in order to help with the preparation of milk products and the collection of berries for the winter. The summer pasture was also closer to the district centre and this allowed for riding trips to evening dances held in the cultural club, or visits to friends and relatives one had not seen all year.

Figure I.2 Lassoing a horse for riding.

This movement to different seasonal places is integral to livestock herding practices, whereby summer encampments, based on the lush, open steppe and a good water source, allow for maximum pasture for young animals and many people are needed to tend them. In contrast, winter encampments, based close to the forest edge at the foot of the mountains, provide shelter from the wind and snow throughout the winter months. People's interactions with one another also undergo dramatic seasonal changes, with individuals perhaps being separated from each other for long periods while engaging in other activities, only to rejoin again in the summer months at a different place altogether. In contrast to my movement from Bat-Ochir's house in the district centre, this kind of seasonal separation from people and place is not something that is considered problematic or difficult. Rather, it is a

necessary means by which growth of one's herds and one's wealth is achieved.

Reflecting on these initial experiences, I can now see how and why people reacted to me in the way they did. At the time, things seemed strange and unsettling. I kept wondering what it was that made movement or separation difficult in some instances, yet necessary and vital in others. Why was it only later that I was able to move about freely? Was it because I was willing to be 'someone's person' and utilize and honour the extended networks that this allowed? The more I relied on Renchin's family, the more I began to realize that by participating in their daily lives, I was able to turn to what Humphrey and Sneath (1999: 141) have termed their 'relations of obligation'—that is, to the extended social networks that they rely on for the transfer of goods and services in a domestic-based subsistence economy. In contributing to these relations, a whole web of connections and possibilities opened up to me.

In opening this Introduction with an account of my own discomforts, shifts, and changes of focus, my aim has been to highlight how my initial assumptions about people and the places they inhabit were turned on their head through periods of intense participation and engagement. Most of my time at Renchin's encampment was spent working with the women, preparing different kinds of dairy produce, looking after the cattle, collecting hay, and other seasonal tasks. Extreme temperature changes and bitterly cold winds, coupled with the never-ending glare of the sun, meant that I had little energy for visiting households or conducting interviews after such tasks were completed. Most reflections were conducted in the evenings, when I wrote my fieldnotes by candlelight, or spoke with people in the house as we hosted passing visitors. My visits to other households or to special events were an outcome of the people I was living with going there too, or on the off-chance that I was able to borrow a horse or gain a lift from a passing visitor to a particular place. Taking part in the routine of everyday life in this way, I came to realize what kinds of movements away from the encampment were accepted and what kinds were not. I also came to realize that the way you conducted yourself outside the house was viewed as a reflection of those in the household, and as an extension of them as people. Taking these examples into account, this book underlines the kind of ethnographic description that Englund and Leach (2000) have referred to as 'a practice of *reflexive* knowledge production' (2000: 226, italics in original). From a methodological perspective, I have attempted to maintain a certain level of transparency regarding the process of fieldwork and the gradual emergence of the sense of connections that prevail in adversity. This methodological

approach is also an attempt to reflect on the way in which anthropological knowledge is made to appear through long-term fieldwork and the writing process more generally. The people and the places I moved between and my own realization of how this had to be done in 'acceptable' ways become very important in this book. Through my ongoing relations with these people, they taught me to see what I had initially perceived as perplexing and strange in a different way.

Separation and containment

This book addresses a set of seemingly paradoxical questions that emerged out of my placement in a family and extends to wider spheres of social life for the Buriad: (1) How do people who traverse the border zone between two countries and have no private land or state of their own accumulate possessions and grow things? (2) How can people who have lived under intense persecution during the socialist period, when most of their male relatives were either killed or taken away, harness such loss and absence to generate a proliferation of relations? (3) Why is it that when these people display wealth in a stationary form, they destroy these exhibits through acts of arson that separate each other from such accumulation? Such questions seem to turn on a broader level of enquiry: what makes separation from people and places necessary and vital in some instances, yet difficult and contested in others?

For the herding households that I became familiar with, separation appeared to be an equivocal concept (for comparisons with China, see Stafford 2000a, 2003). On the one hand, it is a necessary means by which fecundity is ensured for the growth of people and animals, as people live apart from places and from each other at various times throughout the year. Yet, it is also something that is experienced as forced upon them, by either 'external' or 'internal' pressures, and results in destructive outcomes. In examining this tension, this book proposes a framework by which to think about the relationship between personhood, memory, and place. This framework is drawn from an indigenous idea about when it is appropriate to separate and move and when it is not. This idea is influenced by a wider concern with fortune as a force that can be harnessed or dispersed at moments of separation or movement. Scattered throughout the anthropological and historical literature on Mongolia we can find intriguing references to practices that involve extracting parts of people, animals, and things when they leave or separate, and then containing these parts inside the

household (Atwood 2000; Bumochir 2004; Chabros 1992; Humphrey 2002a). Such practices appear on many different levels when people need to 'harness fortune' (*hishig hürteh*). The term 'fortune' (*hishig*) can be translated in a variety of ways to mean 'grace', 'favour', 'benefit', or 'fortune', and points to an element or feature that is held to be necessary for the growth of animals, people, and things. When paired with the term '*hürteh*' (to receive, or accept, parts of a share) it points to a respectful act of receiving, accepting, harnessing, or sourcing an allotment, or share of fortune.[7] Varied practices are employed to harness fortune from outside the house to ensure an increase in livestock, people, and things.

Practices associated with harnessing fortune are to be viewed not as somehow archaic or timeless, but as a part of the way in which wealth and prosperity are currently held to be achieved. In this sense, I want to highlight that local ways of understanding wealth and prosperity include attention to a series of different elements, such as fortune, might, and luck, with which we may not be familiar. This book traces how such ideas are increasingly held to be important in the emerging open market economy where economic differences between households are ever more marked. As in communities in central Vietnam noted by Kwon, nationwide de-collectivization, privatization of property, increasing foreign investment, and other market-oriented reforms have 'provoked a forceful revival of ancestral and other related ritual activities in local communities' (Kwon 2007: 74), all of which are held to secure wellbeing and prosperity in the present.

Focus on the emerging importance of these practices also provides a conceptual framework through which to explore the ways in which personhood, memory, and place are currently generated in and through people's interactions with each other and through various objects, such as photographic montages, pieces of people and animals, embroideries, and various household items. The analytical purchase of working with this framework is that several aspects of social life can be understood through it. It appears in different encounters when people need to draw attention to a contrast between people's mobility or movement and ideas about their centredness or replication.

Attending to practices associated with harnessing fortune also highlights wider moral concerns, in that performing them correctly is considered the 'right' way in which people constitute themselves as subjects (Humphrey 1997). In this sense, we may say that in order to be recognized as a person, one must engage in particular practices and activities (Leach 2008: 320;

[7] It is also commonly paired with the term '*huraah*', meaning to accumulate.

Willerslev 2007: 21). These practices are also thought to have some kind of effect, beyond the subject, in which growth and wealth may be generated. To show how practices associated with fortune generate growth, I contrast this concept with 'naturalist ontologies' of growth found in horticultural practices (Strathern 2005; Viveiros de Castro 2004). In so doing, I am able to draw out the complexity of the Buriad concept of fortune and open up the analytical space that a naturalist ontology obfuscates.

By starting my analysis with an indigenous practice, I am able to question and challenge our own assumptions about themes such as wealth accumulation and ideas of growth (Henare *et al.* 2007). It is also to acknowledge, as suggested in the description of my own shifts and changes, that 'the ethnographer can never assume prior knowledge of the contexts of people's concerns' (Englund and Leach 2000: 236). In saying this I take the position that cultural meanings are realized in practice which, rather than expressing consensual values, creatively constructs and conveys them (Battaglia 1990: 217). By focusing on practices performed by herding households in the Mongolian countryside to harness fortune we see how Buriad personhood is enacted through people's relations with others as well as with various objects. Saying this, my aim is to trace the way in which memories, objects, and places come together to form different ideas about the person. In taking this methodological approach, my work does not take the person for granted, but instead looks at where and how the person is located in different material and bodily forms. In using a Mongolian concept, such as fortune, to do this, I do not mean to reify ideas about fortune as some kind of abstract mental artefact. Rather, I aim to stress how meaning is always situated in people's enactments of certain practices and as a response to wider concerns.

Personhood and modes of agency

Previous literature on Mongolian kinship was predominantly structural-functionalist and tended to emphasize the overarching importance of agnatic ties that preserved the 'shared bone' of patrilineal ancestors over generations (Vreeland [1954] 1962; Krader 1954; Levi-Strauss 1969; Pao 1964a, 1964b).[8] These accounts often emphasized kin terms as a way of understanding prescribed or prototypical behaviour and then elaborated from these as to

[8] Other, more recent works that deal indirectly with ideas about Mongolian kinship, include Humphrey with Onon (1996), Sneath (2000), Pegg (2001), and Bulag (1998).

possible types of 'social structure'. In so doing, they did not take actual ethnographic events, processes, or interactions as their starting point for understanding how people came to make kinship out of such events more generally. Sneath (2006) has pointed out that these approaches tended to classify nomadic societies as modelled on ideas about descent and tribal groups, whereby economic and political activities were based around lineages. This model of a tribal or kinship-based society became popular during the colonial era, when evolutionary social theory postulated that pre-state society was based on kinship clans and lineages and was seen to operate differently from those societies based on states. Focusing on early Inner Asian political formations, Sneath (2006) reveals that in contrast to these approaches, the concept of 'tribe' was in fact often a political formation rather than necessarily a kinship unit. Indeed, much steppe society was under the authority of various kinds of aristocratic orders, based on ruling lords and their subjects or vassals, where the ruling lords were not always related by descent to the people they ruled (Sneath 2006: 14). This produced local levels of aristocratic power (or pastoral polities with social stratification) that were independent of an overarching central authority, amounting to what Sneath describes as a kind of 'headless state' (2006: 18).

In line with an emphasis on agnatic (or descent-based) relations, other anthropological accounts of Mongolia have suggested that a shift occurs as we move from northern North Asia, or Siberia, to southern North Asian societies, such as Mongolia (Pedersen 2001). In the former, bilateral kinship, egalitarian societies based on hunting and horizontal relations characterized by animist or shamanist modalities are prominent. In the latter, vertical relations based on the hierarchy of aristocratic (or Buddhist reincarnation) lineages and the replication of agnatic relations prevail (Hamayon 1990; Humphrey with Onon 1996; Pedersen 2001). In relation to this geographical shift, the Buriad occupy an ambiguous position. Living as pastoral herders on the geopolitical border that divides these types of sociality, the Buriad currently traverse this territory and bridge this position, never fully inhabiting either of these modes.

Rather than questioning whether terms such as 'clan' or 'tribe' are appropriate, or whether 'vertical' or 'horizontal' forms of social organization prevail, my analysis pivots around a very different axis. Recent approaches to kinship in anthropology have emphasized a relational approach, whereby people are able to shift between different modes of engagement and performance. Here, relational perspectives exist prior to the position of the person with whom the relation is held, so that existing relations create positions or modes of sociality and it is people who are able to move between

PLATE

A. District centre

B. Summer encampment

them (Strathern [1988] 1990; Viveiros de Castro 2009). In such a way, Strathern (1994) has emphasized that: 'a performance is always a reduction: a single act created out of composite relations' (Strathern 1994: 248). I aim to highlight how such an approach, which acknowledges shifting relational perspectives (or subjectivities), might inform the way in which personhood among the Buriad is created out of activities which centre around the separation and containment of people, animals, and things.

These activities point to different modes of agency that replicate on different scales. For example, the widespread Mongolian concept of the person (the socially recognized idea of the individual) posits that people are made from the 'bone' from their father (*etsgiin töröl*, *yasan töröl*) and the 'blood' or 'flesh' from their mother (*ehiin töröl*, *tsusan / mahan töröl*) (Bulag 1998; Diemberger 2006).[9] The idea of shared bone is used in the formation of agnatic kin. Here the male component of a person is contained in the idea of shared bone that is passed between generations. Agnatic relations are also visible at annual mountain ceremonies, in political formations, and at marriage, and these connections may be conceived as a metonym for ideas about a rooted sense of personhood or the need for replication. In contrast, women, who are separated from their natal families at marriage, are held to contribute blood to their in-laws. What kind of model for agency does the idea of shared blood point to? I suggest that relations based on 'shared blood' are not objectified in particular sites or ceremonies, or in more general ideas about containment. Instead, they point to hidden or concealed relations that are housed inside the person and are only visible through particular interactions.[10]

A similar kind of contrast between modes of agency has been made in relation to different kinds of social prominence in Mongolian societies. Humphrey with Onon (1996), for example, have drawn a contrast between

[9] Diemberger (2006) notes: 'According to Mongolian and Tibetan ideas of kinship, fathers transmit bones to their children through semen. Mothers pass on flesh and blood. Bones are therefore associated with paternal ancestry, patrilineal kin-groups and patrilineal transmission of religious and political roles' (Diemberger 2006: 160). Diemberger also points out that a bilineal kinship system is common in Tibet whereby 'bones are passed on patrilineally while flesh and blood are passed matrilineally' (Diemberger 2007b: 122). 'Even though the bones are usually highlighted, under some circumstances the flesh / blood line may be used to make claims and can become significant' (Diemberger 2007b: 122). 'The female line, represented symbolically by blood or flesh, can thus be used in two different ways: as a negative factor associated with impurity or as a positive factor that enabled women to negotiate certain rights on the ground of matrilineal relations' (Diemberger 2007b: 122–3).

[10] Describing these as male and female components is a short hand. In the following chapters we see that this distinction is also cast in many other ways (cf. Strathern [1987] 1992: 272).

the central pre-revolutionary Daur position of the 'old man', and the marginal, or interstitial, position of the shaman. In political and religious terms, these two positions are contrasted as 'poles of sensibility' (Humphrey with Onon 1996: 63). A similar contrast has also been made between two types of leaders or specialists, defined in terms of central prominence versus peripheral or marginal prominence (Pedersen 2006). This disjuncture has also been conceptualized in terms of topographical differences. Pastoralists move between 'absolute centres' fixed along a particular trajectory or route, and these striated points or roots are inherited 'vertically' through men. In contrast, hunters and women move along horizontal trajectories that disperse without a trace, into a smooth or rhizomic 'nomadic void' (Pedersen 2006, 2007). In each of these accounts, I suggest that we can identify a fluid counterpoint that weaves around a stable or centred mode. This counterpoint does not have to be an equivalent of the thing being described. It can also be of a totally different order, to such an extent that it does not resemble a person, but points to a wider sensibility, such as a sense of fear. Extending modes of agency beyond the subject is often emphasized in object-relations theory, whereby an object can be the objectification of a subject, such as 'the mother', as well as an object, or thing (see Gomez 1997).

Seen in terms of these wider contrasts, a double conceptualization appears, whereby blood, separation, and mobility provide a counterpoint to a different kind of sensibility centred on ideas about bone, containment, and replication. I suggest that, together, these can be seen as two modalities that scale outwards and permeate relations in Ashinga. Ceremonies at stone cairns, ideas about clan affiliation through shared bone, photographic montages which project relations attached to a household, and the replication of deceased ancestors through intra-kin rebirths, may all be viewed as modes of agency centred on containment, where accumulation over generations is valued. In contrast, a counterpoint to this mode of agency is found in other places among women who, as daughters and as affines, are never fully located among their natal or in-laws' kin. This affinal mode can be conceptualized through the contribution of blood, a substance that is not passed on over generations, but is considered fluid, temporary, and mobile. It points to more fleeting modes of relatedness that evoke a sense of absence or separation from places and people, and extends to include the Buriad's sense of their interstitial position in Mongolia.

While different instantiations of these two modalities can be observed, I do not cast these against each other as opposite counterpoints. Rather I suggest that it might be fruitful to view these modalities as internal to each other, as people shift between various forms of sociality. By this I mean that,

in taking seriously the idea that a person is made from the coming together of blood *and* bone, a person has the potential to embody either of these modalities, so that they may be conceived of as 'internal elements within a person' (Strathern [1987] 1992: 282). For example, people may switch between affinal (blood) and consanguineal (bone) modes of relatedness (as different 'kinds of people'; Astuti 1995). At one point they may be viewed as containers that house the rebirth of a deceased relative, while at another time they may be viewed as the son or daughter of people in the present. In turn, a woman is both a container that gives birth to children for her husband's relatives, while also being a separated affine, a person who has left her natal family and who has come from outside. The Buriad may view themselves as detached from their homeland and, therefore, distinct and different from others, or they may see themselves as part of a wider Mongolian nation contained in the country of Mongolia. Equally, they may recognize that their intellectuals brought socialism to Mongolia, while being quick to point out that they also suffered as a result of this ideology. And while destruction has been inflicted on them from outside, it also exists internally, through the persistent threat of arson. Here, differences between Self and Other are not opposed as external negative counterparts. Instead, the Other (be this multiple or singular) appears to be internal, as one acts as the ground by which to foreground the other, and people move between these modalities in different interactions (cf. Navaro-Yashin 2009).

This view that people are not fixed by some single form of sociality, or agency, and that they contain the potential for multiple relations with others, avoids a dual idea of bone versus blood, elders versus shamans, or centre versus periphery, district centre (or city) versus countryside. It suggests instead a way of understanding how people are generated in and through their interactions with others and, in so doing, contain the potential for different modes of engagement. It is also to stress the importance of events (as both decisions and actual happenings) to shape subjects as individuals (see Humphrey 2008). Certain aspects of the person come to the fore, or are elicited (often in a singular mode), through particular activities, or events, which involve relations with others but also, crucially, through their attention to various things. A virtue of viewing personhood in a relational way (through particular events, decisions, and interactions) is that one is able to maintain the complexity of multiple forms of sociality while also specifying the conditions under which certain modes or forms appear.

Viewing personhood as an outcome of differentiation achieved through different practices is common in anthropology (Strathern [1987] 1992: 298). Leach (2008), for example, states that '[t]o study the "person" is to

investigate how an entity must appear and how they must behave in a given social network in order that they be recognised as a person' (Leach 2008: 320). The emergence of the person is, thus, a social issue that requires the study of social relations and wider social forms. In turn, Willerslev (2007) notes that 'personhood, rather than being an inherent property of people and things, is constituted in and through the relationships into which [people] enter' (Willerslev 2007: 21). Here, personhood is perceived as something that is achieved and constituted in various social transactions and activities. Rather than being defined by consanguineal or affinal positions, then, we may instead think of people as revealing or concealing different aspects of themselves in different relational encounters. As Butler (2006) has noted, when speaking about concepts such as personhood, or the subject, we are speaking not always about an individual but also about *a model for agency*. In this sense, we may say that people take up a variety of different subject positions or modalities within different discourses and practices. This is to privilege a view of the self that is produced in interaction with others—be those humans or non-humans—in culturally specific ways (Moore 2007: 30, 40–1; 2008).

In adopting this approach, I also think it is important to note that it is not just persons, but also objects and places that may house the potential for models of agency. This kind of approach opens up our field of analysis to include the idea that the Buriad have had to accommodate the Other that is Mongolia as part of their personhood, not least because the land on which they currently live is considered the cradle of Mongolian nationalism, the place where Chinggis Haan (commonly referred to in English as 'Ghengis Khan'), the so-called founder of the Mongolian state, was born. Further, this plurality of subjectivities can be viewed in terms of spatial dislocations, as people are separated from each other for much of the year. It also includes temporal shifts, as people house the rebirth of deceased relatives inside themselves, but crucially have to learn how to act out a different model of agency that allows them to be the sons and daughters of people in the present. The tension between making such modalities visible or invisible can be said to echo the tension between the desire for separation and containment of people, animals, and things found in practices involved in containing fortune.

Memory and place

Ortner (1978) has noted that writing ethnography using classical anthropological categories such as 'kinship' or 'religion' is problematic. She argues that this is partly because of their externally imposed character, but also because such terms imply a static quality that renders social life fixed and structured. Such categories 'do not carry one into an experience of the interconnections that must be at the heart of the discussion' (Ortner 1978: 1). Instead, she suggests we focus on 'representative anecdotes' or analyses of 'cultural performance'. Focus on different kinds of personhood enacted through performance and practice highlights that the given aspect of consanguineal relations (that is, those based on blood and bone, ethnicity and clans) are not the only concern, nor are they always given. Instead, it is important to acknowledge 'a view of kinship created, not through birth but through a continual becoming . . . [a] cumulative transformation through the taking on of new appearances which you become but which in the process you also make your own' (Bloch 1998: 77). Growing out of this need to redefine our understanding of kinship, Carsten (2000a) suggests that the term 'relatedness' can be used to convey 'a move away from a pre-given analytic opposition between the biological and the social on which much anthropological study of kinship has rested' (2000a: 4). Such a focus allows for an examination of relations between people that are dynamic and creative; they can be activated and deactivated through practice in one's relations with others and are not simply determined at birth. Rather than reifying ideas about the person as determined by a dominating structural principle, then, by taking seemingly everyday 'domestic' relations as a starting point, we find that ideas about personhood extend to include multiple spheres of social life.

What kind of everyday practices am I talking about? In the following chapters, I explore the way in which, in the course of everyday life, people attend to various objects, such as pieces of hair, stone cairns, household chests, photographs, embroideries, mirrors, houses, places in the landscape, and intra-kin rebirths. Focusing on these items, I use the term 'object' to refer to things as well as to people and places. In tracing the way in which these objects come into being and are tended, perspectives of Buriad personhood quite different from dominant narratives about Buriad ethnic distinctiveness emerge. This is not to exclude more overtly political dimensions, but to recognize that many seemingly everyday practices are inherently politicized because they compete with other ways of appropriating places or memories, or accumulating wealth. Seen in this way it is obvious that there is a con-

tentious historicity to these practices, where different agendas are cultivated for different means. Attention to the creation of various things through these everyday practices also has an effect on those who reside in their vicinity, not least because in the process of making and tending to these things, people claim a sense of historical depth to their lives.

The anthropological literature on people's relations with objects can be said to fall into two distinct spheres. On the one hand, writers have stressed that objects become inscribed with meaning by those who create or live in their vicinity (Hoskins 1998; Gell 1998). In this sense, objects may be said to carry, abduct, index, or represent the intentions and memories of those who encounter or make them. One may say that this is an essentially symbolic, linguistic, and subject-centred analysis that privileges social construction. Here, non-human subjects are rendered a blank slate on which to mediate the intentions of people, so that it is people who define, or inscribe, objects and spaces and project their own biographical history and intentions *on to* them. On the other hand, writers have suggested that objects, places, and environments exude affects *on to* people. This requires the analysis of a network (assemblage or nexus) of different elements that includes humans as well as non-humans in order to gain a better understanding of social relations and forms of knowledge production. Here, non-humans (objects, places, and other material forms) may be viewed as agentive in that they affect those in their vicinity. They contribute to social life in such a way that personhood or subjectivity can be said to emerge out of people's relations with various non-human forms (Bender 1993; Latour 2005; Mitchell 2005; Henare *et* al. 2007; Navaro-Yashin 2009).

In relation to this polarity in the literature, Navaro-Yashin (2009) has highlighted that while the former approach privileges the subject to the exclusion of non-human agency, the latter approach does not address the historical contingency, emotionality, and politics of the assemblage of human and non-human agents in the analysis, whereby subjects and objects are treated as symmetrical agents in a simultaneous field. While one approach appears to be rooted in the specifics of biographical history, the other accumulates all kinds of elements in an ever-increasing network or rhizome (the term is used here to differentiate it from the networks based on shared bone, which may be considered roots). Theoretically, it appears that we are forced to take one side or the other. Following Navaro-Yashin (2009), however, I suggest that instead of siding with either of these approaches, it is important to be sensitive to the idea that human–non-human and non-human–human relations may relate in multiple, complex, and sometimes contradictory ways. In this sense, we may talk of layering different ways of apprehending these relations in our analysis, rather like a form of montage, whereby each perspective appears to rest alongside or overlap the other.

This is also to acknowledge that the relations that people forge with objects must be studied in their historical specificity. Taking the view that '"assemblages" of subjects and objects must be read as specific in their politics and history' (Navaro-Yashin 2009: 9), I suggest that the way in which pastoral herding households currently engage with various objects, people, and places is informed by and very much an outcome of important events from the past. Memories of migration, political persecution, and the place in which they currently live (see Chapters 1, 3, 6, and 7) are a constant presence in the life of these people. I also hold that some of these forms come to life and are held to be affective in an animist sense, as they move through people to create particular kinds of environments, places, or people (see Chapters 2 and 4). A certain kind of agency lingers in other people's bodies, in household chests, and in formations in the landscape. In this way, objects, such as a piece of tail hair, a child's umbilical cord, or a particular mountain, might act as subjects in their capacity to affect those who live in their vicinity, while also acting as objects through which people inscribe their own meanings and memories.

In a similar way, the literature on memory in anthropology can, broadly speaking, be said to fall into two main strands. First, anthropologists drawing on the work of Halbwachs (1992) and Connerton (1989) have focused on 'collective' or 'social' memory to explore how critical events, such as war or migration, are recalled through a collective mnemonic medium (Antze and Lambek 1996; Said 2000; Humphrey 2003). Here, anthropologists have focused on the way in which a collective or shared memory is reproduced or commemorated by a group of people over generations. Secondly, a focus on how individual life stories are recalled and narrated through different mnemonic devices has allowed anthropologists to explore how memory plays an important role in the construction of the person and the creation of different forms of subjectivity (Hoskins 1998; Küchler 1987; Radley [1990] 1997).[11] In the following chapters, I bridge debates found in these two prominent approaches to memory. On the one hand, people recall shared

[11] This is, of course, not an exhaustive review of the approaches to memory in anthropology. In contrast to works which focus on how memory plays an important part in the construction of identity and self, anthropologists, sociologists, and philosophers have focused on memory as something that we encode in our mind (Cole and Gay 1972; Bloch 1998; Sperber 1989; Yates 1974). Others have focused on embodiment, whereby memory is constituted in the act of bodily recalling (Casey 2000; Connerton 1989; Csordas 1994; Hallam and Hockey 2001; Olick and Robbins 1998).

memories of migration and political persecution through narrative idioms that highlight ethnic difference. On the other hand, individual memories may be reproduced over generations as they come to life through the bodies of children, or in the tending of everyday material forms, such as embroideries or photograph albums. Taking this dual approach, I attempt to show how everyday processes of relatedness speak to larger-scale political concerns. In saying this, I follow Carsten (2007) in focusing on how ideas about personhood are located in personal and familial histories that connect to the wider political formations of which they are a part.

I should state that this book is not explicitly about post-socialism. That is, I do not view current social life in Mongolia as only reducible to an outcome of its recent history. While there is no doubt that the collapse of the socialist state was a difficult experience for everyone, the introduction of a neo-liberal economy, coupled with the promotion of Mongolian nationalism, has equally brought its own problems. What is an outcome of Soviet policy or the current rewriting of history is slippery and often difficult to define. To attempt to do so would, I think, be to objectify, in a top-down way, how people in the Mongolian countryside experience change. Taking my lead from anthropologists working on post-socialism, I think it is important to stress that 'the unmaking of earlier ways of living and the putting together of new ones' are always *mutually constitutive* (Humphrey 2002b: xxiv). This is to stress that people are not living in a way that they consider to be 'transitional'. The Mongolian government still retains enormous decision-making powers over the district, its people, and resources (cf. Hann 2002), but people create local ways of manoeuvring within different kinds of adversity and constraints. In attending to this it is also important to hold in mind what has gone before. This is especially the case for the Buriad who have a haunting relationship to their past, which is tinged with memories of violence and loss that live on in a very real way in the present. I will show how this past energizes and enables current forms of subjectivity. Indeed, focus on the remaking of particular kinds of relationships and ideas about inheritance might point to wider experiences of post-socialism more generally. This book can be read in many ways: as an outline of Buriad concepts of personhood, as a description of a marginalized ethnic minority and their struggle to find a place for themselves in a landscape that is not their own, or as a theorization of object–person relations. Together, these point to the mutually constitutive relationships between people and objects, the dead and the living, and land and people.

Outline

The book is divided into three parts. In the first part, I focus on narratives of loss and migration, practices concerned with harnessing fortune, and media displayed inside the house, such as embroideries and photographic montages. These seemingly disparate spheres may be viewed as different sites that gather and discharge affects on the people who recite, engage, or view them. They may also be viewed as political gestures that serve to situate people in a rooted web of connections with others. In Chapter 1, I present narratives concerned with people's past experiences of loss and migration. This is explored through the prism of their current interstitial position as an ethnic minority living in Mongolia's far countryside. Narratives about the Buriad's sustained persecution by the Mongolian state are often evoked as a means by which to objectify themselves as different from other Mongolians. In contrast, narratives of continuity revolving around the tracing of clans and genealogies are used to highlight connections to a wider Buriad diaspora. Focusing on the way in which people define themselves against, or alongside, others I reveal some of the idioms by which people evoke different kinds of personhood. These narratives provide a background against which ideas of separation and containment can be used to think through other aspects of Buriad social life. In Chapter 2, I examine practices by which a household manages its fortune through attention to its herds and in mountain ceremonies. These practices point to domestic ways of forging a sense of personhood in the present, whereby people are viewed as the custodians of the land in which they currently live. They also involve attention to particular objects and so they highlight the moral means by which fortune is harnessed and contained. Focusing on objects inside the household, in Chapter 3 I explore how photographic montages and embroideries project different aspects of the person on to visitors to the house. These objects outwardly display the relations of obligation available to people within the household, while provoking individual memories of absent people and places for those who live in their vicinity.

In the second part of the book, I use the idea of separating and containing fortune to explore ideas about the temporality of personhood. In Chapter 4, we see how the creation of hidden pieces, such as umbilical cords and pieces of tail hair from herd animals, contained within the household chest, point to modalities of personhood, quite different to those objectified on the outer surface of the chest. Here, people are brought into being, not though repetition and stasis, but through their separation and movement across time and space. In Chapter 5, I examine the role of the mirror, which

is placed at the centre of the display, to reveal an exemplary kind of person made from each of the parts that constitute the household chest. Drawing on recent work in artefact-oriented research (Gell 1998; Latour 2005; Hoskins 1998; Mitchell 2005; Navaro-Yashin 2009), these visible and hidden components of the household chest appear as inter-dependent perspectives that index different concepts of the person. They reveal that relations based on affinity, separation, rupture, and difference are the necessary, yet invisible, background that supports the visibly foregrounded relations based on shared bone, containment, and sameness. When viewed together, through the mirror that stands at the centre of the display, we see that a person is made from each of them. Far from being a mere psychological reaction to external stimuli (Jay 1996: 3), here vision of oneself through the mirror becomes the 'tool' through which an exemplary kind of personhood is revealed. While things kept in the household chest are the means by which different forms of sociality maybe created between living people, in Chapter 6 I explore the relationship between memory and kinship (Carsten 2007; Das 1995; Humphrey 1992), to show how people's bodies can also be viewed as the containers that 'house' deceased kin. This is necessary, we realize, because a sense of being separated from one's relatives embraces many levels of life for pastoral herders in Ashinga. Primarily, there is a sense of absence from place as the Buriads escaped war and disruption in Russian Buryatia and migrated to Mongolia in the early 1900s. As mentioned, in Mongolia, the Buriad were heavily persecuted during the socialist period and people were prohibited from communicating with their ancestors through shamanic performance. Intra-kin rebirths, common to most families in this area, provide a way in which to negotiate the politics of memory and wider feelings of loss. Nevertheless, when people are born into a world where they are both the rebirth of their grandfather and the daughter of someone in the present, life becomes a process of learning how to separate out this multiplicity in order that one may become the son or daughter of a person in the present.

The final part of the book draws on theoretical approaches to the anthropology of landscape and the morality of people's means of accumulating wealth (Humphrey and Sneath 1999; Bender 1993, 2001; Englund 1996; Pedersen 2007a). With the shift from a command economy to an open market economy (*zah zeeliin üye*, lit. the age of the market), much attention has been paid to the increasing migration of people from the countryside to the ever-growing cities in Mongolia (see Brunn and Narangoa 2006), but little attention has been paid to the people who remain in the places that these people leave behind and to their different economic strategies. In Chapter 7, I focus on accumulating wealth through herding. For pastoral herders,

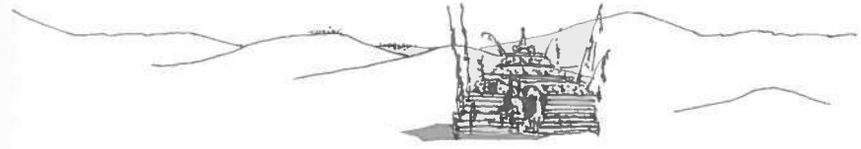
movement across the landscape is the dominant means by which fortune is harnessed and growth in animals achieved. Here, fecundity and wealth are visible in mobile and transitory forms. At the most basic level, it is the herds that form the landscape as it is they who traverse the land and contain the fortune that engenders the fertility and vital energy that makes 'places' (see Humphrey and Hürelbaatar, in press). In the face of competing claims on the landscape, local shamans are motivated to establish relations with previous inhabitants who are held to reside in particular places. In so doing, they gain endorsement from past historical figures who claim that they are good people who should remain there. In securing this endorsement, I suggest, the Buriad go some way in gaining authority over the place in which they currently live. In contrast to the more dominant narratives based on migration, persecution, and ethnic difference, the display of images in the household (Chapter 3), intra-kin rebirths (Chapter 6), and shamanic performance (Chapter 7) reveal how multiple dimensions of history compete for recognition. Focus on these diverse areas allows for a more fluid way of apprehending the ways in which people may be said to move between different subject positions. When movement ceases, however, wealth becomes visible in static forms. In Ashinga's district centre, wealth is increasingly visible in the form of people's elaborately constructed wooden houses. In Chapter 8, we see that these static displays have, over the past decade, become the target of serious arson attacks. Such attacks bring to the fore memories of past terrors where people's property was confiscated in the dead of night. But the threat of arson should not be viewed simply as an extension of a previous terror. Instead, through a focus on Mongolian ideas about fire, arson appears as a form of purification, as people question the morality of one another's new means of accumulating wealth and power.

Practices involving separating and containing people, animals, and things can be said to revolve around a series of tensions. For example, the mountain cairn appears as a gathering point for fortune and prosperity. At the same time people live some distance from this place and extract pieces from it in order to harness fortune for their households (Chapter 2). Similarly, objects placed outside the household chest emphasize infinite replication and inclusion (Chapter 3), while its interiority draws attention to separation and movements (Chapter 4). This tension is made visible when people look into the mirror and see an image of themselves as made from multiple parts (Chapter 5). A tension also appears when living people are viewed as rebirths of deceased relatives, while also being the sons and daughters of people in the present (Chapter 6). Similarly, for nomadic pastoralists wealth is stored in mobile forms that exist apart from people, but it can also appear as a resource

when people attend to the history of the landscape in certain fixed sites through shamanic ceremonies (Chapter 7). In the district centre, wealth is visible in static sites, such as elaborately decorated wooden houses, and yet people are forcibly separated from these sites through acts of arson, dislodging people from these forms of accumulation (Chapter 8). While people may be drawn towards containment and accumulation at certain sites, the need for separation from these sites is seen to generate a kind of growth. This idea echoes the need for seasonal movement from places and peoples engaged in livestock herding practices more generally. In this wider sense, a generative potential exists in being able to maintain a position between them.

In attending to a tension between that which is visible (or contained) and that which is hidden (or separated), I draw attention to aspects that are often left out, or buried, in our own anthropological descriptions. The book ends by reflecting on the distinction between naturalist ontologies of growth and those found in the Mongolian concept of fortune. Review of these ideas in relation to the ethnography suggests that previous distinctions, which have usually been considered as distinct modes or ways of being—such as 'vertical' and 'horizontal', or 'agnatic' and 'consanguineal'—should instead be viewed as instantiations of a wider archetype for perspectival traffic. By focusing on the transformations afforded when parts are extracted from people, animals, and things and then contained, or housed, to allow for growth and generation, we see that these distinctions are always internal. In shifting between them, fortune is harnessed and growth is made visible.

PART ONE
SITES THAT GATHER



1

The Mountain and the Runaway Daughter

There is a well-known myth in Ashinga concerning a small mountain, located in the middle of a large open valley to the north of Renchin and Delgermaa's summer encampment. The valley provides the summer pasture for thirteen families living to the west of the district centre. The mountain at the centre of the valley is called 'Mongol Tolgoi' (lit. Mongolia's Hillock/Head; the word *tolgoi* means 'hillock' as well as 'head'). Crowning its top is a cairn (*ovoo*) made from stones and the saplings of willow trees collected along the banks of the rivers Eg and Tsegeen, which merge at its base. Families whose animals graze here worship at this cairn. Once a year, in the early summer, monks gather to recite prayers, and families who use the pasture-land below shower the cairn with milk products.

It is fairly common in Mongolia for mountains, rivers, and other formations in the landscape to have stories attached to them that explain how they came into being. The myth concerning Mongol Tolgoi is by far the best-known mountain myth in this area. As I was sitting with Tsendmaa, Renchin's eldest daughter-in-law, one summer evening looking across the pasture towards the mountain, searching for the cows to return for the evening's milking before the calves got to them, she asked if I knew how the mountains in front of us were related and proceeded to tell me the following 'mountain myth' (*uulyn domog*):

> 'Mongol Tolgoi' is 'Lord Mountain's' (*Noyon uul*) daughter [a mountain to the north-west]. One day, Mongol Tolgoi fled, without her father's permission, to elope with a young mountain that resides in the south-east, called Binderya Ovoo. As Mongol Tolgoi was running from her father, she stopped briefly to catch her breath. As she did, she turned to see if she was being followed. When she looked back, she saw that her father was watching her from a great distance. She felt shameful and bowed her head towards the

> ground in embarrassment. This is how she has remained. Now Mongol Tolgoi [the hillock] stands here and looks like it is bowing its head. Look north-west. There is 'Lord Mountain', the highest mountain visible in the distance. Next to this is 'Lady Mountain' (*Hatan uul*), and next to this is 'Son Mountain' (*Hüü uul*). They stand in a row, in order of height . . . If you think that mountains are like people, then the daughter is caught here while her father, mother, and brother, Lord, Lady, and Son, stand next to each other looking at her.

In this myth, the hillock is perceived as a runaway daughter, caught midway between her natal family and her future husband. Crouching down, her head is lowered in embarrassment. On hearing this myth, I cannot help but think of it as an allegory for the Buriad's position in Mongolia.

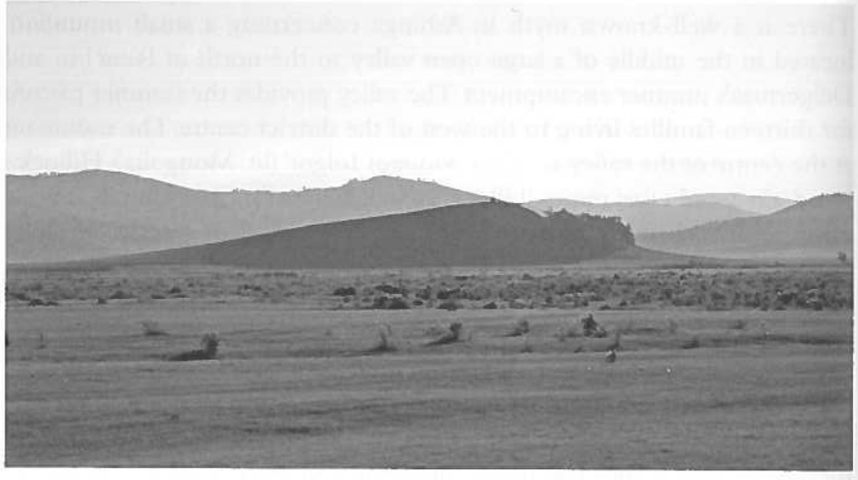


Figure 1.1 Mongol Tolgoi.

Unlike the Halh Mongols, who are the dominant nationality in Mongolia, the Buriad have never had a state or country of their own. Instead, they may be viewed as a diaspora who inhabit areas that have been designated to them by the Mongolian, Chinese, or Russian states. The area that the Buriad currently inhabit is, quite literally, on the geopolitical border between Russia and Mongolia. This border also encompasses a topographical shift. It marks a transition from the dense central Eurasian taiga forest to the north, to the vast flat open steppe to the south that characterizes much of Mongolia.[1]

[1] There is a vast steppe region inside Buryatia which many Buriad inhabit, but the area directly to the north is composed of mountains and dense taiga forest.

When referring to the hillock as 'Mongolia's Head' (rather than hillock), people personify the landscape as a body and explain that at this point, where the hillock rises up from the summer grazing lands, the country of Mongolia begins. Living here, the Buriad are caught midway between two topological and political territories.

Other resonances also come to mind. Being an ethnic minority (*yastan*), who have only relatively recently arrived in Mongolia, the Buriad were heavily persecuted during the twentieth century. Living at the threshold of an often violent state, like the daughter-hillock, the Buriad were forced to lower their heads to the country of Mongolia throughout much of the socialist period and silently accept what was to be their fate. Furthermore, the myth may be perceived as a narrative about political progress. As the daughter-hillock defied the authority of her noble family and fled to her future husband, so too did the Buriad flee at the beginning of the revolution, from their homeland in Buryatia, into the arms of Mongolian socialism. But the daughter-hillock is fully embraced by neither people. She is separated from her family yet, suspended by her father's gaze, she is unable to join her future husband. This 'interstitial' position (Bhabha [1993] 2004) is reminiscent of the Buriad's uncertain relationship to the landscape in which they currently live. Separated from their homeland in Buryatia, the history of the land in which they currently reside belongs to someone else's past, to a past over which they have no control and which sometimes appears out of nowhere to make certain claims on those who live here. It is also not surprising that this hillock is considered to be a woman. The liminal position of the daughter-hillock may be seen as characteristic of the position of Buriad women more generally, who move to their in-laws at marriage, but remain attached to their natal homes, while men, like the father-mountain, remain in place. It is also reminiscent of young children, who live the first years of their life open to the possibility that they may return to the spirit world from which they came. Being separated from some place or person, and yet still, in some way, attached to it, also evokes the idea that people are the rebirths of deceased relatives, while acting as the sons and daughters of people in the present.

The story of how this hillock came to be in this location and its relation to the surrounding landscape echoes various aspects of social life for the Buriad. It is not unusual for landscape myths to speak to broader understandings of historical time (Gow 2001; Hirsch 2006), and throughout East Asia we find ideas that mountains may be viewed as a geographical representation of a sacred geography, or a human body. However, Taylor (1996) has noted that myths often point to 'the world as it is in a highly problematic way,

and thus make the obvious paradoxical' (Taylor 1996: 204). The daughter's failed attempt to reach her destination can be said to complicate the wider paradox that the Buriad face as they are caught between countries, time periods, and subject positions. Suggesting this, I do not mean to set up a series of dualisms. Rather, I want to highlight a complex mix of historical and contemporary tensions that permeate social life for people who live at the base of this mountain.

This chapter focuses on the history of the Buriad's arrival in Mongolia and explores why the themes identified above provide an apt starting point by which to focus on the wider tensions that exist between the need for separation (movement or difference) and the desire for containment (or accumulation, attachment, and sameness). Several narratives of past atrocities and loss that were recounted to me when I first stayed in Northern Hentii are presented. These narratives, I suggest, may be viewed as a form of property through which Buriads, especially people of forty years old and above, objectify themselves to others. Indeed, recounting these narratives may be viewed as a means by which the Buriad actively position themselves as different from other Mongols. It is also an attempt to keep alive a past, with its experiences of suffering and terror, so that people do not forget. In emphasizing this past, people can be said to create a living history for themselves, which provides a way to recreate their positions in the present. In so doing, people in Ashinga make the place in which they currently live a home, rather than an arbitrary place to which the turmoil of migration brought them. In the final part of this chapter, I explore how this distinctiveness is reified by people through different registers, such as ethnicity or place, to form networks of economic and social support in the present day. By focusing on the way in which such networks are maintained and utilized, I show how people forge links with a wider diaspora as they begin to re-imagine themselves connected to other Buriads located in the People's Republic of China and in the Russian Federation.

As I write this, it has been twenty years since the planned economy and administrative infrastructure of the Mongolian People's Republic collapsed. There are people in positions of power and authority who never experienced the working socialist state. Nevertheless, remnants of the past continue to shape the present. Drawing on Das's writing on 'critical events' (1995) that dominate local political and social imaginaries and shape the lives of those who are caught up in them, I attempt to show that experience of large-scale political events in the past may find expression in the present on many different registers or scales. As Carsten (2007: 4) has noted, these events may be viewed as moments when everyday life was disrupted and local

worlds were shattered. They also brought into being new models of agency, which changed the categories within which people operated. In the following, I explore how events such as migration and persecution have shaped the way in which the Buriad perceive themselves and their position in Mongolia. Before I begin, however, it is important to highlight the conditions through which such narratives and concerns come to the fore. This is to stress that knowledge of the past often emerges from specific types 'of interaction which results in the repetition of certain communicative events' (Boyer 1990: 23, emphasis removed).

The anthropologist as a conduit for knowledge

Bulag (1998) has noted that foreign anthropologists in Mongolia tend to represent prestige and power to the people hosting them: 'he or she is an outsider, and the insiders are eager to tell him or her stories, to boast about their culture . . .' (Bulag 1998: 6). Indeed, it is common for anthropologists to be entrusted as cultural brokers who will carry a particular message or story to others (Leach forthcoming). When I first arrived in Ashinga, people were keen to emphasize that as Buriads, they were different from others in Mongolia. I would be told about particular rituals (*zan zanshil*), customs (*yos*), different clan names (*ovog*), and the importance of knowing about one's ancestors at marriage and during shamanic ceremonies. They also objectified their difference through painful narratives that outlined a history of living through trauma, loss, and displacement. In order to learn about this, they directed me to their knowledgeable elders (both men and women, but mostly men) and historical experts (such as school teachers, government officials, Buddhist monks, shamans, and diviners).[2] It was they, I was told, who really knew about things. They were considered mediators of certain types of knowledge and through this knowledge I would gain an understanding of what it was like to be a Buriad in Hentii. Local elders and government officials wanted to involve me in this project. It was hoped that I would document their stories and relay them to wider audiences. For them, disseminating knowledge of these things mattered. On my first visit to Renchin's, for example, he spent part of the day showing me activities, such as collecting hay, or digging for wild onions (*mangir*). These activities were,

[2] Where reference to specialist knowledge is concerned, I have indicated the profession of the person, or their gender. This is because people distinguish specialists, such as diviners, shamans, or elders, as having particular detailed knowledge about certain issues.

he insisted, part of what made the Buriad different from other Mongols. During these activities we also sat in the grass while Renchin lit a cigarette and made a point of telling me about the history of the Buriad, the fact that his family were part of one of the eleven Hori Buriad clans (a sub-group of the Buriad), about the role of Buriad intellectuals in Mongolian political life, their distinctive words and phrases, their myths which captured historical events, and their continued persecution by the Mongolian state.[3]

Figure 1.2 Hay collecting.

After about two months of meeting with elders and local historians, they were, however, surprised and quite confused to hear that I would be staying for a longer period. It became obvious that I did not fit so easily into the category of 'researcher' (*sudlaach hüün*) that they had envisioned. For a start, being twenty-three years of age I was not exactly the kind of authoritative middle-aged man they thought of as someone who was studying for a PhD.

[3] At first, I thought my Mongolian must have been to blame (and it probably was). Only later did I realize that much of my earlier inability to understand clearly what people were saying was because they were talking with a heavy Buriad dialect and sometimes used different words or expressions altogether. Renchin further explained that Buriad herding households tend to observe three yearly dates. On 14 September (*semüün ödör*), people stop collecting hay, as it is likely that it may begin to rain, or snow, or be very windy. On 7 or 8 April (*balgavshain ödör*), small frozen rivers begin to thaw and flow again. On 22 May (*mihuul ödör*), there is usually enough spring grass available for the herds, so that they do not have to move around searching for their feed. People also tend to predict the weather forecast for the rest of the summer on this date.

I didn't have a car. Nor did I seem to have much in the way of support. Instead, I was seen as a young, unmarried woman who had few resources, and was very far from her family. True, I could sometimes be seen checking my watch and walking to houses with heavy dictionaries, talking to religious specialists and elders, and clutching a pen and paper. But in the evenings, I could also be seen running across the district trying to bring the neighbours' cattle home for milking. In the mornings, I could be observed at the local kindergarten working as a caretaker, and in the afternoons I could be spotted trying out different make-up techniques with women of my own age around the district's kiosks. This position meant that my main friends, apart from local historical specialists who always wanted to meet with me, were women of my own age, who were often busily tending to their young children, and elderly women who spent the afternoons showing me how to knit socks and sew while chatting about life in the district. Only later, when I was firmly positioned within a family and involved in everyday tasks, was I able to move about more freely and have more informal kinds of discussions with men.

By taking part in various activities, I slowly became a person, rather than a conduit for a particular kind of knowledge. I also came to realize that information about the history of the Buriad that was felt to be so crucial for me to document at the beginning was a very particular kind of knowledge. It became increasingly clear that it was not the way in which people normally objectified themselves to each other in their daily life (for comparison, see Carsten 1995: 330). This book is, then, not about this dominant narrative and how it is presented as a kind of cultural property to outsiders, but about how this history is lived and carried in daily life through intimate social relations. In focusing on domestic practices associated with households, these things have often been dismissed as folklore and the preoccupation of women. In the present day, however, when a person's success is measured by his or her ability to subsist on a household-based economy, these practices become inherently political. In saying this, I want to acknowledge that these narratives are only one of many forms that the past takes in the life of these people.

Nevertheless, I do take seriously my responsibility to transmit some of the narratives of absence and loss that I learnt about. When talking with people in the early stages of my fieldwork, these narratives were often tinged with sadness and anger and it became increasingly clear that emphasizing difference was, in part, a form of resistance to years of forced sameness during the socialist period. Arguably, this point could apply to Buriads in Russia and China too. In all three areas, the Buriad maintain strong ideas about

ethnic identity more than do neighbouring peoples. And yet, if being Buriad involves a sense of proud resilience, a sense that one is different and distinct, this also stands for experiences of suffering and destruction. In order to understand the forcefulness of these narratives, I begin by giving a brief historical outline of the Buriad's experiences of migration to Mongolia. I then provide accounts of various forms of persecution. In writing this, I am aware of the reflexive aspect of this history. Indeed, I prefer to think about these narratives as a kind of artefact where the past becomes a site that gathers and attracts different things to it. Equally, we may say that such narratives, or stories, are important because they are held to discharge a particular effect on the people telling and listening to them (see Navaro-Yashin 2009). This is emphatically not to suggest that they are not emotive and traumatic memories for the people who recount them. It is obvious that for many, these narratives were intensely painful. Rather it is to acknowledge that in this instance, they were using these narratives as a way of describing themselves *to me* and as a way to craft my perspective of them as people. Sharing these narratives was a way to create themselves as subjects. Indeed, at the beginning of my fieldwork, this was what people thought I should hear. It was as if negotiating and trading in the politics of memory was the first layer of information I had to grasp and it came to inform my later understandings.

A history of migration and dislocation

Prior to their arrival in Mongolia, the Hori Buriad lived just north of the Mongolian border in south-east Siberia. Nomadizing more frequently than other Buriads, they raised large numbers of animals, and migrated between eastern Mongolia and the western Baikal region, previously known as Baikaliya (the present-day Buryat Republic and Aga region in Chita). During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, they began to settle in the region to the east of Lake Baikal (Humphrey [1998] 2001: 24; Atwood 2004: 61–2; Oyuntungalag 2004). In 1727, the Treaty of Kyakhta fixed the Russian–Qing territorial border that separated the Buriad in Russian Siberia from the Halh Mongols in Mongolia (Atwood 2004: 54, 70).[4] Importantly, unlike the

[4] The earlier Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689) laid the foundation for this treaty and limited border crossings between Russian Siberia and the Qing Empire, until 1911 when the Buriad began to migrate to Mongolia (see Cheney 1968). Prior to this treaty, the Mongol–Siberian border was more fluid. For example, Heissig (1980) notes that 'many South Mongolian and North Mongolian families fled to Buryat Mongolia in the various fratricidal wars in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially at the time of Ligdan Khan (1604-34) and of Galdan (1645-97)' (Heissig 1980: 11). Humphrey (1979) comments that while the history of the Hori in the Chinggis period is not clear, in the sixteenth century many of the Hori were feudal subjects of the Mongolian Altan Haan in south-east Mongolia. They were given in dowry to the Altan Haan's daughter when she married the Solongut Bübei-Beile in the 1590s, but they soon fled into Russian protected lands in the Trans-Baikal area. In the early 1600s they fled again westwards to the other (western) side of Baikal, returning to the eastern side some forty years later (Humphrey 1979: 243). This history of movement back and forth between Mongolia and Siberia, and within Siberia itself, suggests that many Hori Buriad were of very mixed origins and were not a single group of people, with many being Mongolian refugees (Humphrey 1979: 247). The unification of the Hori did not occur until the nineteenth or twentieth century when the border was closed to large-scale migration. The tsarist support for the heredity principle standardized genealogies and they began to be written down to consolidate the power of the Hori Buriad leaders/princes for taxation purposes and to determine the limits of exogamy (Humphrey 1979: 253). Any migrating newcomers established affiliation through manipulation of these genealogies.

Halh Mongols, the Buriad were never under the administrative and political rule of the Manchu (or Qing) dynasty.[5] In the past, Buriads formed large numbers of exogamous clans, whose senior leaders jostled for influence while claiming some remote fraternal origin (Atwood 2004: 63). This provided a basis for their subjugation by the Russian tsar. For most of the seventeenth century Buryatia was ruled by local princely heads of clans (Bur. *taisha*) who collected taxes for the tsarist ruler from their subjects (to whom they were not always related). In return, they were protected from Cossack abuses through an imperial patent (Humphrey [1998] 2001: 51; Atwood 2004: 62).

This patent did not protect them from everything. In the early 1900s the Buriad were prompted to flee their homeland in Buryatia owing to a lengthy period of war and disruption. They settled in different Mongol-inhabited regions.[6] Crossing into Mongolia, many of the Buriad had experienced hardships in their homeland. Clashes between Buriad and Russian migrants in Siberia (1902, 1917), the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5), the First World War (1914–18) and the October Revolution (1917–18), as well as a civil war in 1918–22, all turned the landscape of Buryatia into a battleground (Atwood 2004: 70; Snow 1971: 205). Political activity among the Buriad also arose in reaction to this Russian expansion and many of the more politically

[5] Mongol princes established alliances with the Manchus earlier than 1691 (Bawden 1968: 39) and Inner Mongolia came under Manchu control earlier in 1624 (Jagchid and Hyer 1979: 16–17). Under the Russians, the Hori were freed as Siberian natives, and excluded from military service (Humphrey 1979: 253).

[6] I use the term 'Mongol-inhabited regions' to highlight that the Buriad migrated to the present-day People's Republic of China, as well as to Mongolia. Many from the Aga region in Chita, for example, settled in the Shinehen area of Hulunbuir, which was then part of Heilongjiang province.

active Buriads hoped to separate from Russia and form a greater Mongolian state (Bulag 1998; Snow 1971). In addition, a railway was built (locally referred to as 'the iron snake') which wound its way across the landscape, 'bringing many robbers and thieves' an elderly man explained. Large-scale migrations to Mongolia took place in 1909, 1917, 1923, and 1925, and in 1927 the border was closed.

The neighbouring country of Mongolia, with which they had long-term religious and political links, had recently established its independence from the Manchu (Qing Empire) and happily opened its borders to them (Jagchid and Hyer 1979; Crossley 2002). Leaving behind most of their possessions, people fled at night, crossing the border in small groups through the dense taiga forest. Renchin's father's older brother explained:

> I was born in 1917 in Russia. When the October Revolution started, my family decided to move to Mongolia because of the chaos of war. Just before the revolution there had been a war with Japan. When we heard the cannons sound in a nearby village my grandfather initiated the move to Mongolia. It was said that it was a peaceful place. We left in silence tying up the muzzles of our cattle, with twenty or so people from my family. When we arrived there were some friendly Halh families who fed us. We first settled to the north of the Onon River, then we moved to the west side of the river. Later my father's brother also came to Ashinga and we all moved here.

The people who live in Ashinga migrated from the area around Lake Baikal, to the east of Ulan-Ude, and from the area directly north of the border in present-day Chita Province. Arriving in Mongolia, they found that the pastureland was sparsely populated, allowing them to settle in clusters based on previous networks and reproduce links and communities of the areas from which they had fled. During the Manchu period, the frontier posts along this border area had been populated by around fifty or so Halh families, who were moved from elsewhere to work here. From 1911 onwards, when Manchu dominance ceased in Mongolia, many of these families returned to their original homelands as new administrative systems were put in place to collect taxes (Dashnyam 1979). Gradually, as more people arrived, the Buriad moved further westwards, away from the border crossing. When news spread that it was a peaceful place (*taivan gazar*), with enough pasture for their animals, more families who had crossed the border moved into the area of Ashinga. In 1925 the 'Onon River Buriad Banner' (*Onon Golyn Buriad Hoshuun/Onon Gurvan Haruul*) was established (previously called Ashinga frontier post). According to government statistics from 1926, 'Onon River Buriad Banner' consisted of 1,458 households, 5,961 people, 132 Buddhist monks, and 87,498 cattle (Dashnyam 1979: 25). Transferring their

own names to the mountains and *ovoos* (sacred ritual cairns), the Buriads who settled here worshipped them with the help of shamans and Buddhist monks.[7]

The Buriad brought with them new kinds of technologies not before seen in Mongolia, such as milk separators for making cream, hand-powered sewing machines, hay-mowing machines, improved horse, cattle, and sheep breeds (*sechev*, *semintal*, *övör baigal*, *orhon*), rakes, tanning equipment, bread-making techniques, and wooden log houses, or cabins, which they erected at winter encampments. Before their arrival, however, people had lived in the area for many generations and the area even features in the chronicle 'The Secret History of the Mongols' as the birthplace of Chinggis Haan (commonly referred to in English as 'Ghengis Khan'), the national hero of Mongolia and the founder of Mongolian statehood.[8] At this point, they did not know the historical importance of the land on which they chose to settle. Nor could they guess at the disruption that was to come. Rather, they chose this place because it offered a peaceful contrast to the destruction that they had fled.[9]

Left very much to their own devices, it was not until the 1920s that the Mongolian government realized that some of the Russian-educated Buriad intellectual elite could be of potential value to them. Several Buriad intellectuals were appointed to negotiate with the Soviet government to establish Mongolia as the first satellite state of the Soviet Union (see Cheney 1968). After the 1924 revolution, some of these Buriad intellectuals became prominent political figures in Mongolia's capital (Atwood 2004; Rupen 1956). Despite being relative newcomers to the country, these well-educated members of the Buriad elite quickly became respected political advisers to their hosts and held prominent positions in the government of the

[7] For further historical background see Ewing (1980) and Sanders (1996).

[8] 'The Secret History of the Mongols' is an account of the ancestry and life of the Mongolian leader Chinggis Haan. Onon (2001) estimates that this account was probably recorded in 1228.

[9] It is worth noting that in October 1920, Baron von Ungern-Sternberg (or the 'White Baron') crossed the Russian–Mongolian border and travelled through this area on his way to Niislel Hüree (Ulaanbaatar). It is said that he robbed and killed many of the Buriads along the Onon River as he tried to recruit people to fight against the Chinese and Russians and restore the Bogd Haan (the reincarnated 'living God' who was the political and religious leader of Mongolia) to the throne. While some émigré Buriads joined his army, others procured arms from him, in order to fight against Russians who were encroaching the border (Bulag 1998). Although it is widely recalled that he had a bad temper and was ruthless, even going so far as to destroy an old woman's sewing machine in Ashinga, many people who spoke to me about the Baron praised him, saying 'he was not a man with an empty head, he knew many things and was clever' (cf. Dashnyam 1979).

Mongolian People's Republic. Rupen (1956) even goes so far as to state that the 1920s was 'the Buriat episode in Outer Mongolian history' (Rupen 1956: 389).[10] On 28 November 1924, the Mongolian People's Republic was established as the first satellite state of the Soviet Union. In the same year, the Buriad in Mongolia were granted citizenship in the republic (Bulag 1998; Atwood 2004: 70).

Narratives of persecution and loss

Although they escaped war and disruption in Siberia, and helped set in motion nascent Soviet reforms, life in Mongolia has not always been peaceful for the Buriad. It did not take long before the political ideology that they helped to establish began to single them out as a potential threat. By 1928 almost all the Buriad politicians in Ulaanbaatar had been dismissed from their posts. In the 1930s, the Buriad in the countryside (who were almost certainly all unrelated to the Buriad intellectuals in the capital),[11] became victims of intense persecution, when most of the male members of the community over eighteen years of age were charged with being counter-revolutionaries or siding with the Japanese, and many were taken away and killed in terrifying night raids (see Bulag 1998: 84; Atwood 2004: 71). In 1933 the first charges of political persecution, locally referred to as the charge of '*Lhümbiin Hereg*' (Lhümbe affair), were enforced on people in this area (Tseren 2007).[12] The Buriad came to represent everything that had to be cleansed and tidied away, being accused of everything from siding with White Russians and the Japanese, or being bourgeois nationalists, to plotting pan-Mongolianism (Rupen 1956: 397).[13] Over several years (1933–4, 1937–8,

[10] While many of these Buriad intellectuals of the 1930s were, in a sense, Russian agents and instruments of Soviet foreign policy, other Buriads pursued goals which came into conflict with Soviet aims; they were 'bourgeois nationalists' who worked for a Greater Mongolian State, a re-creation of a Mongolian Empire which could defend Mongolia against Russian and Chinese incursion (Rupen 1956: 384). From their perspective, the Halh and Southern Mongols were traditionalists, aristocrats who hated the Chinese but wanted to preserve the old ways, while the Buriad were largely progressive (Rupen 1956).

[11] It is important to note that these pastoral herders and craftsmen were different from the Buriad intellectual elite who supported the revolution and occupied prominent positions in the early Mongolian socialist government, reforming its military, educational, and administrative capacities (see Maiskii 1921, referenced in Cheney 1968).

[12] It is estimated that more than 2,663 Buriad in Hentii were liquidated in the political purges (Bulag 1998: 85). See Bat-Erdene (1999) and Tseren (2007) for details of the 'Lhümbe affair'.

[13] Such accusations are deeply embedded in historical Mongol, Russian, and Chinese relations. Accusation of Buriad involvement with the Japanese is, in part, a Halh-centric view and we are unsure whether there ever were any wandering Japanese spies in this area. Bulag and Humphrey (1996) analyse three documents from these countries concerning ideas about Japanese relations in the early 1900s. From them, we can elucidate that some of the early leaders in Mongolia feared Japan as a destabilizer of Soviet and Mongol power and believed that the Buriads' involvement with them was fuelled by the desire to create a pan-Mongolian movement with Buriad leaders. China saw Japan as a threat to its own territory, while Russia had already signed a secret treaty with the Japanese protecting Mongolia from Chinese occupation.

1939) execution squads from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, locally referred to as the 'green caps', repeatedly seized male Buriads, monks, and nobles in Hentii and sent them to labour camps in Mongolia or Siberia or shot them in the provincial capital (see also Dashnyam 1979).

Not surprisingly, this period has left a deep emotional scar on the minds of later generations. During the early stages of my fieldwork, elderly people would recount the widespread loss and terror of these events. Learning to live with this loss was a part of what it meant to be a Buriad in Hentii. Before I could understand the present in any meaningful way, they claimed, I had to know about this past. An elderly blacksmith from Ashinga explained:

> My grandfather was seized even though he was eighty-two years old. My father was seized and put in prison for ten years and my wife's father was seized at forty years old. During this time I was in the army. My father was taken while I was away. Every Buriad man who was not fighting against the Japanese [in 1939] was seized. Military people took them to Öndörhaan [the capital town of Hentii Province] and forced them to sign a paper otherwise they would be killed the following morning. My grandfather agreed with some of the other elders to sign the paper, but the next morning he was accused of giving horses to a Japanese soldier and was shot. When I returned from the war, there were mainly women here. Everyone's property had been taken and families had only one cow each to live from.

Another man told me that, in a sub-district of Ashinga where there had been approximately one hundred households, after a wave of persecution only seven males were left. In this period of great uncertainty, people created a special genre of songs called 'persecution songs' (*helmegdliin duu*) to lament the loss and absence of their husbands, brothers, grandfathers, and sons. Garam, an elderly Buriad man in Ashinga's district centre, whose house contained the full works of Lenin in a neat series of leather-bound and embossed books, once sang some of these songs to me in a moving attempt to make me understand how people had embodied their grief. The following is a song called 'Separated in Grief from My Father' which his sister sang after their father was seized on 10 June 1938.

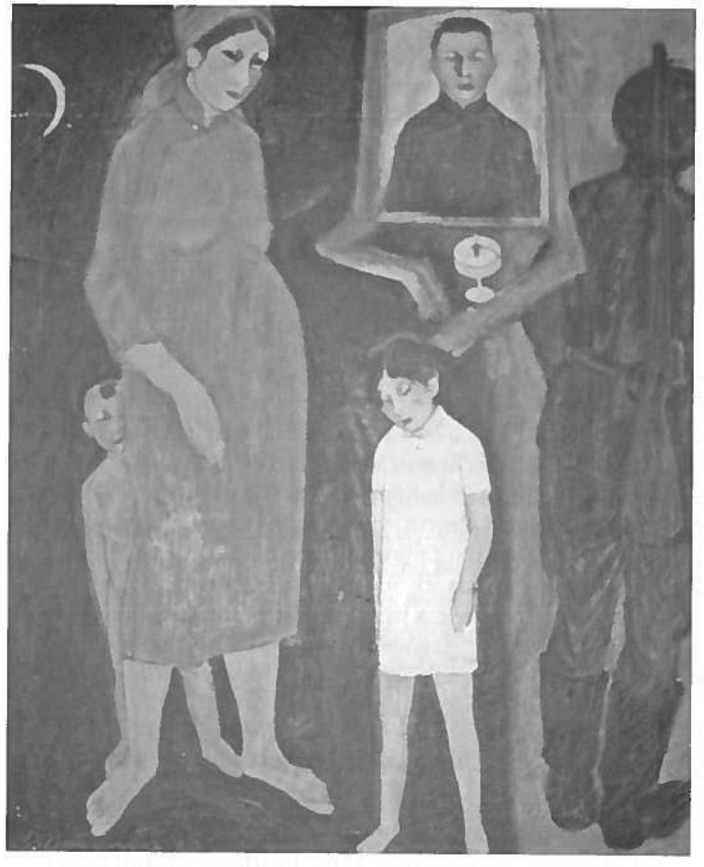


Figure 1.3 Woman mourning the death of her husband with her children, while soldier stands with back toward them. By Myagmar (1982). The Museum in Remembrance of the Politically Repressed, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Photograph by Christopher Kaplonski, 2009.

> My beautiful untrained horse neighs when torn away from its herd
> As I go about my work I grieve when separated from my father
> My present body becomes sad when torn away in grief from my father.
> (my translation)[14]

On 17 June, seven days after she sang this song, their father was executed. Garam knew this, he explained, because in the early 1990s the Mongolian government announced his 'rehabilitation' (*tsagaatgal*) and awarded the

[14] In Mongolian, title: Aavaasaa hagatsaad gunihardag; song: Ardag saihan mor' min', Aduunaas tasraad yantsgaadag, Ajild yavaa biye min', Aavaasaa hagatsaad gunihardag, Emneg saihan mor' min', Ijlees tasraad yantsgaadag, Enüühend yavaa biye min', Etsgeesee tasraad gunihardag.

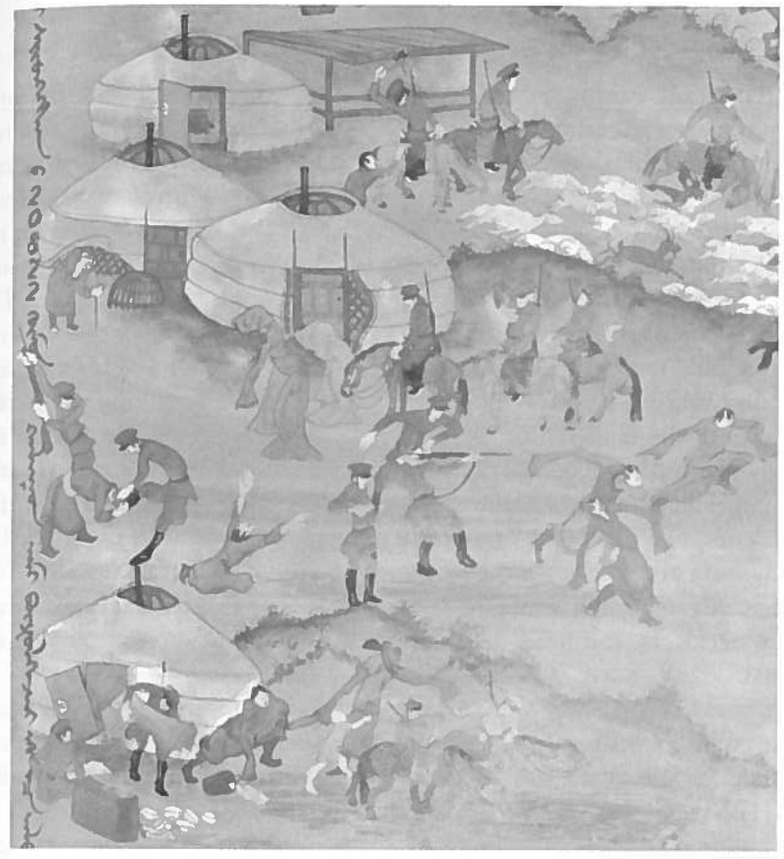


Figure 1.4 Detail from 'A day in the life of the period of political repression, 1932–1940'. By B. Nyam Bagsh and Ya. Ürjinee (1996). The Museum in Remembrance of the Politically Repressed, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Photograph by Christopher Kaplonski, 2009.

family compensation, in the form of a million *tögrög*s (approximately £500 according to exchange rates in September 2008, or £1,500 at the time, or £250 for relatives who were exiled but returned). Garam also sang a song that he had composed himself, called 'Did Not Save Us'. I include it because I think it captures the intense sense of helplessness that people felt in the face of this violence and the ensuing deep-seated mistrust and resentment towards the state that this sense of helplessness cultivated.

> We who have lost our fathers have experienced all kinds of suffering
> This government of ours has not protected or cared for us
> We who have lost our fathers have suffered terrible torments
> Ariyabal God [a Buddhist god] did not save us

Although I did not see my father's death I felt it in my body
At a young age his life was taken and he was shot. (my translation)[15]

Ruthlessly tearing people apart and killing their kin was not the only form of persecution that the Buriad experienced. After men in the area had been seized, officials from the Ministry of Internal Affairs returned to raid household chests and confiscate people's jewellery, clothes, cattle, horses, sheep, goats, and carts. Kaplonski (1999), an anthropologist working on the political purges in Mongolia, explains that, when carrying out such raids, 'the Ministry of Internal Affairs operated according to a set pattern. The ministry's men arrived most often at night, usually in a group of two or three. If household items were not confiscated on the spot, chests were sealed and the most valuable items were removed. In due course, everything was confiscated from the families . . . Repeat confiscations were not unheard of if a family managed to acquire animals or property from friends or relatives after the initial arrest and confiscation' (Kaplonski 1999: 97). It is said that, after such raids, Halh Mongol women in the provincial capital were invited to claim some of these looted goods as their own. Elderly Buriad people would indignantly explain that these women could be seen wearing several of their rings, necklaces, and head-dresses as they went about their errands in the capital.

During this period, women were often left to fend for themselves and their children with only one or two cows, 'leaving no one', one woman claimed, 'to slaughter cattle or sheep'. One man commented, sadly: 'unlike the Halh we have no gold and silver hidden in the bottom of our trunks for our children at marriage'. The physical absence of those who were charged did not erase their lingering presence, as families were haunted by the state's condemnation of these men. It was as if their sorrow was not a private form of suffering, but a visible scar they were continually reminded of when singled out as coming from a family with counter-revolutionaries. Children associated with counter-revolutionaries were denied schooling and young Buriad men were often sent to fight on the front lines rather than allowed to use their skills, such as reading and writing, in administrative positions. Renchin's father recounted: 'My parents came from Sholgyn gol which flows north-west from Ulan-Ude. Our family tree was burned by government officials. I left for the army in 1937 and when I returned there were hardly

[15] In Mongolian, title: Avaraagüi bidniigee; song: Etsgiigee aldsan bid nar, Eldev yanzyn zovlon edelsen, Ene zasag tör maan', Eneren hairlaagüi bidniigee, Aavygaa aldsan bid nar, Aimshigtai zovlon edelsen, Ar'yaabal burhan, Avraach ügüi bidniigee, Etsgiinhee ühliig haraagüi ch gesen, Enehen biyeeree medernem, Ider dund nasandaa, Erslen zogsoj buuduulsan yüm.

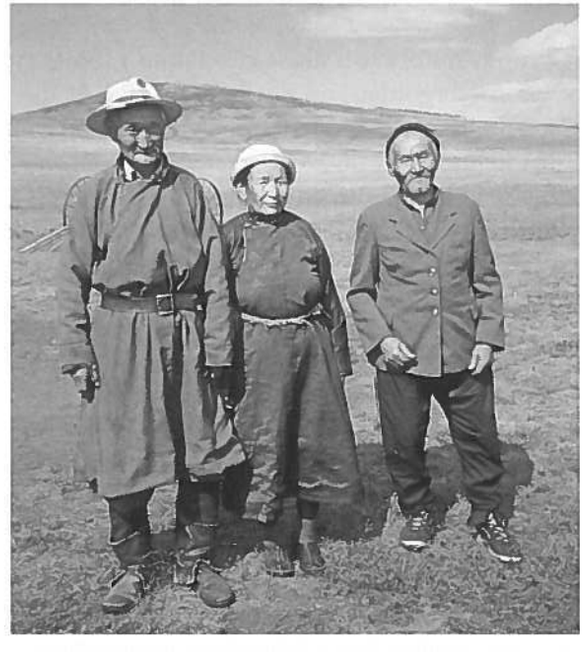


Figure 1.5 Elderly people and historical experts.

any men left here.' Charged with having counter-revolutionary husbands and fathers, many women and children took the names of their brothers or maternal uncles in order to avoid further association with these absent, yet condemned men.[16]

It is important to note that the Buriad were not targeted simply because they were suspected of being counter-revolutionaries. Ethnic distinctions of all kinds were held to be politically polluting and representative of a kind of history that had to be erased, or cast in new ways, for the socialist world to come into being. During the socialist period, Soviet nationality policies espoused the goal of transcending ethnic particularities, but they also institutionalized ways of expressing differences within the confines of certain politically correct limits (see Kandiyoti 2002). This paradox meant that displaying ethnic difference of any kind was always a precarious balancing act, which could result in either humiliation or reward. Buriad genealogical diagrams (*ugiin bichig*), extending back over seven or eight generations through agnatic lines to establish exogamy, for example, were burnt by officials, or had to be hidden in the bottom of chests. These things were classed as 'primitive' or 'nationalistic'. In fear, many people also burnt these documents themselves, worried that if they got into the hands of the Ministry of Internal Affairs everyone listed would be killed (Bulag 1998: 129). During this period, people had to use their father's name as their surname, thereby limiting knowledge of a family history to a single generation. History was something that had to be erased, forgotten, and cast in new ways. At the same time, it seemed that elements of the past could suddenly appear and grab you, pulling you down so that it changed your life forever.

Persecution is held by the Buriad in Hentii to have been a direct result of Stalin's resentment at their leaving Siberia at the beginning of the revolution.[17] It is interesting to note that people do not blame Choibalsan, the Mongolian leader at the time, for instigating orders to kill the Buriad, an attempt, maybe, to bow their heads to the government in order not to instigate further attention. Persecution was also prompted by fears that the Buriad might be part of a wider plot to establish a pan-Mongolian movement that would threaten the new Mongol–Russian alliance. To this day, people across Northern Hentii insist that their children and grandchildren have been blacklisted and discriminated against by the dominant Halh Mongol authorities because they come from families of counter-revolutionaries.[18] One local history teacher spent all of our conversations, over several weeks, carefully tracing the different ways in which he perceived that the Buriad had been persecuted throughout most of the twentieth century. One afternoon, his anger seemed to culminate when he exclaimed:

> The discrimination and killing of the Buriad carried on until the 1990s, I can

[16] This name changing has led to a lot of confusion. When the Mongolian government issued compensation for families with politically persecuted relatives, many could not prove that they were related to the so-called counter-revolutionaries because their parents had swapped their names in order that they might go undetected by officials.

[17] Stalin was often paranoid about those who lived on the borders of the Soviet Union, and was obsessive about keeping them politically 'clean' and as distinct as possible from their neighbours. One instance of this was the way in which the official dialect decided upon for the Buryat Republic was a northern Buriad dialect almost incomprehensible to Mongolians (pers. comm. Caroline Humphrey).

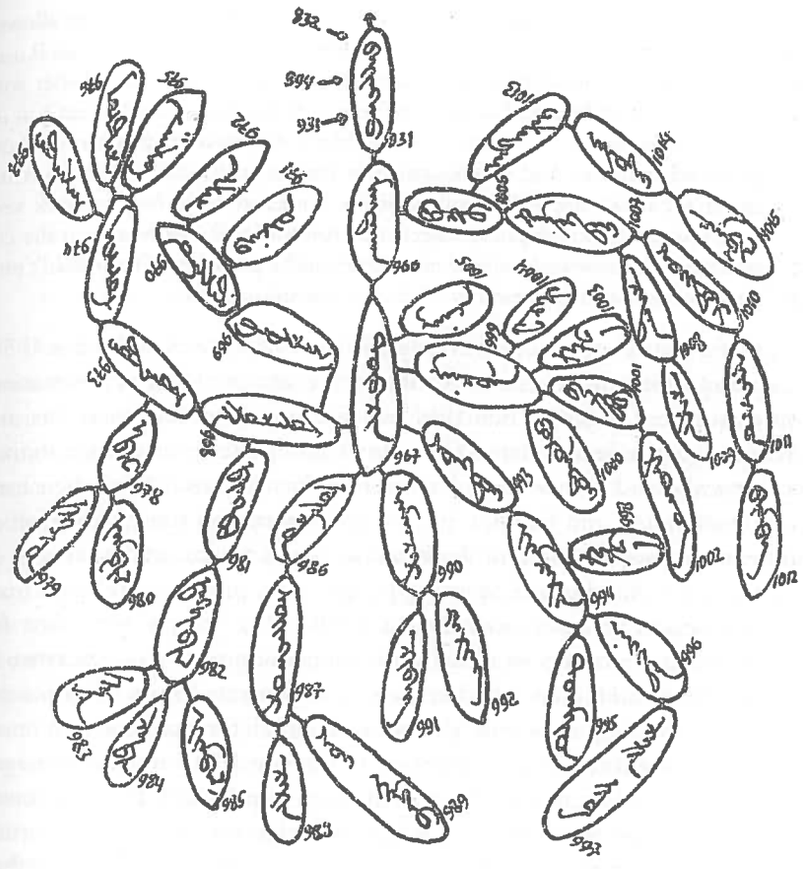


Figure 1.6 Buriad genealogy (Sum'yabaatar 1966: 100).

[18] See Bat-Erdene (1999: 364) for political views regarding the Buriad in Mongolia.

> prove it to you! For example, children of executed parents are never allowed to study abroad. So the Buriad can never advance in official ranks. Even Russia oppressed the Buriad; they split Buryatia into three parts. When I met with the governor of Aginski Province, he whispered to me: 'Our Russian parents split us apart.' In the 1930s and 1940s children of persecuted parents could not go to school, they had to change their names. Just when life was getting better for us, in the 1950s collectivization emerged, we had to work very hard towards different yearly targets and surrender all our wealth to the co-operative. It was very hard and people would be punished if they didn't produce enough, this was another kind of persecution!

The formation of co-operatives (*negdel*) and collectives in the late 1950s throughout Mongolia was, some would tell me, another form of persecution. As if to torment people when they had just begun to find their feet and were managing to accumulate a few animals and possessions, private animals were removed and people were often forced to work away from their natal lands (*törsön nutag*) and families. In fact, collectivization strategically forced families to engage in different activities, so as not to accumulate wealth or power in a specific domain. Splitting people apart prevented relatives from close economic co-operation (Bulag 1998: 125). It was very rare, for example, to find brothers working in the same division of a co-operative in the same district. Herders' children were also separated from their parents for most of the year at boarding schools in district centres, or at pioneer camps in the summer. In turn, workers in the late 1970s were encouraged to send their children to kindergarten at three months old. This was something that I learnt about one day when, as Delgermaa and I were sorting berries for jam, she explained why her second son was so much shorter than everyone else in the family. This, she reasoned, was due to the fact that she had been unable to breastfeed him for very long as she had given him to the kindergarten at three months old in order to retain her job, while her husband's position at work was becoming increasingly tenuous as he continued his sporadic drinking.

By the 1980s, people recounted, things became easier. A woman, called Enhtuyaa, who was a schoolchild in Ashinga in the 1980s but now lives in the city, described the district centre during the late Soviet period in the following way:

> In the mornings you were woken by the sound of the sawmill calling people to work. People could be seen rushing off to the co-operative, the sawmill, the school, or some other place. Everyone could be seen dashing about in different directions. Trucks and lorries would arrive at all hours from neighbouring provinces to collect planks from the sawmill. In the evenings, there were two social clubs that showed films, or there were other kinds of meetings arranged. On Saturday mornings the workers attended the 'Information Meeting' (*sonsgol tsuglaan*). Here, news would be distributed and discussed. Everything was discussed. If someone had divorced, for example, they would be mentioned in the meetings and they would be branded as immoral (*uhamsargüi*), sometimes they would even have to identify themselves by standing up. Your picture might even appear in the newspaper (*tonshuul sonin*). Everything was judged. At school we had regular health inspections. If you were found to be dirty, you were forced to visit each of the classrooms. The teacher would make you stand at the front of the class and show the other children your dirt.

During this period, some people from Ashinga were allowed to cross the border on specially arranged cultural exchanges, where they performed Buriad music and dances for their neighbours at arranged locations. Seen as a kind of reward, people I spoke to who had been on such trips also resented the fact that they were not able to stay for longer and seek out their relatives in Buryatia.

It is clear that migration and political reform has disrupted family life for the Buriad several times over. Elderly men and women would sometimes cry as they told me these stories, local historians would get angry, and young children would sit quietly and listen with horror, while I would wonder what kind of experiences I was to hear about next. Commenting on ideas about loss and the annihilation of cultural forms during the early Mongol-Soviet government, Humphrey (1992) has noted that this period 'cannot accurately be described merely as a "social transformation" . . ., but was more like a strange apocalypse, in which ordinary people were stunned but nevertheless had to go on living' (Humphrey 1992: 380). Notwithstanding this 'apocalyptic' separation between people and place, people did manage to carry on living and they did so in incredibly innovative and creative ways. While socialist reforms targeted the most obvious manifestations of Buriad sociality, such as genealogical diagrams, clan names, and locality, the Buriad maintain relations with people in spite of their physical absence and draw on the fecundity of a landscape that is not fully their own. In a country where the past has been repeatedly erased to make way for a new present, being able to tend to the memory of those who lived before in a variety of different ways is of great political value. However, a sense of absence from place and kin continues to permeate many aspects of Buriad relations in Mongolia, as it is also integral to the movement involved in livestock herding practices that dominate the area. Following Das and Poole (2004), the way in which the Buriad experience and reflect on the actions of the early socialist state allows us to rethink boundaries between the centre and the periphery. In many

ways the Buriad, who were located at the nation's margins, became the site for shaping early forms of socialist state power (Das and Poole 2004: 3). But just as the state legitimized its violence towards the Buriad through its own fictions, so too do the Buriad continue to generate their own kinds of narratives to validate their positions in Mongolia.

The politics of difference and similarity

In anthropology we are familiar with exploring the 'social life of things' (Appadurai 1997), or the biography of a particular nationalist movement and its imagined community (Anderson 1991), but how can we view the ways in which ethnic identity, as a form of cultural property, has changed in value as it is re-imagined by the Buriad over time? It certainly is the case that suffering, migration, and political persecution are dominant tropes that bind the Buriad to a wider diasporic community of Buriads, but the type of person with whom one has that exchange determines its value and thus the way in which these narratives are presented. During the socialist period, relations based on ethnicity were something to be hidden and concealed. While Halh Mongols were the 'true' Mongols, the custodians of Mongol history, and the guardians of the Mongol homeland, the Buriad lowered their heads like the daughter-hillock and were classed as an 'ethnic minority' (*yastan*), or of 'mixed origin' (*erliiz*) (see also Bulag 2004), where the idea of being 'mixed' implied the existence of a 'true' or 'pure' essentialist counterpart.

According to the national census undertaken in 2000, the Buriad make up 1.7 per cent of the population in Mongolia.[19] Today, these people may speak of being 'Buriad Mongols' in an effort to express that, although they recognize and cherish links with a wider Buriad diaspora in Russia and China, 'Buryatness is part of Mongolness' (Bulag 1998: 88). By using the term Buriad, rather than Hori Buriad, Buriad Mongol, or just Mongol, to refer to these people, I realize that I am perpetuating their distinctiveness from other Mongols in a very particular way. Referring to them through a term that designates their ethnicity may seem to reify a particular aspect of these people. Like other forms of identity, ethnicity is, of course, not a fixed singular mode, but a contingent category that is privileged at certain moments. Tensions based on ethnicity emerge when, for example, the Mongolian government promotes the idea that the land in which the Buriad currently live is the cradle of the Mongolian (and, therefore, Halh) state. Or

[19] In 1989, the number of Buriad in Mongolia was estimated at 35,444 (Atwood 2004: 54).

when exploration licences in the district are issued by politicians in the capital, who have alliances to other parts of Mongolia (particularly western Mongolia) or to Chinese mining companies, bypassing local government and causing rivers to become polluted. Or when, one day in the summer of 2000, cheap Chinese food products procured from the capital were seen to be the cause of appendix problems among six children who had to be operated on in the district centre, without electricity. Here, the children's bodies can be seen as analogous to the state of the Buriad people as a whole, as people lamented their lack of choice and control in the place in which they lived, even over the lives of their family members. This position is internalized by the Buriad who refract the sense of being marginal citizens of Mongolia and relate to diasporic homelands in Buryatia (Shimamura 2004: 5). In such instances, a more general sense emerges that their place here is not considered valid, permanent, or something that is particularly endorsed or embraced by others.

In addition to narratives of loss and absence imposed by an external other, the Buriad also express internal differences among various Buriad groups living in the area. In a sense, they re-inscribe criteria of difference on each other. Maintaining internal differences is one way to establish relations of exogamy. It is also a way in which to keep their pre-migratory history alive, as such distinctions often relate to their homelands prior to their arrival in Mongolia. For example, in Ashinga, the Hori Buriads fear the Hudir Buriads, who live on the eastern side of the Onon River and came from an area just north of the border, for their strong shamanic beliefs and claim they are prone to marrying their relatives.[20] They mock the Tsongool Buriad for being weak-minded, having joined the tsarist Russian army while residing in Buryatia. In a district to the east where many people have relatives, the Buriad distinguish themselves from the Hamnigan, who they claim are an ethnic group quite different from the Buriad and of Tungus origin.[21] One elderly woman, for example, mentioned quite proudly:

> Buriad and Hamnigan have been hostile towards each other since very ancient times. Our hero, Barga Baatar [Bur. Bavjabaatar], saved the Buriad from the Hamnigan who wanted to destroy them. Old people say that the Hamnigan had one male shaman and one female shaman and they held a ceremony to

[20] The term Hudir relates to the name of a river in the area in Siberia from which they came. Being from the 'hud clan' (*hud ovog*) also means to be from a distant enough clan to permit in-marriage, and thus, the name could also refer to an exogamous marriage group for the Hori Buriad.

[21] Local proverbs based on ethnic differences include: 'You don't become friends with the Hamnigan, just like you don't use a broken pot because it will leak.'

try to kill Barga Bataar, but he killed the female shaman and put her head in a pot of yoghurt and that is why, to this day, Hamnigan can't make yoghurt. My grandmother used to tell me that it is better to marry a Halh than a Hamnigan, and a Russian than a Chinese. In the 1940s one Buriad man married a Hamnigan woman here and local Buriads used to joke with him and say: 'let us taste your yoghurt'.[22]

In the Introduction I mentioned that people were moved from western Mongolia in the 1960s to work at the newly established sawmill in Ashinga. Most of these people were also ethnic minorities, and they arrived without animals or relatives and were placed in workers' housing well to the east of the district centre, where they had their own kindergarten and cultural club. The Buriad, by contrast, worked at the co-operative and lived in the western area of the district centre. With the collapse of the state-run sawmill in 1990, these western Mongolian families had, literally, nothing apart from the crumbling stone houses in which they had been placed, and many returned to their homeland or moved to a mining town called Baganuur Hot. Middle-aged Buriad men would sometimes explain to me that, although they had been friendly with these people, at school they would fight each other and always, somehow, feel 'different inside' (*dotor öör*). Today, these distinctions are still visible in spatial terms, with different ethnic groups and Buriad sub-divisions living in different residential areas in the district. In Norovlin (the district centre), Hudir and Tsongool Buriad live in the north; Halh Mongols live in the east; and Hori and Barag Buriad live to the west.[23] In Barh (the sub-district to the west of the district centre), Hori Buriad live across the whole area. In Onon (the sub-district to the north of the district centre), Hudir Buriad live to the east of the Onon River and Tsongool Buriad live to the west of it, while Hori Buriad live in Hurh (the sub-district to the south of the district centre).

[22] Feuds between Buriad and Hamnigan include the belief that the Hamnigan denounced Buriad men during the political purges. They are also reflected in historical myths. Barga Baatar, the founder of the Hori Buriad, is said to have migrated from Mongolia into Buryatia with his three sons, who established the eleven tribes of the Hori Buriad. Another hero is Gantömör, a noble man from Mongolia. When Mongolia came under the control of the Manchu, half his subjects moved to Buryatia and became subjects of the Russian tsar. The rest were left in Mongolia. Many people in Hentii spoke to me of signs, which involved placing household objects in certain positions so that these people could identify each other in the future.

[23] It is worth mentioning that it was only a few years after my first fieldwork in Ashinga that I learnt that many people who had initially called themselves Hori Buriad were, in fact, Barag Buriad. It seemed that people may have been apprehensive of this identification since many Barag Buriad had been suspected of supporting the Japanese during the early socialist period and had been severely persecuted as a result.

Despite differences articulated through clan and ethnic distinctions, the Buriad, and particularly Buriad men, may also boast that they are intellectually superior to Halh Mongols. In so doing, they fight against the idea of the Halh as dominating Mongolian state politics and powerful political positions. Claims that national heroes, such as Sühbaatar and Chinggis Haan were Buriad are common (cf. Bulag 1998: 89), and it is sometimes highlighted that early democratic revolutionary figures were Buriad and played an important role in early democratic reforms. These kinds of claims point to the Buriad involvement in the formation of the current Mongolian state. This way of talking may also be seen as part of a range of cherished masculine attributes that include an interest in history and books and speaking in elegant ways that often involve metaphors and ambiguities that add a twist to the conversation. Indeed, it was common for the men in Renchin's household to read when inside and any visitor would be treated to a discussion of the latest political events or some debate. These were never dull conversations, but heated exchanges that were tinged with a sense of irony and humour. And yet, one often gained the impression that behind these claims and elegant turns of phrase lay a sense that the real truth of their political situation would one day be revealed.

While relations based on locality are deeply embedded in the Mongol notion of the importance of one's homeland (*nutag*, Bur. *niutag*), the use of one's homeland as a marker for where one comes from is, however, double-edged for the Buriad as their claim to the particular area they currently inhabit is split with the idea that there was also a belonging to a different place previously. Emphasizing identity in terms of place, people have to confront certain aspects of their temporal claims to the landscape in which they currently live (see Chapter 7). The history of the landscape sometimes weighs heavily beneath people's feet. Many of the local shrines, such as the sacred trees (Bur. *hairhan mod*) and some of the *ovoo*s, existed before the Buriad settled in Ashinga. Local Buriads have appropriated these places through frequent worship with offerings from their own herds. At the same time, people in Ashinga cannot help but feel a sense of pride when they recount that they live in a place where Chinggis Haan was born and buried. Appropriating the history of the landscape as their own, men often claim that 'Chinggis Haan's mother was a Buriad' or 'The Hori Buriad originate from a man called Hor'tümür in the "Secret History of the Mongols".' One man from another district explained that people in Ashinga had been so proud of the history of their landscape that in the late 1980s they had rather daringly voiced such association in a song. 'There is a song about how Chinggis Haan has Buriad origins. It is said that people in Ashinga sang that

song and Mongolian television reported it on national television. The Halh Mongols didn't like it one little bit. They said maybe those Buriads just got drunk and said Chinggis Haan is a Buriad.' Drawing on national heroes such as Chinggis Haan, people in Ashinga orient their positions within national discourses, whereby Mongol identity is associated with a pre-socialist past (see Chapter 7).[24] Claiming kinship with the history of the landscape is to forge their position not just as Buriad, but as 'people from Ashinga' (*Ashingyn hün*).

Prejudices between Halh Mongols and Buriads survive because they are prevalent on both sides. As Eriksen (1993) has noted '[g]roup identities must always be defined in relation to that which they are not—in other words, in relation to non-members of the group' (1993: 10). When in Ulaanbaatar, I would often hear the Buriad stereotyped in various negative ways. In this sense the current focus on Mongolian national identity has not elided intra-Mongol differences. At certain times, what kind of Mongol one is becomes more important than the fact of being Mongolian itself (Kaplonski 2000: 334). When I was trying to find a lift to Ashinga, men at the bus station or market would sometimes say, jokingly, 'Why do you want to go there? Buriad men wear knives on their belts, they drink and fight all the time, it is dangerous.' Such comments are said in a light-hearted manner without a pause for thought as to what they might mean if a Buriad person heard them. Bulag (1998) notes that in 1991, there was even a nationalist campaign to denounce the Buriad as 'Russian immigrants' (*Orosyn tsagaachid*) or a 'motherlandless people' (*eh orongüichüüd*) (Bulag 1998: 87).[25] In response to such negative stereotyping, young Buriad women who are sent to university in Ulaanbaatar consciously learn to harden their accents to blend with Halh Mongols. Many men, on the other hand, when in the city, often play on their image as strong, hard-drinking, and easily angered Buriads from Hentii, who are able to wield connections and support from distant places in order to strike lucrative deals with trading partners. Stereotypes of being other, or not other enough, are internalized by the Buriad, who use these modalities to identify or differentiate themselves from different people and collectivities.

[24] See Pegg (2001: 7): 'Chinggis Khan and his "Golden Lineage" (Altan Urag) are being used as symbols of "Mongolness" in different performance media by a variety of ethnic groups.'

[25] Similarly, Shimamura (2004) suggests that 'Buryats are often labelled *Mongolyn Yubrii* (Mongolian Jews) among Mongols' (Shimamura 2004: 3, italics added). This derogatory term is mostly used in a wider anti-Semitic sense to refer to a minority who are politically and intellectually influential, rather than simply to denote a landless people (pers. comm. Christopher Kaplonski).

While the Buriad may be judged as different and as a minority in Mongolia, it is worth highlighting that the Buriad in Hentii also suffer from being not Buriad enough in comparison with Buriads in the far eastern province of Mongolia. When I spoke with Halh Mongols in Ulaanbaatar, and particularly scholars, they would often wonder why I was not studying Buriad shamanism. In their minds, this religious aspect was something that made these people distinct. In turn, if I was researching the Buriad, why was I doing fieldwork among the Buriad of Hentii? They, it was claimed, do not wear 'traditional dress', nor had they retained their Buriad dialect, therefore, they are not 'authentic' (*jinhene*) Buriad. Being both too Buriad, and at the same time not Buriad enough, the Buriad in Hentii may be considered doubly marginalized or interstitial. At the same time, this search for 'authenticity' is not just something conferred from outside. It also occurs between Buriads in Mongolia, Russia, and China, who each, in their own ways, claim to be the standard bearers of Buriad customs and identity.

My refusal to make topics such as shamanism, traditional dress, or dialect the object of my study was considered strange by Halh Mongols in cities. While I would stress that this would be to elevate a small part of cultural life for these people and to reify traits that were seen as exotic by outsiders, people often wondered what I was finding that could be so interesting that I would stay for so long. I should highlight that I did, of course, engage with such topics when they arose as concerns of the people with whom I lived. By insisting on not making topics such as ethnicity or religion the explicit focus of my analysis, I was able to let the relationships I encountered set the agenda.

Post-socialist rupture and networks of obligation

In 1989–90, the political framework of Mongolia's planned economy disappeared, almost into thin air, with the collapse of the socialist state. It gave way to what, after a few years, could be termed the introduction of a ruthless neo-liberal market economy that rapidly differentiated people in economic terms. 'If you want to do or start something, you can,' Handmaa, an elderly grandmother with whom I often stayed in the district centre, positively exclaimed when describing the benefits of the market economy. The problem, she went on, was that 'young people were lazy and didn't seize the opportunities that were now available to them'. In 1990 the co-operative was dismantled in Ashinga and livestock and other collective assets were distributed to individuals or sold off. Faced with a country-wide

economic and institutional crisis, the majority of people resorted to household subsistence economies based almost entirely on pastoralism, with supplementary activities such as hunting and nut and berry collecting (cf. Bulag 1998; Pedersen 2006). A pattern of fewer animals but more herding households emerged. Sharing produce and distributing goods among these households is almost entirely based around kin networks, where clusters of brothers distribute produce and assistance to each other from countryside encampments to the district centre, or to cities (cf. Sneath 2002). For example, in return for products obtained in the district, such as flour or sugar, families in the countryside may herd their relatives' sheep and cattle and send dairy products and meat to households in the district centre.

In the countryside one can also see clusters of encampments made up of several households. They often consist of two brothers, their families, and their elderly parents.[26] Women generally move to live with their in-laws, and the youngest son of the family inherits the bulk of his parents' herds and use of the winter pasture (see Chapter 8 for issues to do with inheritance). Renchin, for example, used to be a woodwork teacher, but in 1990 he left for the countryside and became a herder. Some of the animals were given to them because his wife had worked for the co-operative, others were purchased. For three years he lived on his own at his father's pasture, herding his own and his brother's animals. His family came from the district centre to visit him at weekends, or during the school holidays. After three years, his wife and his youngest child, a daughter called Baigal, joined him. A few years later his two older sons joined them, with his youngest son visiting during school breaks. At this point they also took on the duty of herding the cattle of the district centre's kindergarten, in return for use of the produce. Not long after, his brother claimed his animals and joined him at his summer encampment.

In addition to a dependence on relatives, relations of obligation based on shared place, connections with previous work colleagues, and ethnicity are also highlighted when people want to forge links across wider spheres. When I was travelling with people beyond the district, the people I was with would often ask after a person's clan name (*ovgiin ner*), or their parent's name, or discuss where their winter pasture was located. In such a way, people could locate each other in known webs whereby connections could be forged and

[26] It is primarily due to the fact that one cannot live together in close proximity with many separate herds, that several brothers cannot form large encampments unless they combine their property. Sometimes, as in two such cases in Ashinga, one man managed to accumulate more than a thousand animals (*myangat malchin*) and thus his sons and brothers remained in one encampment.

Figure 1.7 Family and friends from the same homeland.

links established.[27] When a wealthy businessman from Ulaanbaatar arrived in the district centre to visit his relatives and sell clothes in return for dairy products and animal parts, for example, some men would sit with him and trace their relation to him. These are not just quaint, informal, and polite ways of establishing bonds but potentially crucial links for one's survival. As mentioned, economic differences today are extremely marked: some people have established relatively stable means of managing their economy since the turmoil and uncertainty of the early 1990s, while others have not. Renchin's two older children, the elder of whom is now thirty-one years old, both left school before the age of sixteen to help with herding and hunting. His two younger children, by contrast, are now at university in Ulaanbaatar. The opportunity to send these two children to university is, in part, a result of the ability of the two elder sons to raise funds through the sale of illegally hunted products. It was also due to Renchin's previous connections with a teacher at the university, who ensured they were both accepted on a course, and to his distant relative who agreed to house them for some period, even though she was without a job, an alcoholic, and lived with her own children and grandchildren. Maintaining links with others thus becomes a political issue of finding potential connections and identifying what kinds of resources and obligations can then be forged through them.

Staying with Renchin's family in the countryside, I began to gain a sense of how people strategically formed ties that spanned across different places. As I visited the district centre one afternoon to buy some sugar and send a telegram, some relatives of Renchin's, whom I knew from visits to our summer encampment, approached me while I was outside the shops and insisted I come to their house before I returned to the countryside. They sat me down at the table and made sure I drank some tea and shared their food before I returned. The man of the household said jokingly: 'Now that you are an *Eg Tsegeenii nutgiin hün* [lit. a person who lives between the rivers Eg and Tsegeen] and you can milk cattle, it is time you became a Buriad bride, don't you think?' Laughing with him at his suggestion, it struck me how different the district centre seemed from when I had lived there. Although I

[27] A similar point is made by Humphrey ([1998] 2001: 267–99, 373–432). Buriads in Russia, while under the Soviet government, maintained links among clans over the landscape. Such groups often gathered together at their summer pasture and centred around a senior male member. People in this group belonged to the senior male member's agnatic family and were referred to by his personal name, plus the suffix '*-tang*'. A similar way of distinguishing agnatic kin exists in Ashinga. People from large families are often referred to by the name of their senior male member with the suffix '*-hai*' (for example, 'Are you Renchin *hai*'s [honorific term for head of agnatic family] daughter?').

had never visited their house before, these relatives of Renchin treated me as if I were his daughter. They ensured that I was fed and looked after before I returned to the countryside. In turn, Renchin commented: 'Now you are my daughter, my three sons' households will always be open to you in the future.' Locating me as his daughter among an extended set of relatives is one way of highlighting how ties based on agnatic kin are perceived to provide lasting obligation and support. Thinking back to Bat-Ochir referring to me as 'his person' (see Introduction), it seemed my rejection of him was precisely in the terms described above. That is, from his perspective, my move was perceived as a way for me to cut my connection with him and, in so doing, I was severing myself from a web of potential connections that this implied. This separation was considered offensive. Because I had not contributed to practices and utilized his connections, we were not indebted to each other in any way. Neither owed the other and this served to annul any future possibility of drawing on each other's ties.

The need to foster, tend to, and draw on relations with others for one's survival is not just confined to subsistence-based households. The district as a whole is also keen to maintain links with those who have left Ashinga. The local government often appeals to successful ex-Ashinga people to contribute money to the district budget when necessary. In the autumn of 2001, for example, when the government budget could not afford to open the local school, the governor appealed to a group of Ashinga people in the city who had created a welfare fund (*nutgiin zövlöl*). These people's assistance was motivated, in part, by a nostalgic longing for their homeland and a wish to promote and assist those who still live there. Events spearheaded by elite members of the district who live outside Ashinga include sponsoring trips for elderly people from the district to visit their parents' place of birth in Buryatia. They also helped to create the successful bi-annual Buriad festival (*altargana naadam*), started in 1994 and held in Ashinga in 1998, which is named after a shrub-like flower whose rhizomic roots extend under the earth, spreading in all directions. Through this festival, people are beginning to forge links with Buriads in China and Siberia (*hoid Buriad*, lit. northern Buriad), and there is a growing sense of being part of a wider Buriad diaspora.[28]

The Buriad's migratory history has clearly created an imaginative terrain

[28] A significant contributor to various cultural events and enterprises in Ashinga is a highly acclaimed local man who graduated from a university in Buryatia, opened a private university in Ulaanbaatar, and has written several books about his life which include memories of growing up here (see Nyam-Osor 1997).

on which links to different places and people may be plotted. In this sense, burning people's genealogies did not eradicate memory of a pre-migratory past, but rather opened up the possibility for a range of different memories to be passed on via other means. Agnatic relations based on 'shared bone' are also used to signal that one comes from different Buriad 'clans' (*ovog*).[29] While Renchin defines himself as Buriad, he also defines himself as Hori Buriad. The Hori Buriad claim ancestry from eleven exogamous clans: Galzuud, Huatsai, Sharaid, Halvin (Hal'ban), Huvduud (Hüvdüüd), Gushid, Hargana, Bodonguud, Hudai, Batnai (Baatad), and Tsagaan (Sagaanuud).[30] Persons of the same clan are regarded as having the same bone. Tracing descent through clans was the basis for past political organization and for the practice of exogamy. In the seventeenth century noble princes from Buriad clans were appointed to take on military and tax-paying functions for the tsarist government and acted as administrative heads over clans. In this sense, Russian tsarist policy actively promoted the idea of clans for state administration. Given this political utility, it is not clear how much the Buriad's current identification with clan distinctions is a product of their use in tsarist administrative policy.[31] Nevertheless, in relation to the 'cultural shaping of

[29] 'The Mongols, with their patrilineal descent system, regard all persons of the same *obog* [clan] as having the same *yas* [bone]' (Bulag 1998: 119). Traditional Buriad genealogies traced relations based on shared bone and only included men, excluding links through women, illegitimate children, adoptees, etc. (Humphrey 1979: 255). As mentioned, in Buryatia, incoming groups could be inserted as 'sons', in order to include more people in a genealogy for taxation purposes (Humphrey 1979: 256). In this way, genealogies were often idealizations (Humphrey 1979: 255).

[30] The nobles of the 'Galzuud' clan were recognized as the titular heads of the Hori people (Atwood 2004: 64). See Oyuntungalag (2004: 67), for further details.

[31] Sneath (2007a) suggests that the imperial policy's emphasis on clans concealed the fact that a vassal–noble dynamic had already long existed, whereby ruling houses and lineages were often not consanguineally related to the people over whom they ruled. Both the Manchus and the Russians had to find a way by which they could administer the Mongols who lived in their territories. Among the Manchus, administration was based on lords, in charge of feudal princedoms, and bannermen who ruled over a group of people who lived in their territory or a monastic institution that rented out its animals to local herders. Among the Russians, natives in the south-east of the country were divided into clans, whereby male headmen were held to stand for a group of people whom they defined as kin. Thus, it may be argued that the current Buriad focus on clans is very much a product of history, particularly that of the Russian administration. But arguing that the current focus on clans is due to the influence of the tsarist administration system is to shrink historical time. More likely, perhaps, is the influence of the Soviet construction of clans to fit with the Marxist view of indigenous Siberian people as having a 'primitive' social organization (see Ssorin-Chaikov 2003: 58–9). In either case, it is clear that these distinctions are not static, hold great importance in the present day, and are taken up and utilized in various ways.

memory [. . . and to] its production and reproduction' (Antze and Lambek 1996: xiii), there is no doubt that an important feature of the Buriad's current re-imagining of themselves is linked to genealogical information of this kind, something which was explicitly discouraged during the socialist period. Terms such as 'clan' are categories of relatedness determined through narratives of genealogy and a reflection of the way that the past is currently imagined and objectified. Here, recalling links through 'shared bone' becomes 'a highly charged tool to legitimate new forms of reification' (Antze and Lambek 1996: xxv). Relationships based on these kinds of distinctions (such as clans and ethnicity) are utilized and taken up in different ways to form crucial links and connections, and are mobilized in various political ways at certain junctures or moments (see Bulag 1998: 134). Mongol citizens are also invited by the state to engage in this political imagination of defining genealogical roots. In 2000, identity cards were introduced throughout Mongolia, and people were invited for the first time since the socialist period to register a clan name (*ovgiin ner*) as part of their name. Unlike many Halh Mongols, most Buriad people were quick to take part in this bio-political imagining, and included their clan name on these cards. In turn, in the school in Ashinga, children are instructed in how to write and collect genealogies (for comparison with another Buriad district in Mongolia, see Bulag 1998: 129).

Families and individuals also reclaim a different kind of genealogical past through the tracing of ancestors in shamanic lineages. The current rise in shamanic activity is partially driven by a need to understand who they are, in a historical sense.[32] While normal people's souls can be reborn in other humans, the souls of deceased shamans (*ongo*) live in different levels in the sky (*ongon tenger*). They may select people among their living relatives to continue the worship of their '*ug udam*', or 'origins'. In order to select the right person, it is said that the deceased shamans test people from a young age. These people may not know that they are being tested and may become ill or suffer in different ways. With the help of a shaman, the reason for their suffering can be revealed. They then identify the ancestor of the person who is suffering and teach that person how to attend to them in the correct ways. In their struggle to locate knowledge of their ancestors, people turn to shamans who are specialists in seeking out information about people's past relatives and locating those whom one believes one is related to. The people

[32] In 1993, and again in 1996, two male shamans from Ashinga travelled to Ol'khon Island in Lake Baikal, in Buryatia, to conduct rituals to ancestral spirits and to forge links with people in Buryatia.

revealed in these kinds of genealogical 'excavations' are often of a different order from those recalled in genealogical records and oral narratives, and are likely to be excluded or somehow irregular or dissenting people in relation to regular ancestors (see Humphrey with Onon 1996). Shamans thus become the gatekeepers, mythmakers, and fictive crafters of a particular kind of genealogical knowledge, providing one with links and explanations as to who one is. Unlike the idiom of 'shared bone', which is used to trace links between men, links to shamanic ancestors are traced bilaterally, allowing men and women to locate themselves in wider webs of connections. It is worth noting that it is only since 2005 or so that an interest in attending to relations with one's deceased ancestors (that is, attending to one's 'origins', *ug barih*, and 'origin spirits', *ug garval*) has really begun to boom in a very visible way in Hentii.

There is also a wider interest in recreating agnatic genealogies (*ugiin bichig*, Bur. *ugai besheg*). Exogamy is also an important factor in this, as most Buriad reckon on seven to nine patrilineal generations for marriage, and genealogical knowledge is used to prevent 'blood from becoming too close' (*tsus oirtoh*). People also value such information because, despite migration and the loss of relatives through political persecution, it provides a medium through which to forge and invent links to others. As Renchin explained:

> When my relatives came here, half of our people were left behind in Russia, in Ulan-Ude. For example, my ancestor had six daughters and three sons. While his three daughters and two sons came to Mongolia, three daughters and one son remained in Russia. Now we cannot meet and we do not even know each other. The only way to know is through our genealogy [or family tree]. For example, I am from the Hal'ban clan. If a person is from this clan, it means he is my relative. If a person is from the Bodonguud or Sharaid clan, they are not my relatives and my children can marry them. If my child marries a person from my clan, the blood will be too close.

Renchin's description highlights that some of his relatives were left behind in Siberia. Because of this, he claims, there is knowledge about people and places that is lacking. Nevertheless, by identifying oneself with a clan name, one can go some way to overcome this. This kind of knowledge about 'who one is' is increasingly valued as a way of reclaiming a sense of the past which was systematically eradicated through years of socialist egalitarianism. Shallow genealogical knowledge and the search for more information about the past appears as an outcome of a fractured modernity and migratory history. While clans and agnatic links are not an institutionalized aspect of society, 'the *concept* of descent' (Chabros 1992: 291, emphasis in the original) as an important marker of who one is has become

increasingly important for the Buriad as they seek to reclaim their own history, either in Buryatia or Mongolia. All this suggests that the current focus on clans and genealogical distinctions is not simply a remnant of previous administration policies or socialist ideas of progress, but is also generated from within, as the Buriad seek new ways to define themselves as people.

While agnatic relations, based on shared bone and ethnicity, are objectified in locally based discourses, in daily life these forms of identity co-exist with other idioms of relatedness (cf. Stafford 2000a: 38). In a sense, such relations are only objectified in narratives when talking to outsiders about ideas to do with ethnic identity, or at marriages and shamanic ceremonies. I have suggested that networks that provide economic and social support are not always grounded in agnatic connections, but may also link city and countryside friendships, or neighbours and work colleagues (see Humphrey [1998] 2001). They are also formed through shared residence in a particular place (albeit only for part of the year), or on friendships established during the socialist period. Renchin's family, for example, benefited from maintaining relations with an old friend who used to deliver petrol to Ashinga from Ulaanbaatar during the socialist period. Every now and then he would arrive to collect produce from them to sell in the city. In return, he would sometimes source clients who needed wooden houses built or assist Renchin's youngest children as they attended university in the capital. Friendships with particular individuals with whom one has especially close relationship are sometimes referred to as 'dry / fictive brother, sister or younger sibling' (*huurai ah / egch / düü*) (see Park 1997).

I have focused on the way in which the Buriad's history of migration and political persecution is objectified in a way that differentiates them from others in Mongolia. Such narratives create a space for creatively interpreting history so that one may position oneself in relation to current political concerns. Together these can be said to shape a wider historical consciousness that embraces the co-existence of alternative chronotopes and sets the succession of temporality 'in a plane of simultaneity' (Lambek 1998). In focusing on this simultaneity, history is not simply made up of a sequence of events or records that fix the past. Definitive events and experiences, such as migration or experiences of state persecution, are recounted as decisive moments in these people's lives that linger and shape who they are in the present (see Humphrey 2008). As Blom Hansen (2001: 20) has noted, history is most frequently encountered in various 'emblemic forms', such as myths, songs, poems, and phrases, that provide nodal points in otherwise hazy chronologies and events. We have seen that the Buriad take up such 'nodal points'—through songs, proverbs, clan names, and myths—and seem to leap

between them to create a fractured but living history of themselves. In so doing, they also reposition themselves as people in Mongolia.

While being Buriad is linked to a history of rupture, persecution, and migration that singles them out as different, it also includes a diasporic notion of identity based on a wider inclusive migratory Buriad consciousness, and a more settled idea of being a people who live in Mongolia. In making these links and crafting these different forms of identity, history becomes 'modelled, adapted and transformed' (Anderson 1991: 141) to suit varied agendas. In the following chapter, I move away from this way of evoking the past to focus on domestic and ceremonial practices that pivot around the separation and containment of fortune. This is to draw a tacit link or connection, but on a very different register, to the kind of experiences of separation and absence that the Buriad hold as a crucial part of their history.

2

Vessels of Harnessed Fortune

It was late spring, but the morning air was cold. There had been a hard frost overnight and I found it hard to get out of bed. Mornings meant helping Delgermaa set the fire and milk the cows before we let the calves out for the day, or gave the cattle hay, and then settled down for tea and soda bread with fresh cream and jam. This morning was different. Outside, Delgermaa and I shouted instructions to each other as we struggled to corral the bull calf into a small pen. As soon as it was in, Delgermaa climbed nimbly into the enclosure and approached the animal. Our movements in the mornings had become so familiar that I hardly noticed when she bent over and swiftly wiped the inside of her coat over its muzzle. She repeated this action and then pulled out a pair of scissors and cut off a small handful of hair from the young animal's tail. She tied this into a loose knot before placing it inside her pocket. Her actions were quick and it would have been easy to miss them, but I later learnt that they had to be performed before she handed over the animal to the men who had come to collect it. The money from its sale would go towards her daughter's university fees, its meat would go to people in the district centre or to the markets of Ulaanbaatar. The tuft of tail hair remained in the house.

Watching these actions unfold, my mind flashed back to an image I had seen many times before. Deep inside the Government Palace (*Zasgiin Gazryn Ordon*), located in the centre of Mongolia's capital, Ulaanbaatar, nine white state standards (*tsagaan töriin süld/tug*) are housed in a large glass case. These standards emerged as important national symbols of Mongolian state power in the early 1990s and consist of long poles with hundreds of tufts of tail hairs hanging from their tops (see Bulag 1998: 242). The pieces of hair that hang from these standards have been collected from white stallions in each of the twenty-three provinces that make up Mongolia. The standards are revered and worshipped. Each year they are carefully taken outside and transported by mounted horsemen to the National Stadium where they are

placed on a plinth for the duration of the celebration of the three manly games (*naadam*). Participating wrestlers, archers, and horsemen circle the standards offering their respect. By honouring the nine white standards, the 'state vitality-fortune' (*töriin süld*) is protected for its people.[1] Watching Delgermaa extract the hair from the bull calf that morning in late spring, I wondered if her actions were in any way connected with the worship of the state standards.

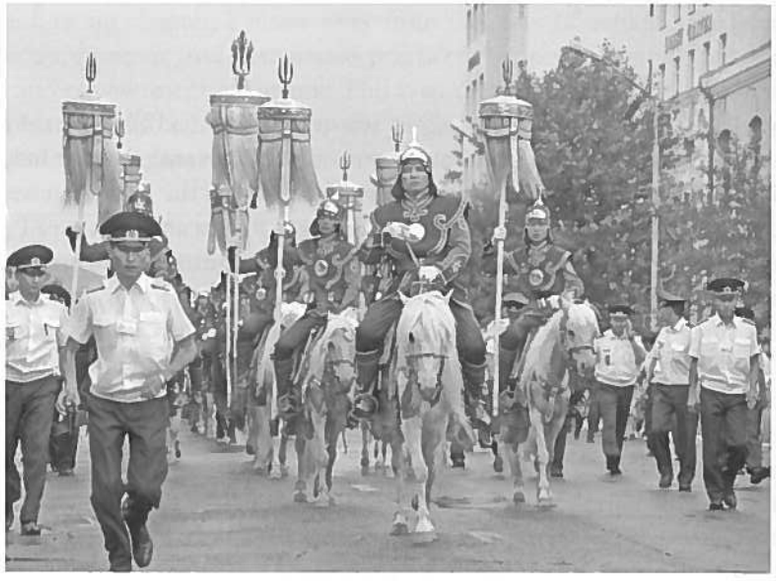


Figure 2.1 The nine white state standards. Photograph by Christopher Kaplonski.

In this chapter I focus on practices involved in harnessing fortune for households. These practices permeated many activities for countryside and district centre households as people worked to secure the prosperity and wellbeing of their families. In trying to understand what is meant by fortune, I compare this concept to the Polynesian concept of '*mana*', and to the Japanese practice of 'beckoning luck'. Shifting ideas of fortune are also traced

[1] In 2009, it was reported in the Mongolian media that these standards had been moved from the Government Palace to the State Ceremonial Palace and placed on a special base made from soil from different areas in Mongolia. In addition to the white standards, five black standards (*har süld*) made from the tail hairs of black stallions are housed in the Ministry of Defence, as a symbol of protection from warfare or other crisis. In 1995, the Ministry of Defence held a closed sacrifice for the black standards in the presence of the President of Mongolia and other state officials (see Bumochir 2004; Saruulbuyan 2003).

in relation to different historical periods. By focusing on various actions involved in 'harnessing fortune' (*hishig hürteh*), from livestock to mountain ceremonies, certain features come to the fore. This leads me to consider, not so much what fortune is, but how it is made to appear through the various practices in which it is attended. A basic feature of these acts is the separation of a piece or portion and the containment of this piece to generate further growth. This feature is common to other activities and may, I suggest, be viewed as part of a wider aesthetic enacted when some thing, person, or animal is departing or leaving the household. My use of the term 'aesthetic' is intended to evoke a feature of an act that is held to produce particular outcomes and is tied to ideas about the moral means of accumulating wealth or fortune. By taking seriously the idea that ethnographic concepts, such as fortune, and the social processes by which they are tended to, can challenge received theoretical assumptions, I compare practices of separating and containing fortune with naturalist ideas concerned with horticulture. This act of comparison serves to open up an analytical space by which to examine different ideas about growth and generation.

Bringing this difference to the fore further allows me to expand on the features of this practice as they are reflected in other kinds of interactions. While this chapter looks at how fortune is harnessed, I want to highlight that the idea of a separated vessel that temporarily contains, but also distributes fortune, can be found in all kinds of seemingly mundane practices. These include displaying relations through photographic montages (Chapter 3), in ideas about personhood (Chapter 6), in people's relations to 'ancestral spirits' (*ongon, sahius*) that are said to reside in certain places in the landscape (Chapter 7), and in the need to dislocate oneself from stationary forms of wealth accumulated in fixed sites (Chapter 8). Attending to these wider practices, a tension can be said to emerge between the need to contain and harness fortune, and, at the same time, the necessity to allow for its movement, dispersal, and separation.

The force of fortune

Like other Mongolians, and people throughout Inner Asia and the Tibetan region, people in Ashinga tend to distinguish between kinds of fortune in everyday forms of speech. *Hiimori*, which can be translated as 'vitality-' or 'luck-fortune', is generally considered to be individual to a person and circulates inside their body. It rises and falls, or increases and decreases, throughout life, according to a person's behaviour and actions, but it is never

lost entirely. The kind of fortune I focus on is called '*hishig*'. The Mongolian term '*hishig*' (Bur. *hesheg*) has been translated into English in a variety of ways. Scholars have used words such as 'blessing', 'favour', 'benefit', 'grace', 'fortune', 'felicity', and 'good fortune' to capture the range of historical and cultural senses of this term. This kind of fortune is conceived as something that circulates outside the subject, but can be harnessed and carefully contained in certain forms to secure the growth of people, animals, and things. Actions, such as 'bestowing', 'capturing', 'harnessing', 'beckoning', 'distributing', 'receiving/descending from above', or 'accepting from a senior', are often used to describe actions of entwining, amassing, or containing fortune to produce differing effects (see Atwood 2000, 2006; Baumann 2008; Chabros 1992; Humphrey 1987, [1998] 2001: 437; Humphrey with Onon 1996: 179; Jagchid and Hyer 1979; Merli 2006; Pedersen 2007b).

Chabros (1992), for example, explains that *hishig* 'is in permanent circulation in the world. One may gain it simply by catching it in a suitable vessel, without performing any ritual' (Chabros 1992: 191). This kind of fortune may also refer to a quality, or feature of a person, animal, or thing, indicating a more general way of being present at a particular point in time. Scholars have drawn attention to the historical shifts in this concept. At certain periods, *hishig* (alternatively spelt *keshig*, *kesig*, *keseg*, depending on the time period) meant one's turn, one's place, time, or opportunity, in a scheduled or alternating order (Atwood 2000, 2004, 2006).[2] I will examine some of these shifting concepts, but it is important to stress that, although fortune is linked to a series of related qualities such as 'luck-/vitality-fortune' (*hiimori*), one's 'portion of fate' (*huv' zaya*), and 'might' (*süüld*), throughout this book I gloss the term '*hishig*' as 'fortune', and refer to these other kinds of fortune by different terms. This is because a single term is needed for the comparisons and analogies I wish to make between the practice of harnessing fortune and other practices involving ideas about relatedness, memory, and personhood. People often talk of these kinds of fortune as interdependent 'fields of fortune' (da Col 2007: 219) that are working alongside each other. Tending to these fields of fortune can be said to take the form of an economy that involves acts of exchanging, hoarding, accumulating, and releasing.

Unlike the English word fortune, which brings to mind ideas about chance or luck as an external, arbitrary force affecting human affairs, the

[2] In current usage, people may talk of the length of the 'fortune day' (*hishig ödör*), which refers to herding shifts. In a short 'fortune day', herders take turns herding every day. In a long 'fortune day' herding might involve a longer shift of a week or more.

term fortune here does not refer to something that happens to you, entirely beyond your control. Instead, fortune always makes itself visible in relation to something, such as the growth of animals or people. Oyunaa, the local diviner, who lives on the other side of the river that runs along the southern boundary of the district centre, but receives visitors at all times of the day from near and distant places, alerts people as to the presence or absence of fortune in their homes, and advises them on ways in which they may accumulate and contain it. When I was staying with her on one of several occasions, we sat for a moment on the wooden steps outside her house in the evening sunlight overlooking the large darkening mountain that rose opposite and she explained, somewhat matter-of-factly, that the presence or absence of fortune was not really a mystery: 'If you have a lot of food, many animals, clothes, and lots of children, it means you have accumulated a lot of fortune.' Taking her description into consideration, we may talk of the presence of fortune as something realized through its appearance in certain forms, be these children, animals, or various objects. While fortune is visible through various forms, as a property, fortune is perceived to be an invisible and mobile quality, or force, that exists in the world. Tümendelger, a local shaman and poet who often liked to describe things in metaphorical ways, explained that 'fortune is an invisible thing. To love or to fall in love is also invisible. Invisible things can make you suffer, but they can also bring you happiness. Fortune can only be seen [made visible] through other things, such as your everyday food, your animals and children, and when you are surrounded with bounty (*elbeg-delbeg*).' After fortune has made itself visible in such forms, it is not completely settled and is liable to depart, disperse, or be lost. The uncertain residence or property of fortune means that people take daily precautions so as not to lose it or let it slip away unnoticed to outsiders.

As an abstract quality, it is difficult to generalize about the principles of fortune. The concept can be understood on various levels and applies to many aspects of social life. Primarily, fortune refers to the concept of a life-force or animating essence that can be understood through actions that involve tending to a part of an animal or person, such as tufts of hair, placentas, or umbilical cords, or to an artefact, such as a piece of clothing. Recalling the example presented at the beginning of this chapter, in the act of keeping back a tuft (*tug*, the same term is used for the tail-hair standards belonging to the state) of tail hair from cattle or horses, people attempt to contain the fortune of an animal in the face of its possible dispersal or separation. When a cow has been sold and is about to be separated from the herd, a woman will silently wipe the inside of her coat across the muzzle of

the animal and detach a piece of its tail hair to keep safely contained in the house (cf. Montell 1934: 109, Chabros 1992: 52, 183). Because the fortune that allows one's cattle to reproduce and prosper may be contained in just one cow, actions that involve keeping back a part of that animal when separated ensure that the animating life-force, essential to the whole herd, does not depart with that single animal.

Similarly, but on quite a different scale, when giving away a container of cream, milk, butter, or any animal produce, the giver pours the contents of their container into the recipient's container that is placed on the ground. When the recipient's container is full, the giver places their own container on the ground and pours back a little of the produce into their own container so that the 'sacred portion' (*deej*), containing the fortune of one's animals, is retained. Delgermaa explained one day as we were sorting containers of cream to be sold in the city, that when selling cream or milk, or giving it away to some relatives in the district centre, 'to make sure the fortune does not leave, I keep the "sacred portion" for the household. I always keep a little back, always.' Similar practices of keeping back a portion at moments of departure and separation can be noted at other occasions. Following Stafford's (2000b, 2003) analysis of the 'separation constraint', such as when sons leave to go hunting, when a daughter leaves her natal home at marriage, or a child is separated from the spirit world, certain actions that involve keeping back something of the person, animal, or thing that is departing ensures that fortune is retained in that household (Chabros 1992: 59–60).[3]

In response to my enquiries about the property of fortune, people always referred to practices, or described scenarios, that would illustrate an aspect of this concept. Indeed, it seemed as though fortune could only really be understood through actions that involved attending to various things. Frustrated at my inability to grasp the fluid nature of fortune, Erdenebat, a middle-aged man in the district centre, whom I came to address as my 'teacher from Ashinga' (*Ashingyn bagsh*) because he regularly reflected on things with me and corrected my misunderstandings through patient discussion, presented the following scenario:

[3] Occasions when fortune may be harnessed include hunting, during rites of passage, at healing, fire sacrifices, when making milk libations, at the stone cairn, when calling a person's soul, etc. Chabros (1992) refers to these as folk-religious rituals that take a variety of forms (Chabros 1992: 1). It is interesting to note that these practices do not seem to be restricted to Mongolia but extend to other Inner Asian peoples. Among the Tibetan Khumbo in Nepal, for example, at marriage, a cloth is held up to separate the bride from the altar and her natal family members, who stand on the other side of the cloth from her. This ensures the fortune does not depart when she leaves the household (pers. comm. Hildegard Diemberger).

> Rebecca, if you want to understand what fortune means, imagine a brick building. If you take just one brick out, the whole building might fall down. You may try to find a single brick you can take so that the building still remains. Maybe your whole life you cannot find this brick, so instead you take precautions. You decide not to take a whole brick out but just scrape away a little at a time from different bricks. In this way you ensure you always keep a little back in order to maintain the whole: it may contain the fortune.

Like Mauss's ([1972] 2001: 133–49) famous description of the Polynesian concept *mana*, fortune in its wider sense can be used as an adjective, noun, and verb. It is divisible yet whole, a force, being, action, quality, and state (Mauss [1972] 2001: 133). Fortune can change location, disperse, and suddenly emerge again in an interaction. Indeed, people seem to think about fortune in multiple ways. While it was possible to give away an object or animal that may contain fortune, this did not demand a return. In turn, while wealth may be the result of accumulating fortune, fortune does not generate profit in the sense of monetary value. In all cases, whether it resides in a herd of animals or a single piece of cloth, fortune does not simply dwell on its own but appears to be attached in relation to a person, an animal, or an object.

Often irreducible to a single meaning, the term fortune is frequently paired with the word '*buyan*', meaning the 'virtue' or 'merit' of any good deed. Merit, a predominantly Buddhist concept associated with karmic theory, may be accumulated through actions that are considered to bring rewards to the actor, such as luck, fortune, and blessings (Hangin with Krueger 1986: 88).[4] Pairing the term fortune with another term, such as virtue or merit, intensifies its good-fortune sense rather than modifying it. Diemberger (2007b) highlights that we should not reduce this idea to something confined to the sacred and outside of everyday political life; instead, ideas about fortune and merit are prevalent in a range of daily interactions (Diemberger 2007b: 43).

Fortune can be a rare gift received from a highly esteemed person (*buyan hishig*), or from one's animals (*malyn hishig*), without the giver being explicitly identified or expecting anything in return. A story someone tells you or some crucial information accidentally overheard can be fortunate (*anny hishig*). A sweet given by a child after they have received actions of

[4] The term '*buyan*' has a similar meaning to the Tibetan term '*jindag*', which describes 'an act of giving that transcends norms of reciprocity and exchange' (Diemberger 2007b: 42). Chabros mentions that some of these practices are 'superficially similar' to the Tibetan lamaist ritual of 'conjuring up prosperity' (Tib. *g-yang-'gug*), yet many aspects of its practice in Mongolia predate any Buddhist influence and draw on shamanic practices (Chabros 1992: 2).

blessing (*myalaah*), or an object, such as a saddle or horsewhip, that has brought about fortunate events (*hishigtei yüm*), can also contain fortune. A person or family can 'be with fortune' (*hishigtei hün, ail*) or contain a share or portion (*huv'*) of fortune when their health and work go well and animals and food are plentiful. In turn, a politician or country can be 'with fortune' when their power increases and things go well. From these varied senses we can begin to see how the concept of fortune appears to scale on different levels. A person is said to be with fortune, a household has fortune, while the country or nation may contain fortune for its people, and a gift from the state, such as a medal for example, may be considered fortunate (*töriin hishig*).

A short history of fortune

Scattered throughout the anthropological and historical literature on Mongolia we can find references to practices that involve containing fortune in various vessels, people, or places. The term is used in 'The Secret History of the Mongols' to refer to a particular rank: the four selected bodyguards (*hishigten*), with their sub-units, that protected Chinggis Haan (Lessing *et al.* 1960: 460; Baumann 2008: 582; Chabros 1992: 155; Jagchid and Hyer 1979: 224, 342–50; Atwood 2006). These selected bodyguards were not confined to people in one particular family. After the Haan's death, the bodyguards retired to guard the palace tent (*ordon*) of the deceased Haan permanently and new bodyguards were recruited by his successor (Atwood 2006).[5] In early Mongolian usage the term was also used to refer to the blessings, or portions of fortune, that people received from Heaven (*Tenger*) or the ancestors, or, after his death, that of Chinggis Haan himself (Atwood 2000: 112).

When I began to research the literature on the Mongolian concept of fortune, I was excited to find that Christopher Atwood had written extensively on the historical uses of the term fortune in relation to different Mongolian political formations (Atwood 2000, 2006). Following the linguistic roots of the term, Atwood explains that the term '*hishig*' is related to the Old Turkish word '*kezig*', meaning (1) line, sequence, a turn/shift in work, (2) courage, and (3) a fever, or plague. The first of these meanings

[5] By 1260, however, Chinggis's successor, Qubilai, allowed these bodyguards to become monopolized by three families. Even though the Yuan Emperors continued to recruit such guards anew each reign, the same families and often the same actual bodyguards commanded the newly recruited guards (Atwood 2006).

enters into Mongolian as 'shift' and 'share' only to be transformed later, through elaboration, to encompass ideas such as 'grace', 'favour', etc.[6] Atwood's research shows how the concept changed in differing political arenas of Mongolian social life. During the Qing Empire, for example, the language of loyalty to the Emperor included the idea that the Emperor's subjects could never do enough to earn the 'imperial favour' (or fortune) that they enjoyed. A recipient of this unmerited fortune ought both to be sensible of and acknowledge his unworthiness (Atwood 2000). Documents of the Qing dynasty written by the Mongolian officials and nobility of the Qing Empire repeatedly invoke the theme of imperial fortune/grace, and the idea of self-abasement and repayment, identical to those found in monarch–subject relations linking the Qing Emperors and their subjects. This theme was also widespread in moral-didactic works written by Mongols as well as in indigenous Mongolian political rituals. Atwood (2000) argues that this idea of never being able fully to repay the fortune that one receives can also be found in the filial idea of repaying kindness to one's parents (Atwood 2000: 91). From the eighteenth century onwards, the term 'fortune' was used both for the relationship between the Emperor and the minister, and for that between parents and their children. Again, we see here that ideas about fortune appear to scale.

Similarly, Chabros (1992) explains that the word fortune may originally have been associated with the idea of portion, that is, with the idea that each person of a family is due a portion of its produce (Chabros 1992: 155). Later, however, it came to be associated with wider notions of favour, good fortune, grace, and benefit received from a senior. It came to encompass broader meanings, including that of an individual's share or portion of the vital energy that forms a lineage. In this more general sense, fortune is seen to increase the kin group's life-potential as a kind of sacred essence or source, fulfilling a common desire to increase one's domestic herds and have numerous children. Chabros (1992) explains that, in this later phase, 'the word acquires a sense of "animating principle" which is close to the notion of "soul"; hence the occurrence of the expression [animal fortune] for a bunch of tail hairs from an animal which is thought to hold its life-

[6] Alternatively, '*kezig*' may have meant 'share' in Turkish and that meaning is preserved only in an early loan to Mongolian. In either case, tracing the term linguistically means that we cannot be sure whether the notion of grace, favour, benefit, and fortune is actually a Mongolian elaboration, or an early preserved Turkic concept of share. The meaning of share, especially of divine or ancestral favour, which seems to underlie the meaning of fortune's share, or portion, particularly the 'share of sacrificial meat', is apparently not attested in Turkish (pers. comm. Christopher Atwood).

principle' (Chabros 1992: 156). Chabros further stresses that in its current usage, fortune is conceived as 'a gift from above' (Chabros 1992: 192), be that from a senior elder, or someone of a higher order.

While people may specify where fortune resides, I should point out that among the Buriad pastoral households that I was familiar with, people hardly ever elaborated *where* fortune came from.[7] While certain actions were held to harness fortune, fortune itself was never explained to me as something which one could gain through an explicit transaction. True, fortune had to be gathered, harnessed, or beckoned, but this was not because someone else 'owned' it. When asking the local diviner, Oyunaa, where fortune comes from, she explained that 'people call and harness fortune from the mountains and cairns, and keep their share'. This rather general explanation was common. In contrast, some religious specialists did have elaborate ideas for who or what granted fortune to people. These ranged from the invisible 'land masters' who reside at cairns and other sacred places, to ancestral spirits, who reside in the 'Good-Fortune Sky'.[8] And people sometimes stressed that they could be 'with fortune' if they received something from a senior, or overheard a piece of crucial information. Yet this aspect of fortune, that it is something that may be received from someone else, was often only ever emphasized by certain people in very particular kinds of discussions. Even then, the giver often remained an abstract donor, rather than a personified subject. By focusing on everyday practices held to harness fortune, we see that, rather than something that is thought to be bestowed *on* people, fortune is 'in the world [and is] always and pervasively "there"' (Humphrey with Onon 1996: 145); it is just a matter of carefully enacting certain practices to ensure that one contains it in a suitable way.

[7] Similarly, Chabros (1992) does not elaborate where, or from whom, people receive fortune (Siklós 1994: 413).

[8] Tümendelger explained that there were different ancestral spirits residing in the different levels of the fifty-five Western skies and the forty-four Eastern skies that could be called on by a shaman to bestow fortune on a family. 'In the "Good-Fortune Sky" (*Buyan Hishig Tenger*) there is a sky called "Gujir Günger Tenger". Ancestral spirits from this sky give you good fortune and food. If a shaman calls the ancestral spirit of "Gujir Günger" he can distribute good fortune to others. There is "Boo Mahan Tenger", which prevents the transmission of diseases, and "Godil Ulaan Tenger" which gives fortune to animals with antlers, like cattle, goats, etc. "Ataa Ulaan Tenger" is used to gather fortune for horses and is called on when we consecrate a horse. "Höh Manhan Tenger" purifies human fate (*huv' zaya*) and improves people's lives. If you have difficulty in your life, calling on ancestral spirits from this sky ensures a good life for you.'

Animal fortune

To return to the example presented at the beginning of this chapter, imagine that you have a herd of cattle. Since the collapse of the state-run co-operative in the 1990s, the animals you acquired have grown in number. You know each of these cows well. You milk them twice a day by hand, even in the dark winter mornings when the wind lashes at your face and the temperature drops to −30°C. You have given them personal names. You sing to them. Their calves have used bullets tied around their necks to ward off attacks from wolves. They know your individual sounds and calls as commands. You live off their produce. Your children go to university because you sell curds, cream, and butter made from their milk. Unlike the produce that you bought from the state-run shop, you now make warm winter boots from their hides and live off their meat. Sometimes, you have to separate off an animal and sell it or slaughter it. Instead of concentrating on what you stand to gain from this transaction, you worry that the herd that remains might not survive this separation. As a precaution, you silently wipe the inside of your coat across the muzzle of the animal and detach a piece of its tail hair. You place this inside the household's large wooden chest and hope that the fortune of the whole herd will not depart with that single animal. Extracting this piece of tail hair is not held to stimulate growth of the animal from which it has been taken. Instead, by containing a piece of the animal when it leaves, through its saliva on your coat and in the tuft of hair, animal fortune is retained as a collective resource for the herd that remains. Containing this portion/piece allows for growth beyond the animal, person, or thing from which it has been separated.

It was often stressed to me that domestic animals are a gift allowing one to live, rather than simply owned property (although they are also under the custody of people, hence horses are branded with signs according to each household). But the exact location of animal fortune among one's own livestock is unknown. Because of this, all livestock have to be treated with respect in order for the herd to increase and grow. Delgermaa commented: 'Maybe just one cow in the whole herd holds this animal fortune (*malyn hishig*), so we don't like to separate them in case we lose the fortune of the whole herd. If you sell the animal that holds the fortune there will be problems, your animals will die.' In order to lessen the risk of losing animal fortune, she explained:

> When we sell an animal we take a piece of tail hair from it and hang it from the roof or place it by the altar in the house or in the chest wrapped in a

ceremonial silk scarf (*hadag*). We rub the inside of our coat (*deel*) across the muzzle of the animal. In this way we take the fortune (*hishig avah*) and it does not leave the household with that animal (*hishig gerees garaagüi*).

Animal fortune may also be harnessed by consecrating an animal (*seterleh mal*) (see Chabros 1992). Such animals should not be ridden or sold and are sometimes blessed at annual mountain ceremonies where they are adorned with bright blue ceremonial silk scarves. Drawings of these animals, or figures carved out of wood, can often be seen placed on family altars at the northern rear part of the house. Such animals are not generally viewed as an offering to some 'higher being'. Rather, through consecration, they are transformed into a vessel (*sav*, also meaning uterus) that roams across the surface of the landscape accumulating fortune for the rest of the herd (see also Shirokogoroff [1929] 1979).

In relation to this, Humphrey and Hürelbaatar (in press) have noted that while the land is animated by people, herds, wild animals, and spirits at the most basic level, it is they who are the landscape. It is they who traverse the land and gather the fortune that engenders the fertility and vital energy that makes places. For example, it is the roaming goats that make areas of barren mountains into pastureland. They carry the fortune that sustains the fertility of places and vital energy of people. Like the sea, people are not said to 'own' this land, but rather move across its surface, harnessing its fertility and fortune, while recreating households at different seasonal encampments. This, essentially, shamanic perspective of a mobile and changing landscape with a unitary encampment, forging towards different temporal junctures, means that it is difficult to determine the presence or quantity of fortune, but a portion of it can be harnessed and its fecundity may be brought into the household. Neither commodity nor gift, it exists somewhere between an inalienable material form and an alienable force.

Women engage with cattle and milk products on a daily basis and it is they who are responsible for ensuring containment of animal fortune for the whole household. Their practices affect life in the domestic encampment in a way that has ramifications for every member.[9] If animal fortune disperses, it was said that a family might be vulnerable to misfortune in the form of animals dying, people falling ill, spirit and human curses (*husyn haraal* and *tsagaan / har hel am*), or pollution from outside (*buzar*). Showing respect for animal fortune as a sacred, vital, animating essence is often part of a daughter-in-law's work. For example, women ensure that they only use their

[9] In this sense, by looking after milk products women ensure the very 'bones' of the kin group are maintained. See Carsten (1991: 427) for a similar point.

right hands to stir milk products, keeping their left hand (*buruu gar*, lit. left/wrong hand) behind their back. Respect for animal fortune is also necessary because portions of milk products (*deej*) are used as offerings to local 'masters of the land' (*gazryn ezed*, hereafter referred to as 'land masters', or 'invisible land masters') and the 'spirits of mountains and rivers' (*hus savdag*). In the early mornings, it is usual for women to make libations outside with a ladle of milk to nearby *ovoos*, mountains, or trees, following the rotation of the sun. Delgermaa would do this in the mornings after the first milking, and she would be sure to make special offerings if any of her sons were setting off on a hunting trip, or her daughter was leaving for the city. A small portion of this milk is also commonly placed at the altar for household protector spirits.

The term '*ezen*' (singular of *ezed*) is usually translated as 'owner', but also means 'lord', 'head', or 'master', and is used to denote asymmetrical relations entailing hierarchy and obligation at several different scales or levels. For example, the word 'master' (*ezen*) was used for socialist and pre-socialist temporal rulers (Humphrey 1997: 29), the eldest male of a household, the head of a factory or other large-scale enterprises, and in the past, for the polity (Sneath 2001: 47). Like the portion of milk offered to the land masters in libations, the first portion of hot food, usually prepared once a day, is given to the eldest male of the household, ensuring that the choicest/sacred portion (*deej*) is reserved for the 'master of the house' (*geriin ezen*). In this way, people benefit from the potential life-force of their animals and contain things which embody that potential in order to use it in offerings. While this is something I explore in greater detail later on, offerings such as these draw attention to the idea that people are not the absolute owners, but the 'custodians' of the land on which they live (Sneath 2002). Here, fortune appears as a facilitating feature that permeates one's wealth and assets. But it is also an unstable force that threatens to make one's wealth temporary. Because this kind of fortune is external to oneself, one can never be entirely certain of its presence, and yet certain practices, it is hoped, ensure one has harnessed some part or portion of it.

Animal herds are the main source of wealth for many households in Ashinga and families are very careful to attend them in a multitude of different ways. Since the early 1990s, Renchin and Delgermaa have invested all their energy in increasing their herds. In part, herding provides them with a means of subsistence in the neo-liberal economy. Cultivating livestock is also a future investment for their children. While their two eldest sons left school as teenagers and are now herders and hunters, through the sale of their produce and part of their animals, they can fund their two youngest

children's education. Indeed, Renchin hopes that once their children have finished their education, he and his wife may retire to the district centre, while their middle son takes full responsibility for the animals. From this example, we may begin to see why investment in herds, as a form of wealth, is of such importance to these people. In securing the fortune of their animals they tend to more general ideas about the prosperity and wellbeing of their family as a whole.

In relation to this it is important to point out that many families in the countryside are herders because it is hoped that this activity will facilitate a different life for their children. For the children of these people, life in towns and cities, even with a university education, is often disappointing. While some may find temporary work, many find it impossible to compete with city people to secure permanent jobs and housing, which allow them to register as city residents. If their parents' animals have been sold or slaughtered to facilitate their education and move, these young people often find that there is very little for them to fall back on or return to in the countryside. Some city-educated children do return to the district and try to initiate other means of income, such as building and selling wooden houses, opening kiosks and shops, or trading in hunted produce, but many are caught living in cramped apartments with seasonal work that carries them through the winter before they return to Ashinga for the summer months to help their parents or relatives with what animals they have left. My point in raising this is to highlight that practices concerned with harnessing fortune for wealth in animals are intimately tied to the survival of household-based economies that emerged in the early 1990s. In this sense, they are not to be viewed as timeless and archaic beliefs and practices. The ways in which these practices are currently performed are historically situated and generate very particular kinds of social interactions that emerge, in part, as a response to an uncertain economic environment that fails to generate security through other means. This is not to suggest that these ideas run counter to capitalist means of accumulating wealth, but that local ritual economies and theories of efficacy might run alongside ideas that we are familiar with in neo-liberal economies.

I have suggested that increase in livestock and an abundance of their products are due to the presence of fortune and if a person or family harnesses this fortune, their life will be plentiful. The spatial uncertainty of fortune, travelling across the expansive steppe in unknown animate containers, means that people take precautions to ensure that what part of it exists somewhere among their animals and their produce is not liable to slip away. A host of daily household practices can be explained by understanding

animal fortune as residing in the landscape among animate beings who roam its territory, as 'rubbing off' as material memory on certain objects, and as something one has to engage with in a particular way because, if neglected, it is liable to disperse or drift off.[10] I turn now to focus on a collective ceremony that involves harnessing fortune in a similar way, but on a very different scale.

Cairns and their accumulations

A ubiquitous feature of the Mongolian landscape is the cairn, or *ovoo* (meaning simply heap), situated on a mountain or hilltop, or on a rise with an auspicious configuration (Atwood 2004: 414). The *ovoo*'s presence can be said to make the landscape into an inhabited territory or place (Deleuze and Guattari 1999: 315). In the pre-Soviet period, *ovoo*s served to demarcate political borders (Atwood 2004: 414; Baumann 2008: 318; Bawden 1968: 109; Bulag 1998: 175). In the Soviet period, they became less political markers than a means to navigate passages, routes, and journeys according to movements between fixed sites. It is still common for travellers to stop at an *ovoo* as they enter a new landscape. They may circumambulate the structure clockwise, three times, offering a stone or some other object, as a way to ensure protection and blessing for their travels. *Ovoo*s are often made of eclectic elements and offerings, such as stones, willow branches, batteries, sweet wrappers, prayer flags, blue ceremonial scarves, incense bowls, dried curds, pictures of Buddhist deities, monetary notes, biscuits, horse skulls, smashed or empty vodka bottles, and so on. These disparate elements are gathered in the shape of a conical pile to form an assemblage or site made up of multiple people's offerings and can often be seen from a great distance. When focusing on each object in its singularity, they appear to contain the concentrated effort of innumerable journeys (Canetti 1962: 88), but the structure as a whole provides a unity of form. It is a gathering point (Baumann 2008: 318; Canetti 1962: 373), not unlike the house that contains various artefacts in the absence of people. The sum of innumerable objects, the *ovoo* stands as a single feature.

In the countryside, the sea-like motion of the surrounding steppe, or the 'nomadic void' (Pedersen 2007a), appears to halt and pause in the features of the *ovoo*. When looking down from this fixed point, one often sees

[10] See Humphrey (2002a: 68): 'Particular admired qualities of the deceased adhere to the object, these being aspects of his (good) fortune.'

movement below in the form of animal herds, people, cars, and the rippling past of everyday life. For those who live in the vicinity of an *ovoo*, it is a physical marker of their connection to the land in which they live in.[11] Daily milk libations are offered in the direction of these sites to different deities, such as the 'land masters' (*gazryn ezed*) and 'spirits' (*lus savdag*) who control the rains, or to 'shamanic ancestral spirits' (*ongon*) (see Atwood 2004: 414). Some *ovoo*s are hardly ever visited, while others are subject to large collective ceremonies or sacrifices (*tahilga*, lit. to make an offering or sacrifice) where people gather annually, in the early summer, to ensure seasonal rainfall and fertile livestock. The date for the ceremony is often determined by astrological calculations, but if there is a drought, forest fires, or some adverse weather conditions, people may bring the date forward. During the socialist period, such large-scale ceremonies were forbidden in Mongolia (Atwood 2004: 415).[12] Today, it is common to find government officials participating in and sometimes organizing them.

Worship at *ovoo*s takes different forms according to the location of the *ovoo* and the type of deities attended to. In each smaller sub-district there are several different *ovoo*s. Some *ovoo*s attract worship by men, others by local families or individuals, and some are places where the whole community

Figure 2.2 Looking towards the district centre from the top of Mongol Tolgoi.

[11] In Tibetan, this feature in the landscape is referred to as 'La rtse' (Tib., see Diemberger 2007a).

[12] In Buryatia, the ceremony continued, but was disapproved of and 'hidden from the [Soviet] authorities' (Humphrey [1998] 2001; Tugutov 1978; Atwood 2004: 69). See also Curtin ([1909] 1971: 44–52) for pre-Soviet ceremonies in Buryatia and the offering and eating of meat for prosperity of different households.

gathers. Some *ovoo*s are offered dairy produce, referred to as 'white foods' (*tsaagan idee*), while others are offered meat. At Renchin's winter encampment, there is an *ovoo* at which different families take it in turns to sacrifice a sheep every year. This ceremony is attended only by local men.[13] In contrast, shamans or Buddhist monks officiate at larger communal ceremonies, but never together. Once a year, at the beginning of the summer, when people have settled at their summer pasture, people gather together on Mongol Tolgoi, the hillock mentioned in Chapter 1, for a ceremony at the *ovoo* and offer dairy produce to honour land masters for the prosperity needed in life. The day is an occasion for those whose summer encampments are based here to meet and exchange news before they disperse to embark on summer activities. Communal ceremonies like this make the site of the *ovoo* into an event, so that its formation appears not out of time, but located in the specifics of time, at moments when the whole community gathers.

By far the largest *ovoo* in Ashinga is 'Binderya Ovoo'. This cairn stands on the lip of a raised wooded plateau, before it dips into an endless vista that forms the large open steppe to the south. The *ovoo* marks the district's

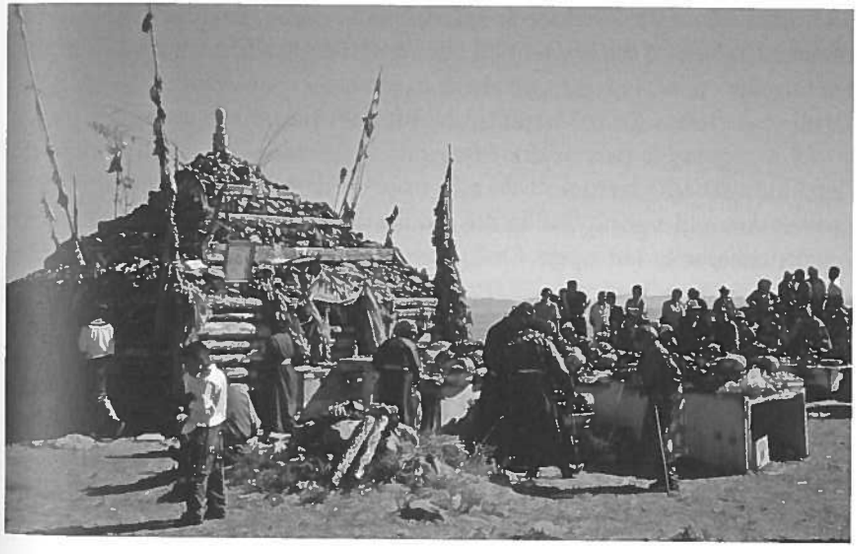


Figure 2.3 Binderya *ovoo* ceremony.

[13] In 2007, it was Renchin's turn to sacrifice a sheep and he chose to offer one of his middle son's sheep. He wanted to do this, he explained, because it was hoped that his middle son would soon take over their herds.

territorial border. People from three districts worship here, and a different district takes it in turns to organize the ceremony each year. Since the 1990s, this ceremony has become more elaborate and the site itself has grown. On the day, women and men, young and old, gather at the site in their smartest outfits, making sure to wear belts, hats, or head-scarves. These items of clothing indicate that people are taking part in an activity that demands a form of sociality that may be termed 'respectful-honouring' (also common when making milk libations, at the Lunar New Year, weddings, and other ritualized and hierarchical occasions). By mid-morning, four or five monks can be found sitting under large awnings on the eastern side of the cairn reciting Buddhist texts. Offerings of white foods, such as rice, dried curds, and milk, are tossed on to the *ovoo* in showers as people circle the formation. Blue ceremonial silk scarves and prayer flags are tied to willow branches jutting out between the stones. Consecrated animals, such as horses (*seterleh mal*), are also brought to the *ovoo* and sprayed with milk libations. On a raised table, on the southern side, large platters of cooked sheep meat (*dallagany mah*) are placed facing toward the *ovoo*. Huge yellowing fatty sheep tails and heads that slowly begin to melt in the glaring sun, top each of the piles. Smaller bowls with biscuits, sweets, curds, bottles of vodka, milk, yellow fat, and other bountiful produce are placed in between. Each platter has been prepared by one of the households attending. People are not sure which texts the monks chant, but they are held to have the power to invite rain and fertility, so crucial for the herds in the summer months to come.

A recognizable part of the ceremony is the moment when the monks 'beckon' (*dallaga*) fortune.[14] People stop what they are doing and sit or crouch down in a group facing the monks with the outer flaps of their coats (*deel*) deliberately left open. One of the monks calls out to the crowd: 'Is the plentiful fortune coming?' (*Buyan hishig ireh üü?*) The people reply: 'It is coming, it is coming.' (*Irne irne.*) And they wave their cupped, outstretched hands containing a portion of white foods in front of them and gesture in circular movements, calling loudly and in unison '*Ai hurai, Ai hurai!*' These precious portions of food are carefully contained in pockets and pouches that are later placed in a special bag at the altar of the household.

Towards the end of this formal part of the ceremony, people reclaim their platters of donated meat offerings. They gather to the west of the site, sitting

[14] The term 'beckoning' (*dallaga*) is a 'name given to a procedure whose purpose is understood today as the "beckoning of good-fortune" [*buyan hishig*] toward the person performing it' (Chabros 1992: 1). It often involves a circling gesture in the direction of the movement of the sun, accompanied by a cry '*hurai, hurai*', the intention of which is to obtain benefits of fortune.

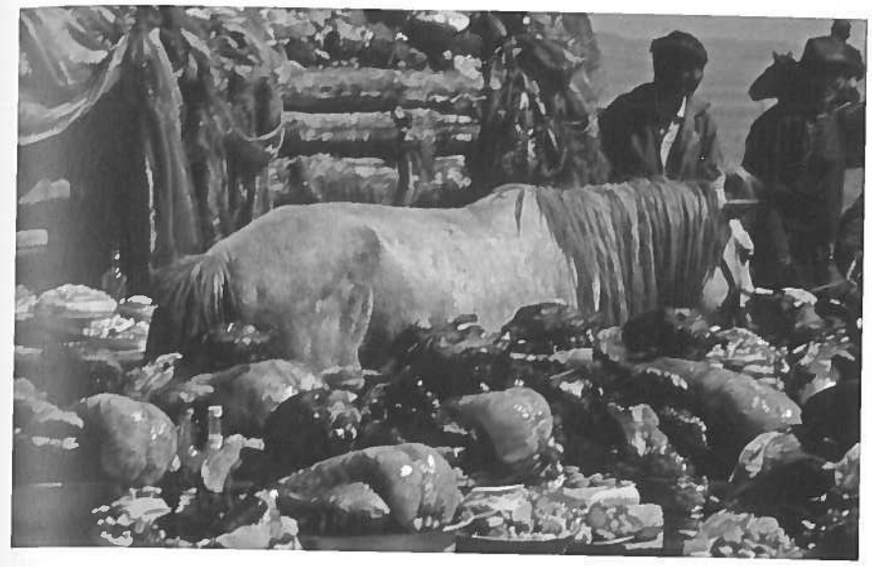


Figure 2.4 Consecrated horse with meat offerings.

down with their relatives in small groups as they begin to share out the meat.[15] The first and best portions are offered to the eldest male of the family, the so-called 'master or lord of the family' (*geriin ezen*), a knife is then passed between the family members as they slice bits off the meat (cf. Humphrey 2001: 498). Eating like this, gathered together in groups, as donors indulge in their offerings, there is a pause in the ceremonial action. People sit back on the grassy hill and a more jovial and festive-like atmosphere commences as children run around and play. Large *ovoo* ceremonies, such as these, provide an opportunity for people who may be absent or separated from each other during the year to gather and exchange news with relatives and friends. It is an event in which people both recognize their ties to each other and display status, showing off their wrestling skills and horses after the ceremony at a contest (*naadam*) which takes place on the flat steppe below the hilltop.

[15] A similar sharing of meat occurs when domestic animals are slaughtered. The innards are cooked immediately and shared between household members.

The politics of sacrifice

Anthropologists writing about this ceremony have emphasized different aspects (Atwood 2004; Chabros 1992; Humphrey with Onon 1996; Sneath 2001, 2007b; Tugutov 1978; Pedersen 2007b; Bawden 1958; Heissig 1980). Sneath (2001), for example, has noted that the ceremony is an occasion for the 'political architecture' of the district or province to be enacted (Sneath 2001: 46). Commenting on Mongolian concepts of land, Sneath stresses that people who attend the ceremony should not be viewed as the *owners* of the land on which they live. Instead, '[i]ndigenous Mongolian notions of "land ownership" can be described as "custodial" in that [people have] conditional rights to use territory and always within a wider sociopolitical framework' (Sneath 2001: 43). Such socio-political frameworks have, of course, varied historically. Even at the end of the seventeenth century, when Mongolia came under the control of the Manchu (or Qing dynasty), and Buryatia was ruled by princely heads of clans who were themselves under tsarist rule (Humphrey 2001: 43), '[i]mperial and princely jurisdiction over land [was] subject to the approval of yet higher authorities' (Sneath 2001: 45). These 'higher authorities' are the ever-present, yet always highly unelaborated, 'masters' or 'lords of the land' (*gazryn ezed*). They are considered to have control of human prosperity, rain, the elimination of calamities, diseases, storms, and the flourishing of domestic livestock in each locality (Humphrey with Onon 1996: 147) and are sometimes considered to bestow fortune on the land (Sneath 2002). They do not so much dominate the landscape, as point to the invisible agency of a place. As Humphrey and Hürelbaatar (in press) have highlighted, we might say that in establishing a relation with these invisible subjects, the idea of the 'land master' is a way of talking about the 'face' that is given through this interaction.

As I examine further in Chapter 7, '[t]he conventional Euro-American concept of "the environment" has no direct equivalent in indigenous Inner Asian languages. The Mongolian term *baigal*, often translated as "nature", is closely related to *baidal* ("state of being", "the way things are" [or what is])' (Humphrey and Sneath 1999: 2). Viewing the landscape as an interactive field rather than a background setting on which human action takes place corresponds more readily with Buriad views of the environment. This is because the term '*baigal* includes animate beings as well as inanimate objects. Objects in *baigal* are attributed with a notion akin to "spirit", often personified in ritual contexts as [*ezen*] ("master")' (Humphrey and Sneath 1999: 2–3; see also Bawden 1997: 37; Humphrey 1995). The concept '*baigal*' includes all beings (visible and invisible) on the earth's surface and points to

the different social relations people maintain with land masters who animate the environment. In such a way, the concept '*baigal*' includes 'animals, mountains, trees, grass, weather, and so forth as active subjects which have their own ways of being that affect human beings, just as humans have ways of life that affect them' (Humphrey and Sneath 1999: 3). People who inhabit the land are therefore dependent on relations with human figures of authority, as well as with the invisible non-human subjects of particular places. *Ovoo* ceremonies can be said to 'reflect the notion that humans do not hold land as they do other mundane possessions, but enter into relations with the spiritual powers of the locality to ensure favourable conditions' (Sneath 2001: 46). Land is generally not held as private property, in the sense with which we might be familiar. Instead, people associate land with spiritual and temporal agencies who are considered the 'owners', 'masters', or 'stewards' of the land from which people live (Sneath 2002: 200).

Taking these broader views into account, the *ovoo* ceremony appears as an event through which people enact custodial relations with the invisible masters of the land. It also denotes those representatives of the human community who are considered legitimate in relation to this 'higher authority'. For local government officials, who often help co-ordinate the ceremony, it is an opportunity to gain political support. Large-scale forest fires are a common feature in Ashinga, especially in the spring and autumn, and can spread very quickly, destroying pastureland, obliterating forests and water sources, and driving away the wild animals that are hunted and sold to traders for medicinal purposes. Facilitating an activity that is held to bring about rain is therefore of general value to those who live in the district. While the monks recite different texts, people often gather in small groups to talk and observe these officials in action. Sitting in the shade of a parked jeep, friends and I looked and commented on these figures. In the summer of 2000, for example, several officials attended the Binderya Ovoo ceremony to campaign for their political parties in the lead-up to the national elections. The men wore large, heavily adorned belts pulled tightly over smart Mongolian or Buriad full-length coats (*deel*, Bur. *degel*), with wide-brimmed Texan-style cowboy hats and dark glasses, while the women wore glittering full-length coats, or black leather coats over trousers and shirts, with heeled boots and plenty of make-up (particularly, thick and slightly off-colour face powder). They formed clusters around the *ovoo*, handing out information about their policies to people throughout the day. Gold miners, who had started excavating a hidden valley to the north of the Onon River, and had only ever been seen travelling through the district in large trucks, or more

rarely by helicopter, also attended the ceremony and swiftly emerged from their blacked-out jeeps to make ostentatious offerings.[16]

These people's presence was a poignant reminder that local families shared this land with others who also wanted to be its custodians. Given that the Buriad are relative newcomers to the land on which they live, and nationalist claims to the history of the territory are increasing, there is also a wider political element to this ceremony. People have begun to engage with the land masters, not simply as an abstract, un-personified force, but as personified subjects to whom they can relate (Chapter 7).[17] Making offerings at the *ovoo* is a means by which different interest groups can visibly enact their 'good relations with such spiritual stewards of the land' (Sneath 2001: 46) and claim some form of custody over it. In this sense, we may say that the ceremony gathers people from the district whom one would not normally see together as they enact their custody over the landscape and work out disputes and feuds and rearrange relationships more generally. Not unlike the collected tail hairs that remain contained inside the household after animals have been detached from the herd, when people disperse, it is the *ovoo*, with its altered formation—of new stones, bottles, and dairy produce—that holds the memory of their connections to each other at a single site.

The ceremony is not exclusively an event for enacting political hierarchies and the display of power (Mauss [1954] 2002: 20). It is also held to produce other effects, such as rain and fortune. As Humphrey with Onon (1996) have pointed out, 'The ritual of the *ovoo* seems to be related to a sacramental tie between men and their land. The celebrations were those which, by a sacrificial exchange, acquired the blessing of the mountain spirit to make use of the land for the reproduction of life' (Humphrey with Onon 1996: 151). Identifying different types of ritual action among the Daur Mongols, Humphrey with Onon (1996) make a contrast between 'sacrifice' and 'propitiation'. By propitiation, they refer to the exchange, or bargaining element, of an animal's flesh, or other objects that are used in transaction 'for a variety of definite returns, such as the spirit agreeing to stay away or remove

[16] In 1999–2000 the governor of Ashinga sold the mining rights for a large area of Ashinga to a company based in Ulaanbaatar in return for a new apartment in the city. This was done without consulting local people or ensuring a cut from the mining for local inhabitants. Over the years this mine has severely scarred the landscape, polluted local rivers, and destroyed the pastureland for people living at its base.

[17] On the personification of land masters, see Humphrey with Onon (1996), who note that the lords of the mountains could behave as a 'human-like recipient', a being who noticed the cost of the offering and had to be persuaded to give something in return.

a disease' (Humphrey with Onon 1996: 145). By sacrifice, they refer to 'the mystical giving-up of the life of the animal in return for a transcendental energy, which infuse[s] the social group with [*hishig*] (blessing, good fortune, luck)' (Humphrey with Onon 1996: 145).

Following this distinction, meat offerings (and offerings of white food) at the *ovoo* ceremony appear as a form of sacrifice or oblation, whereby people, as custodians of the land, sacrifice the life of one of their animals in return for the blessing or fortune needed to carry on living on the land. Not unlike Mauss's ([1954] 2002: 19–20) description of north-east Siberian asking or inviting-in festivals, '[t]he purpose of destruction by sacrifice [at the *ovoo* ceremony] is precisely that it is an act of giving that is necessarily reciprocated' (Mauss [1954] 2002: 20). As we have seen, the ceremony is enacted with various outcomes in mind. It is a space to establish human–human and human–spirit hierarchies. It is performed with the idea that it will benefit the whole district, generating rain and so forth, and, by sacrificing the life of an animal from one's herd, donors make individual offerings in the hope that they will increase fortune for their families.

Notwithstanding these multiple senses of generation, one may wonder how offerings that are subsequently eaten by their donors can be viewed as offerings at all? And what to make of the fact that one kills the very thing which one is asking for more of? Literature on sacrifice (Hubert and Mauss [1964] 1981; Bloch 1989, 1992; Humphrey and Laidlaw 2007) points to the idea that sacrificial practice is generally composed of three sequences: the killing of a living being (such as a domestic animal); the offering of its life to a spirit, deity, or 'master'; and the subsequent acquiring of benefit or fortune through the consumption of the parts offered (Humphrey and Laidlaw 2007: 236; Bataille 1991; Bloch 1992). Following this general definition, we may say that what is being offered to the land masters is the 'life' of the animal, rather than the meat, carcass, or body (cf. Bataille 1991: 55). In consuming this meat after the ceremony, the meat appears as 'a material medium [or container] for the blessing [or fortune] (*hishig*) which was received in return' for the life of the animal (Humphrey with Onon 1996: 147–8). Indeed, following Bloch (1992), Humphrey with Onon (1996) note that the meat is consumed by donors because it has been 'ritually transformed, blessed, and made "eternal", and the communal eating of those same parts injects blessed "life" to the clan' (Humphrey with Onon 1996: 149). We may say that it is the life of the animal that is being separated, killed, and given to the land masters. In return, they transform the mundane meat, bestowing it with blessings, which are ingested into the bodies of their donors.

Commenting on ingesting portions of the sacrificed meat, Humphrey ([1998] 2001) points out that the idea of sharing from a single source is an essential concept of Buriad personhood (the socially recognized idea of the individual), whereby the person is not a single, separate unit but is understood as a part 'like a molecule in an organism which self-reproduces through the generations' (Humphrey [1998] 2001: 498). Distributing shares of the sacrificial meat, or its portion '*huv*", defines the person as inseparable from the whole. The idea that a person houses a portion of something that reproduces over generations is a point I raise further in Chapter 6, in relation to the idea of intra-kin rebirths. The practice of giving the life of an animal, and yet containing its blessed meat through consumption, also echoes the practice of separating a herd animal while containing its fortune through a piece of its tail hair that is kept in the household chest.[18]

Viewing this part of the ceremony as a form of sacrifice (or exchange) seems to fit conceptually, but it was never explained like this to me by anyone. Most people did not elaborate about the reasons why certain actions were performed. The actions were just held to be part of the event; and since the event was held to generate rain and fortune, this is what it took to make this happen. Following Godelier (1999), I suggest that the emphasis on 'exchange' in sacrifice may obscure the fact that 'sacrifice is never really a business deal' (Godelier 1999: 186). Instead, offerings to land masters may be viewed as an expression of an ongoing relationship based on debt and patronage. The dynamic of this relationship can be said to provide a model for more general ideas about power and authority between master (patron) and custodian (client). For example, the relation of master and custodian has been taken up by various figures of authority at different historical junctures in Mongolia, be that between the local noble and his people, or the socialist state and its citizens, and points to more widespread ideas about power and who can wield it.

In raising this point, I want to highlight that since many of the participants at the ceremony grew up during the socialist period, when such ceremonies were forbidden (although many smaller mountain ceremonies were performed in secret), knowledge as to what should be done is often left to the direction of elders, or exemplary religious figures, who revive and

[18] In this regard, Humphrey with Onon (1996) note: 'the blessing in sacrifice was a normal or inevitable outcome produced by the rite, without the need for persuasion or bargaining with the deity. Blessing came to the people as a result of the beneficent putting-in-motion of the way things are in the world, and therefore it was not necessarily enjoined that the powers in nature be seen as anything other than that' (Humphrey with Onon 1996: 154).

reinvent what they know.[19] Their knowledge is seen as powerful when other kinds of authority figures are seen to be lacking in their ability to address these people's daily concerns. The event, thus, seems to be driven by a motivation to revive religious knowledge and authority in the hope that it will have some kind of effect. A similar point has been made by Diemberger (2007b) regarding the multiple opinions of participants at large-scale ceremonies in Tibet. Here, she explains, 'everyone makes a different sense of the . . . rituality' (Diemberger 2007b: 313). The ceremonies are neither a strategic use of religion for political purposes, nor a strategic use of politics for religious purposes. Instead, 'the answer lies with each of the participants, mirrored in their personal view of the occasion and in the different "interpretative communities" that they create' (Diemberger 2007b: 313–14). Indeed, it seems fruitless to try to separate out the varied political and religious aspects of these ceremonies. Instead, these ceremonies may be viewed as providing a 'metaphorical space that enables, in practice, many creative arrangements' (Diemberger 2007b: 314). In focusing on the politics behind enacting certain custodial relations and the ceremonial eating of blessed meat, I hope to have raised some of these interpretative possibilities.

Vessels of harnessed fortune

We have seen that fortune may be carried in animals that roam with the herds, or ingested in people as they consume portions of sacred meat. A small portion of the 'white foods' offered at the *ovoo* ceremony are also contained in a multi-coloured glittering bag, frequently referred to as the 'fortune vessel' (*hishigiin sav*). Oyunaa, the local diviner, explained to me at one of the ceremonies, that while 'part of the fortune harnessed at the *ovoo* ceremony is contained within the person, it is also stored in a bag where we put dried curds, other white foods, and yellow rice every year after the ceremony'. Such bags can often be seen hanging from the beams in the ceiling, or on a small ledge on the wall in the north-west part of the house, above the family's household chest.

[19] It was often religious practitioners, such as the diviner, the elderly monks, or local shamans, who elaborated on the reasons for performing certain acts. For example, Tümendelger explained: 'it is important for people to "call" (*duuduulah*) the fortune once a year'. In the autumn of 2007, he wrote me a letter explaining that he had been travelling to people's homes to perform a ceremony, which occurs once a year, 'to call fortune (*hishigee duuduulah*) and ensure that the "chief backbone of the year" (*jiliin noën nuruu*) will be prosperous and peaceful'.

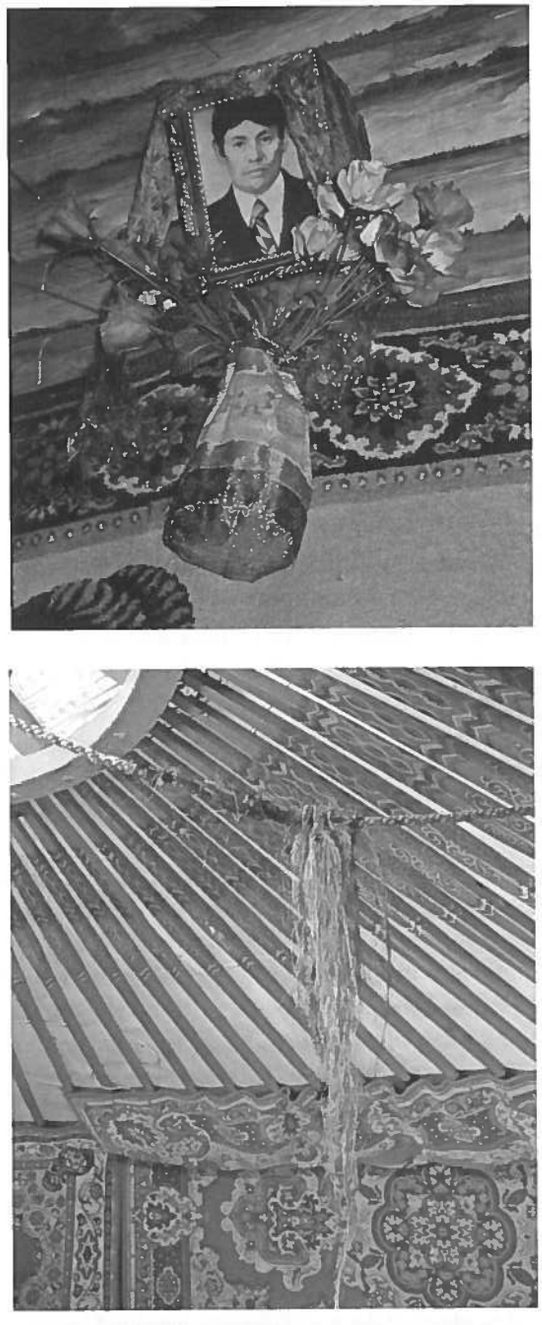


Figure 2.5 Fortune bag and tufts of tail hair.

It is common for an elder relative to give such a bag to a newly married couple on their wedding day or when they establish their own household. Delgermaa purchased such a bag from a monastery and gave it to her eldest son and his wife, Bayar and Tsendmaa, at their marriage.[20] Over the years, they have added new portions to the bag. Like miniaturized versions of the *ovoo*, the bag has grown to accumulate disparate and eclectic elements and remains a fixed feature inside their house. Attending to this kind of vessel ensures that people and animals attached to the house will prosper and grow. We can find examples of similar ideas of containing fortune in household objects in other Asian countries. Daniels (2003), for example, has described how Japanese concepts of beckoning fortune may be achieved through the storing of material objects that are held to gather more fortune. These objects, termed '*engimono*', are neither sacred nor secular, but are placed in the home as tools that invite luck into the household, generating success and wealth (Daniels 2003: 629). Daniels (2003) refers to the circulation and consumption of such objects as an 'informal domestic spirituality'.

Containing objects in the fortune bag is not an end in itself. Once harnessed in a small bag, fortune also needs to be distributed and made mobile in order that it may be effective. For example, portions from the bag are offered at the altar, or thrown towards the direction of the *ovoo* in small, and often private, ritual acts throughout the year.[21] In this sense, the bag should not be viewed as a container that keeps its contents separate and closed off from its surroundings. Rather, like the consecrated horse, it is a 'vessel' (*sav*), open to receiving and distributing its contents (see Chabros 1992: 190–2). This idea is important because it indicates that harnessing fortune does not always involve the storing or accumulating of fortune in a fixed site. Rather, the herds and households where fortune is stored are living and mobile objects/forces that may be temporarily gathered, but also, crucially, are distributed across the landscape and can be shared or scattered.

I have focused in some detail on the *ovoo* ceremony and the fortune it is held to produce because the idea of a vessel that temporarily contains, but

[20] When she purchased the bag it contained: (1) a packet of rice in five different colours—blue, yellow, red, green, white; (2) a packet containing six kinds of seeds; (3) a small plaque with nine precious materials (gold, silver, iron, copper, conch, turquoise, lapis lazuli, coral, pearl); and (4) a packet of barley grains (*mandalyn arvai*). All of these items, she was informed, had been blessed by a monk.

[21] Humphrey with Onon (1996) note, 'the communal ceremony has in the background the numberless occasions of lone and silent enactments of this simple gesture' (Humphrey with Onon 1996: 144). 'Saturday and Tuesday', Oyunaa the diviner used to tell her clients, 'are days of the week when one must not separate off any fortune from the household. You cannot give away white foods on these days.'

also separates from or distributes, can be found in other kinds of practices. Focusing on different examples in the following chapters, we will see that within these practices a tension emerges between the need to contain and harness fortune, and, at the same time, the necessity to allow for movement and separation. In the next section, I suggest that this similarity (of a tension between containing and separating) points to a more general aesthetic sensibility and to a local theory of efficacy.

A moral aesthetic

As overtly religious practices were either banned or heavily frowned upon during the socialist era, it is not surprising to find that many activities which had previously been enacted in the open continued to be performed at home, away from the eyes of possible informers. Many of these informal domestic ritual activities are generally not elaborated as part of some wider cosmological feature, but are considered part of everyday life.[22] Not elaborating on the reasons for certain practices points to the fact that many people carry out these acts, such as the one mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, on their own in the context of ordinary everyday life because they are felt, quite intensely, to be the right way to do things. For example, I have mentioned that most people did not think of fortune as being bestowed on them by some higher being. Rather, they reasoned that if they carried out certain acts and attended to its containment, they would have fortune. Of course, reasons for conducting certain acts are varied and dependent on the people involved, but not being able to explain how such acts work is also to maintain a kind of favourable scepticism as to their efficacy. Frequently, I was told that these were things that were not known; to understand them, I must instead attend to how they were addressed in various actions.[23] By focusing on actions to harness fortune, we can see how fortune is made to appear through various practices. This is to privilege the idea that techniques used to make fortune visible—the lone everyday private acts and wider collective practices—become the means by which we understand what fortune is.

Humphrey and Laidlaw's (1994) theory of ritual action is useful for

[22] In relation to this kind of lack of explanation, Green (2005: 12) has noted that the need to pin down and clarify ambiguities is often a product of our Euro-American intellectual training which values things that can be made explicit.

[23] Chabros (1987: 258) similarly highlights that the set-like features of ritual actions in Mongolia may be viewed as part of a wider aesthetic.

understanding why people find it unimportant to describe explicitly how these kinds of informal practices work. They argue that, rather than a definable category of distinctive kinds of events, ritual is a *quality* that action can come to have. They make the important point that ritual is a feature of an act and that this feature does not necessarily have to be religious. The feature or quality of action that they suggest defines ritual is the modification of normal modes of human intentionality. In rituals, participants both are and are not the authors of their acts. Acts in rituals tend to be stipulated in advance and the thoughts and intentions of participants do not alter these acts. Rituals are rules that are governed, repeated in different contexts, and the actions themselves have an object-like quality that appears 'already formed' (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994: 5). The more ritualized an act, the less the thought and intention of participants matter to the act itself. Ritualized acts are therefore unlike usual acts that are given meaning by the intention of the person acting. What is distinctive about ritual is its quality as an action or event, rather than the need to understand the nature of the acts themselves. Many of the practices I have been describing seem to echo Humphrey and Laidlaw's (1994) definition of ritualized acts. When performing such acts, people suspend their intention and claim that it is not the meaning of the act that is important but that the act itself is carried out in a particular way. This, they argue, is the right way to do things. And while most people are not interested in identifying where exactly, or from whom, fortune comes, as long as one conducts certain acts, I was told, one might be lucky enough to gather some of it. Fortune, it seems, was not something brought about through a transaction or exchange in any direct sense. Rather, it was something that was generated in the acts themselves. Here, gestures and actions did not carry, or stand for, elaborate meanings, but were meaningful *in themselves* (cf. Humphrey with Onon 1996: 143–4).

A similar set of features may be identified in these acts that is based on ideas to do with the right way of doing things: (1) at moments of departure or transition an artefact or portion is extracted from the person, animal, or thing that is departing; (2) this artefact is carefully retained inside the house; and (3) it is believed to contain fortune which is made visible outside the artefact itself. I suggest that these features may be viewed as part of a wider aesthetic, what we might call an 'aesthetics of propriety'.[24] That is, such acts point to a wider sensibility about the right way to conduct one's social relations (with various people, objects, and the invisible land masters). To isolate these features is not to presuppose some kind of all-encompassing

[24] I thank Piers Vitebsky for his discussions concerning this idea.

structuring principle, but to suggest that a series of practices are enacted around a conventional core. This core can be said to provide the ground upon which innovation takes place (cf. Wagner 1986).

The term 'aesthetics' has suffered particularly badly in anthropology and elsewhere.[25] Gell (1998, 1999), for example, has criticized the evaluation of art objects in relation to aesthetics. An aesthetic view, he claims, reduces objects to being merely representations or the vehicles of symbolic meaning. This risks reducing our analysis to a branch of semiotics, whose theoretical affinities lie in Western theory, and obscures the technological skill and social interactions that go into the making and use of objects (Gell 1998: 9). A focus on the aesthetic appreciation of objects, it is argued, conceals their technological specificity and efficacy. Following Pierce's typology of iconicity, indexicality, and symbolism, Gell (1998) posits a technological model for the explanation of the agency of objects. Here, objects appear efficacious because they act as indexes of people. That is, they abduct the agency of their producers and enmesh patients (such as viewers) in relations and intentionalities sought by the agents who make them. Gell's (1998) concept of agency has affinities with the idea of animism, whereby intentionality may be attributed to, or abducted by, inanimate objects. Thus, objects are not simply about style or beauty. For Gell (1998), objects appear to have a kind of agency because they mediate relations *between* humans (Thomas 2001). In line with this, any 'aesthetic responses are subordinate to responses stemming from the social identities and differences mediated by the index' (Gell 1998: 81). In this sense, objects become the extensions of people who customize or create them, investing them with their intentions.[26] One may say that while Gell (1998) does not offer a very clear definition of what he means by the term 'aesthetic', he is very clear about wanting to avoid any representational and symbolic connotations of the term in an approach to objects.

Other anthropologists have used the term 'aesthetic' in a broader sense, beyond the confines of art objects, to focus on ideas about the form that social relations take. Weiner (2001), for example, suggests that aesthetics need not be 'restricted to a consideration of how a notion of beauty or sensory fitness is achieved in any given tradition' (Weiner 2001: 16). Instead, he suggests that aesthetics may refer to the elicitation and judgement of proper social forms. These judgements are often tacit, such as ideas as to what constitutes a proper house or marriage, for example (Weiner 2001: 16). Various interactions can be said to generate particular kinds of sociality, in a way that may be described as aesthetic. In the hinterland of the Rai Coast of Papua New Guinea, for example, a large wooden drum, referred to as a slit-gong, is said to be a man and to have a voice. Instead of viewing this drum as the outcome of skilled processes, Leach shows how, in the process of constructing the slit-gong, particular relations between persons are generated. This process of producing an object while at the same time producing social relations, Leach argues, reveals a particular aesthetic or perceptual orientation for the people of the Rai Coast (Leach 2002: 715). Following Strathern ([1988] 1990), he argues that the elicitation and judgement of particular social relations may be described as an 'aesthetic act' (Leach 2002: 717).

[25] In relation to the term 'aesthetic', Eagleton (1990: 3) comments that '[f]or a notion which is supposed to signify a kind of functionlessness, few ideas can have served so many disparate functions.'

[26] Gell's theory may be viewed as a theory about the representation of social agency via objects (Leach 2007: 183).

Drawing on this broader sense of the term, an aesthetic sensibility points to what we might generally understand to be a kind of shared morality. Strathern ([1988] 1990) uses the term 'aesthetic' in this broader sense when she comments: '[t]he criteria that I have been calling aesthetic with regard to form can also be called moral: the self is judged by the way it activates its relationships' (Strathern [1988] 1990: 277). If people are judged by the way they activate certain social relations, then reproducing these may be viewed as an aesthetic activity (cf. Jay 1992; Redfield 2006: 273). Taking these broader understandings into account, my use of the word aesthetic is in relation not to art objects, nor to ideas about sensory rapture, but to practices that generate particular social relations through attention to various things. These practices are held to enable the circulation of fortune, but they are also a medium through which certain types of social relations are formed. While I will draw on Gell's idea that objects abduct the agency of their producers and affect those who view or engage with them (see Chapters 3, 4, 6, and 8), in the following I wish to draw attention to the fact that certain practices are repeated on different scales because they point to a wider sense of morality that can be viewed as generating particular outcomes—both social and material.

To present an example of the way in which everyday activities can be said to turn on wider aesthetic sensibilities concerned with the elicitation and judgement of proper social relations, I present some events from the early stages of my fieldwork. While living with Renchin's family in the countryside, I would often help Delgermaa in the evenings carry the heavy pails of milk inside. One evening, as she passed me on her way to the enclosure, she ordered me to stop and put the pails of milk down. The way I was carrying them was 'ugly' (*muuhai*), she said. I looked down and noticed that the lid on top of one of the metal containers was loose which created a very slight

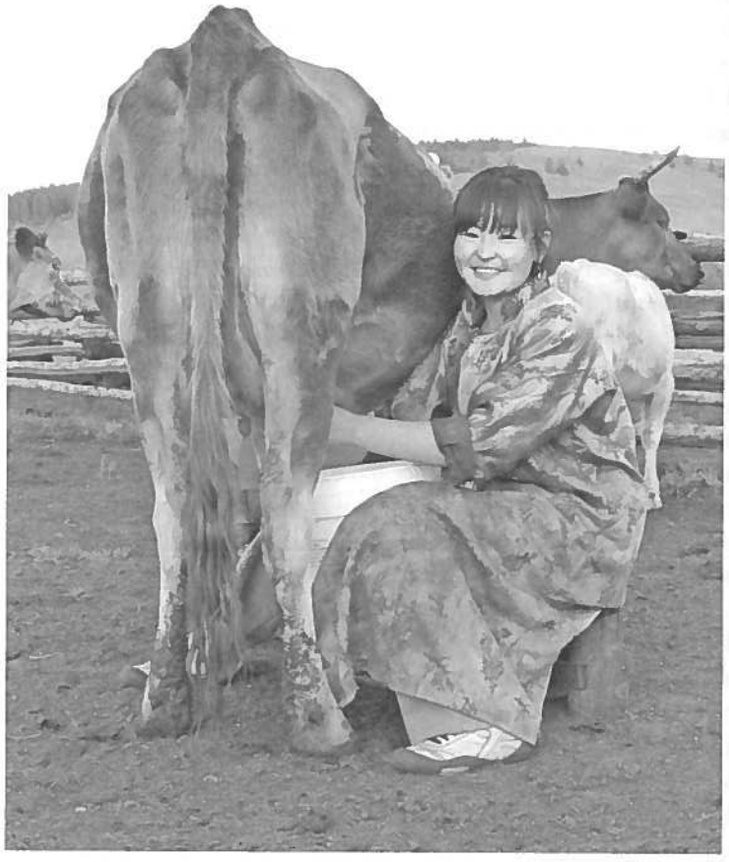


Figure 2.6 Milking the cows.

sound as I carried it. This was 'placed wrongly' (*buruu tav'san*), she claimed, as she altered the position of the lid so that it was fixed securely. I found this intervention in our mundane routine surprising. Only the two of us were at the encampment and there was no one else for many miles who would see this act and judge it as 'ugly'. Was she just being particularly stubborn in her insistence, I wondered? Was it because dust might get into the milk and spoil it? Or was it because I could inadvertently spill some of it on the ground as I was carrying it inside? None of these things concerned her. Instead, she explained, I had to learn to treat the milk 'correctly' (*zöv*).

On several occasions, the idea that there was a 'correct' or 'right' way of engaging with objects and substances was brought to my attention. It was as

though certain things had to be treated almost like subjects, lest one offend them through improper engagement. When washing one's hands, for example, the water should be poured not directly on to one's hands, but from a container *into* one's mouth and from one's mouth *on to* one's hands to clean them.[27] And, even though I thought I had developed a brilliant method for washing my hair in a small basin placed on an upturned stool, I was often told by other women that I should wash my hair as they did. Not only would this mean being more economical with the water but, more importantly, it would also mean that my hair would be cleaner. When people corrected my actions they often did so without an explanation, assuming that I would see that this was the correct way to do things, whether this be engaging with certain objects or with other people.

Not wanting to compare everyday activities like washing my hair to practices during mountain ceremonies which are considered sacred, I do, however, think that they point to a more general perception that there are certain 'right' or 'correct' ways of doing things and these should not be innovated upon, nor do they need to be elaborated with different meanings. This sense of correctness, I suggest, reveals a more general sensibility about the way things should be performed, not because they hold some powerful symbolic meaning, but because they are held to be morally right/correct (see Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994). For example, practices involving harnessing fortune often point to wider judgements concerned with the right or correct means of accumulating wealth. It should be clear that I use the term 'morality' to refer to the evaluation of conduct in relation to esteemed or despised human qualities and to the more general idea that individuals constitute themselves as subjects through such moral conduct (Humphrey 1997, where Humphrey is drawing on Foucault in this regard). To be a 'proper' person, I had to learn how to carry pails of milk correctly, how to wash my hands and hair in a certain way, and to know when to retain a portion of milk for the household when giving it to a neighbour or relative. Carrying out these practices correctly was a way of constituting myself as a person who was part of a nexus of wider social relations (be these based on kin or life in the district centre, or those with the land masters). Doing something in a different way would not simply reflect badly on me as a person; things could also go wrong if they were not carried out like this. Fortune could be lost, animals could die, or relations with others might

[27] In the district centre, people have small water containers which allow the water to pour down from a dispenser. In the countryside, however, we had an old kettle that we used to pour water into our mouths and then over our hands.

be upset, provoking jealousy and suspicion. Everyday practices, as well as explicitly religious acts, were seen to elicit particular subjective relations. Here we see that ideas about what counts as proper social 'form' can apply to areas where we would normally look for ideas about morality or politics. In pairing the term 'aesthetics' with the term 'morality', I aim to bridge ideas about 'ethics', as a form of self-cultivation, or individual desire, with ideas about 'morality', as a shared and relational mode of subjectivity.[28]

Attending to the flow of fortune through everyday practices is, then, part of a wider way of managing one's relations with others. It is a kind of technology by which people hold that growth (of people) and generation (of fortune) is achieved.[29] While most people are not interested in identifying from where exactly, or from whom, fortune comes, as long as one conducts certain acts correctly, I was told, one might be lucky enough to gather some of it. Here, harnessing fortune is what motivates action, as well as being a mode of action. Actions such as these do not just illuminate how people go about interacting with others, but also point to what relations and people are being made through these kinds of practices, so that very fixed relations between people and objects are created in and through these kinds of acts. These practices may also be said to scale outwards to different spheres, including judgements about the form that certain social relationships should take. In addition to securing the welfare of households, practices such as these provide a framework through which social relations are created, be that with neighbouring people, invisible agents in the landscape, or the government administration. In the following, I contrast the concept of separating and containing fortune with Euro-American ideas about horticulture. Through this comparison, an alternative concept of growth and generation begins to emerge.

Analogic comparisons

The use of analogy or comparison is commonplace in anthropology in order to elicit difference (Strathern 2005). In this final section I compare the

[28] In saying this, I am aware that the term 'aesthetic' is in danger of becoming a kind of substitute word for culture. See Howell (1997) who makes a similar point with regard to the term 'morality'. My aim in the following chapters is to stress that these practices can be seen as a kind of template that people innovate and manipulate for their own desired outcomes and agendas.

[29] The term technology is here used to refer to a practice, rather than to an artefact (see also Harvey 1997).

practice of horticulture to the practice of harnessing fortune. Initially, horticultural concepts, which revolve around the practice of separating and containing plants, seemed to me to be similar to ideas concerning the extraction of a piece of an animal, person, or artefact to generate growth. We may note briefly that the term 'horticulture' (horti, from the Latin *hortus* + culture, on the model of agriculture), defined as 'the art or science of cultivating or managing gardens' (*OED* 2000), denotes that a single view of nature encompasses varied practices, techniques, or 'art' forms. In the case of horticulture, this single view of nature falls under the umbrella of 'natural science'. Similarly, the term 'multicultural' (multi + culture) points to the idea that there may exist multiple cultures, or cultural perspectives, within a single community or country. Combined, these two terms point to the widespread Euro-American concept that a single nature encompasses multiple cultures (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 2004).

In order to elucidate this comparison, I focus on the horticultural practice of extracting cuttings. Here, a piece is extracted from a plant and it is from this 'cutting' that a new plant is grown. Imagine, for example, that you have an apple tree in your garden. One day, you decide to take a small cutting from the tree so that you may grow a new tree through the cutting. Horticultural practices that involve cutting a piece from a plant do not involve 'killing' the original plant. Instead, 'a cutting is part of a plant that can be taken and treated in such a way as to form roots, and thus become a separate plant. Propagating plants from cuttings is a way of increasing them vegetatively, in order to maintain their characteristics exactly' (Wheeler 2003: 4). Further, 'taking cuttings is the only guaranteed way to obtain identical plants to the parent plant' (Wheeler 2003: 10). Two points about this practice are worth highlighting. First, extracting a piece from a plant in the form of a cutting allows the cutting, rather than the original plant, to grow. Secondly, this cutting grows into an exact *replica* of the thing it has been cut from.[30]

The idea of separating to contain fortune presents something of a

[30] In contrast, the horticultural practice of pruning, although involving a similar technique to the practice of extracting cuttings, produces a very different outcome. Squire (2004) notes that 'A clinical but nevertheless accurate definition of pruning would be: the removal of parts of a woody plant to train and shape it, maintain good health and, for many plants, achieve a balance between growth and flowering. Pruning is also used to improve the quality of fruits, flowers, leaves and stems. Too often, it is employed just to limit the growth of a plant, such as when pollarding trees in space-restricted areas' (Squire 2004: 3). Like cuttings, then, pruning also involves the gardener severing pieces from a plant. But this severing is not done to produce a new plant. Rather, the pieces that are cut from the plant are discarded and the cuts are performed to stimulate the growth of the plant itself.

contrast to practices concerned with the propagation of plants through cuttings in a 'naturalist ontology' (Viveiros de Castro 2004). In the practice of extracting a cutting in horticulture, new plants are *grown from the pieces of the original plant*. In contrast, in the practices I have described, the extracted pieces are not held to grow. Rather, growth is generated outside the piece that has been cut. When a woman leaves her natal home, for example, some of her items are left behind to ensure that: (1) she is able to continue relations with these people in a new form and draw on her natal family fortune if she needs to, and (2) the household's fortune does not escape or depart with her. For the people who remain and attend to these items, they can be said to take on a kind of agency; their containment is seen to increase the collective fortune of the household. Similarly, when keeping back a ladle of milk, or a piece of tail hair, these pieces are held to contain the fortune of the things from which they have been separated and retain this for the household. In this sense, the piece that is contained does not produce a replication of the thing it has been taken from. Rather, the piece itself takes on a kind of abstracted and collective agency for those who retain it, as it attracts fortune for the household. In turn, it is also held to have an effect on the person, animal, or thing that it has been separated from in that it retains their connection to that household even if they live apart from it. These differing effects are dependent on whether we take the perspective of those who do the separating and contain the piece, or those from whom the piece has been separated.[31]

Identifying a difference between the practices of harnessing fortune and those of horticulture, I hope to have shown how comparison or analogy can bring subtle contrasts to the fore. There is a long tradition in anthropology of bringing difference into focus through comparison. In using the analogy of horticulture I am transplanting ideas from work carried out in other areas of anthropological study. In Strathern's (2005) work on Melanesia, for example, the art of gardening is seen as analogous to that of kinship. While gardens and clan territories are fixed and enclosed, wealth and produce, in the form of women and pigs, are mobile. When men bestow their daughter or sister on another clan in marriage, they literally 'transplant' a piece of themselves into that clan, so that further rights and claims travel with her. In turn, women who arrive from outside the clan are placed in its territory to grow children (Strathern 2005). The practice of horticulture provides an apt

[31] The term for animal fortune is used to refer to (1) the benefit, or potential life-force of animals, as well as (2) the bunch of tail hairs which is thought to embody that potential (Chabros 1992: 158). In this sense, it is both a force and a vessel, a subject and an object.

analogy by which to examine ideas about kinship and place. Apart from illuminating difference, what do we learn from transplanting (or bringing into focus) concepts from one context to illuminate another? In relation to the material I have presented, it is, perhaps, not surprising that a naturalist ontology derived from horticulture does not quite fit with people who have little concern for planting and do not hold individual ownership over land. In Mongolia, outright ownership over land is confined to cities or towns and the practice of cultivating things in the ground is confined to particular seasonal places. Indeed, the art of gardening might seem to be a jarring analogy for people who generally hold that making any kind of mark in the ground is problematic and might invite misfortune or retaliation from land masters (Humphrey and Sneath 1999: 3). I have tried to show that the practice of taking parts of animals, people, and things to contain fortune presents something of a contrast to these models. Harnessing fortune may be viewed as one way in which people hold that growth (of social relations) and generation (of fortune) is achieved. In this instance, the analogy has allowed me to begin to specify the complexity of the Buriad perspective of harnessing fortune in order to open up the analytical space that a naturalist ontology obfuscates.

In saying this, I am not suggesting that people do not make decisions in terms of a wider naturalist ontology. They work with the physical processes of biological growth, such as sex, pregnancy, and birth, etc. Nationwide success was recognized with the rapid increase in herd sizes of particular co-operatives whose veterinarians were skilled in generating productivity through the cross-breeding of certain types of cattle. In the face of a nationwide ban on contraceptives, women shared techniques by which they could avoid pregnancy through extended breastfeeding. A widespread incentive to cull wolves was known to have a direct effect on livestock, and bacteria were associated with the spread of illness and disease. How then, one may ask, are concepts such as fortune related to such naturalist ideas about growth? I suggest that while Buriad concepts of nature correspond with Western concepts of nature, they also differ in that they include ideas such as fortune in this concept.[32] In this sense, we should view ideas about fortune not as somehow outside of naturalist concepts about generation and growth, but as

[32] I use the term Western, or Euro-American, to refer not to a fixed place or belief but to certain shared tropes of understanding about reproduction and growth shared by a large number of European and American societies. Of course, Western concepts of nature are multiple and varied, diverse and heterogeneous. But the term is heuristically useful in so far as it provides a contrast by which we can illustrate difference (see also Gottlieb 2004: xviii; Bender 1993; Hirsch 1995; Leach 2004).

internal to them. This is not to suggest a non-naturalist ontology, but that a naturalist ontology might take a form that includes additional elements to what we think of as common, such as ideas about fortune, vitality, and might.[33] Ideas about fortune appear, at times, to be isogamous with understandings of biology, as a part of the same process (that is, you know there must have been fortune if growth occurred), while also, at other times, different from them too.

We may recall Erdenebat's example, presented earlier. Having first explained the analogy of the brick building to me in 2000, he explained it to me again some five years later, but somewhat differently, focusing, not so much on ideas about separating fortune, but on its containment. 'Before, I thought that the brick building could be seen as a person's life,' he explained, 'but now my thinking has changed a little.' He went on:

> Fortune can be seen as similar to a person's goods, something one collects a small amount of during one's life. For example, we use terms such as 'to accumulate fortune' (*hishig arvijuulah*), 'to harness, distribute, or gather fortune' (*hishig hürteh, tugeeh, dallaga*), but not everyone can collect the same amount. It is not equal. Harnessing fortune could been viewed as giving or receiving good energy. If you collect it, it increases your potential. We say that this is a 'gift' (*bilegdel*). If you think this gift is like a human's body, then fortune is like the small cells, or the DNA (*DNK*) inside the body. Or, you can understand that it is a big database inside the person, or an activated virus, where the virus can be transported to another person. Maybe this is a bad example. It is only one of hundreds of possible examples . . .

Erdenebat's ways of describing fortune continue to captivate me. It seems as though imagining the circulation of fortune can draw all kinds of possible explanations to it. Indeed, this may be why we should not think of fortune as being external to various practices, when it exists as a *potential* feature or force which is present in all kinds of things. I have attempted to outline features of a practice that can be seen in its basic form to replicate in different interactions. I have referred to this as part of a wider moral aesthetic that is judged as the right way to do things. In saying this, I mean to point not to some kind of formal composition, but to features of a practice that appear because they are held to engender certain effects, crucial for the survival of one's animals and family. What I refer to as an effect differs from what my interlocutors point to. This is because I focus on the social relations that emerge from these particular interactions. While people insist

[33] See Humphrey (2006b: 99) for a comparative point about Mongolian concepts of knowledge, particularly in relation to ideas about science and prophecy.

that harnessing fortune ensures the growth of animals, people, and things, it is also the case that certain kinds of relationships are generated as an outcome of these practices. In the following chapters, I examine some of these social relations in detail and extend the concept of separation and containing as two modes or ways of being. The first is concerned with accumulation, centredness, and display (Chapter 3, 6, and 8), and the other with the need for movement, separation, or dispersal (Chapter 4, 5, and 7). These two ways of being may be viewed as kinds of sociality that are activated through people's interactions with various objects that are common to most Buriad households.