

MANAGEMENT AND EVALUATION OF LIVESTOCK UNDER SOCIALIST COLLECTIVIZATION IN MONGOLIA

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ABSTRACT In socialist Mongolia, animal husbandry was collectivized from the second half of the 1950s until the end of 1990. Under this system, domestic animals were divided into “public animals,” belonging to animal husbandry cooperatives or state farms, and “private animals,” owned by individual herders. Although most animals that herders cared for were public animals that were looked after under contract, herders continued to manage small numbers of their own animals, even under the socialist regime.

The value of domestic animals under collectivization has already been discussed from an economics standpoint. In contrast, this paper focuses on the cultural meanings of animals. While herders regarded animals as commodities, they also had behavioral and cognitive interactions with them. In the process of these interactions, animals developed a significance transcending economic value. By examining differences between the ways herders managed and treated public and private animals, this paper aims to show that domestic animals under the regime of collectivization could be “singularized” (Kopytoff, 1986) and attain multiple meanings.

Research was conducted in Deren District, Dundgov’ Prefecture, from June to August 2001. Data revealed that, as part of the management system of public animals, the cooperative changed the combination of herders and animals every year and, consequently, a herder looked after different animals each year. In contrast, herders would closely watch their private animals for a period of several years. This meant that herders had full knowledge of the growth process of each individual animal, as well as the animals’ genealogical relationships. Consequently, herders accumulated a great deal of information concerning each individual’s birth, growth and death and its familial patterns associated with their private animals. In addition, the author was indelibly impressed by the fact that when herders referred to a past animal or animal family, it reminded them of their own past and their family histories.

In general, while public animals were collectively recognized as belonging to several categories, private animals were perceived as individual beings. Furthermore, although public animals were definitely regarded as commodities, private animals were sometimes “singularized”. These differences between public and private animals arose from the duration of animal-human transactions. Herders always lived with their private animals; the animals therefore became part of their lives. Thus, private animals assumed multiple meanings, which included being seen as domestic consumption goods, as gifts, as symbols to evoke past memories, and as commodities.

Keywords: Collectivization; commodity; domestic animal; individual recognition; Mongolia

INTRODUCTION

In Mongolia, animal husbandry was collectivized under the socialist regime from the second half of the 1950s to the end of the 1980s. Here, I aim to clarify the human-animal relationship and the evaluation of livestock under socialist collectivization in Mongolia by examining the characteristics of animal management at the time.⁽¹⁾

Under collectivization, herders were organized as members of animal husbandry coopera-

tives and their animals were owned as the common property of the cooperatives. Herders earned salaries by taking care of the cooperative's animals and by producing dairy products. The property relationship and animal management system under collectivization have been discussed from an economic viewpoint (Sakamoto, 1969; Onuki, 1985). However, little attention has been given to the interrelationship between herders and animals. Animals have been evaluated only for their exchange and use values, i.e., as commodities, in the framework of a planned economy.

Here, I focus first on the interaction between herders and animals and on changes in this relationship over time. Kopytoff (1986: 69-70) argued, based on the concept of value equivalence, that everything can be commoditized or singularized over time. Second, I focus on the extra value given to animals beyond the economy. Although contemporary pastoral societies are part of monetary economies to varying degrees, anthropologists have found that livestock have local cultural values within each society (Konaka, 2002; Ohta, 2002). Collectivization is a socialist, but not market economy, version of money economization. I examine the balance between economic and cultural values given to livestock in Mongolia under collectivization.

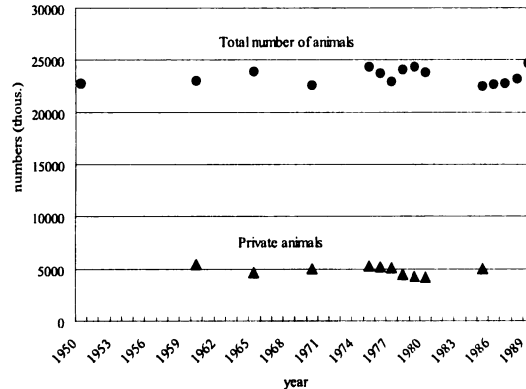
Research was performed in June-September 2001 in Deren District, Dundgov' Prefecture. The district encompasses 390,000 ha located 200 km south of the capital city, Ulanbator, and is part of the Gobi desert steppe. According to unpublished official statistics of Deren District, there were 2600 Mongols belonging to 612 households in December 2000, whose subsistence was based largely on animal husbandry. They raise cattle, horses, sheep, goats, and camels.

STATE POLICY ON ANIMAL HUSBANDRY DURING THE SOCIALIST PERIOD

Mongolia was under a socialist regime for 70 years, from the revolution in 1921 until 1991. Animal husbandry was collectivized from the second half of the 1950s to the end of the 1980s. The purpose of collectivization was to intensify animal husbandry and increase productivity according to a socialist economic plan. Therefore, animal husbandry cooperatives (*kho'doo aj akhuin negdel*) were established in each district, herders were organized as members of cooperatives, and their livestock became the common property of the cooperatives.

In Deren District, a cooperative called "Nairamdal" (friendship) was established in 1954. Most of the herders' livestock was "socialized" and became common property, referred to as "common animals" (*khamtyn o'mch bolokh mal*); only a small part was remained "private animals" (*khuviiin mal, aminy mal*) (Mongol Kagaku Academy, 1988[1969] : 137). The number of private animals allowed per household was limited. In 1955, the maximum number of animals that a herding household was allowed to own was 150 head, in the Gobi region, and 100 head in the steppe-forest region (ibid. 137), but the real number of animals belonging to herders was much lower. Although the limit varied over time and by region, according to state statistics, the proportion of private animals was constantly about 20% of the total number of animals in Mongolia from the 1960s to the mid-1980s (Fig. 1).

The core of the animal husbandry practice was production from, and reproduction of, common animals. Each prefecture and district was given production tasks by the



Note

1. The author made it from such materials as National Statistical Office of Mongolia 1998:134, Central Statistical Board under the Council of Ministers of the MPR 1981:178,181.

2. The census was done in June-July until 1960, and in December after 1965.

Fig. 1. Total number of animals and private animals.

government to achieve every year, according to a 3- or 5-year economic plan. The tasks included details such as the quantity and quality of the production of milk, meat, wool, hair, and leather, as well as the increase or decrease in the number of animals each year. In each cooperative, the tasks were divided and distributed among the herders as his/her personal norms. Every prefecture, district, and person was under competition to achieve the norm.

The cooperatives entrusted common animals to herders, who cared for the animals. The common animals were distributed among the herders. The cooperatives entrusted each herder with a certain number of animals for a certain period, with the obligation to care for the animals and produce and deliver a certain dairy yield each season. Each herder earned a basic salary depending on the numbers and species of animals they cared for, and received a reward seasonally according to his/her achievement.

The smallest unit of animal husbandry was a household, which was composed of a married couple and their unmarried children. Households formed *suur'*, groups in which one to three households set their tents (*ger*) close together and cooperated in the labor. A household with an abundant labor force formed a single *suur'*, whereas households with few members cooperated to form a *suur'*.

MANAGEMENT AND EVALUATION OF COMMON ANIMALS

I. How were Common Animals Managed?

Common animals were divided into several herds by categories, such as species, sex, and age, and a herder cared for animals of a certain category. Thus, the animal management was specialized. This was based on the theory that specialization and division of labor increases the production efficiency (Inamura *et al.* 2001:128). The aim of specialization was to have more animals cared for by a smaller labor force. Herders cared for animals of a certain species, sex, or age, for a short period, such as 1 year, and produced dairy products.

Hereafter, I describe the herd formation for each species based on interviews with Deren herders.

1. *Sheep and goats*

In Mongolia, sheep and goats have always been maintained together as one mixed herd. Under collectivization, sheep and goats were divided by sex and age into three groups: reproductive females (female herd), castrated males and mature, nonpregnant females (nonpregnant herd), and young sheep and goats 6 -18 months old (young herd). Sheep and goats were divided into these three herds because more care could be given to the female herd, which was responsible for reproduction, rearing, and milking, and because animals could go on herding day-trips at different speeds and ranges according to their age and other conditions.

Suur' in charge of female herds received the herd in August which is autumn in Mongolia. In spring, from March to April, female sheep and goats bore young simultaneously. The herders struggled to keep the mortality of young lower than the norm. In summer, the herders collected milk and wool according to the norm and castrated male infants. In August, the young were separated from their mothers and passed to the *suur'* in charge of young herds, while females from young herds that had reached 18 months of age were transferred to the female herds. Herders of female herds were required to have excellent technique and experience. They could obtain honor and high monetary and object rewards if they reached or exceeded the newborn growth ratio norm. However, if they failed repeatedly, the cooperative ordered them to take care of other categories of animals.

In the autumn, *suur'* in charge of young herds received sheep and goats that were 5-6 months old. For example, DD, a man who was 76 years old in 2001, along with his family (DD-family), was required to care for a herd of 700 females. Herders of young herds raised young sheep and goats for a full year, after which they passed the adult males to the *suur'* of nonpregnant herds, and the adult females to the *suur'* of female herds. They then received new young sheep and goats that were 5-6 months old.

Suur' in charge of nonpregnant herds received about 1000 head of nonpregnant females and males more than 18 months old. Herders raised them for several years until they were sent to Ulanbator for slaughter. This was an easy job that could be accomplished by inexperienced herders; however, the rewards were few.

2. *Cattle*

Cattle were divided into four herds: reproductive females with their nursing young (female herd), young males 12-36 months old (young male herd), young females 12-36 months old (young female herd), and mature males more than 36 months old (mature male herd). Cattle were divided into these four herds for the same reasons as sheep and goats.

Herders of female herds took care of birthing from February to May and also began to milk the cows and deliver milk to the cooperative. After 1 year, they passed the grown calves to the young male and young female herds. Herders of young female herds raised the cattle and prevented pregnancies until the cattle were 36 months old. The cattle were then passed to the female herd, where they were inseminated and had young. Herders of young male herds castrated the males and raised them for 1 year, after which the males were passed to the male herd to be fattened.

3. Camels

Camels were divided into only two herds: reproductive females with young less than 36 months old (female herd), and males more than 36 months old (male herd). This was because of their slow growth and small numbers in Deren District. In Deren, camels were raised mainly to transport burdens and people, but not for milking; therefore, the number of camels was small. For example, DD-family cared for a female herd of 60 females and their immature young. Males were moved to the male herd and castrated when they reached 36-48 months old, whereas females remained in the female herd and bore young when they reached 48 months old. *Suur'* in charge of male herds cared for 100 head of castrated males and some studs. The studs were moved to a female herd during the time of estrus in winter and spring.

4. Horses

Horses were not divided by sex and age. Instead, studs spontaneously led 20-30 mature females with their young, as well as castrated males, young males, and young females. The *Suur'* in charge of horses, consisting of two or three households, raised about 100 horses with 4-5 studs. Horses were used for riding and milking, but were rarely eaten, and they generally died at an old age.

In brief, herders raised herds organized by species, sex, and age, for a short period of time. After 1 to several years, herders returned the herds to the cooperative and took herds of another species, sex, and age. Even when a herder continuously cared for a herd of the same category over several years, the individuals belonging to the herd changed every year. For example, if a herder cared for sheep and goats that were 6-18-months old, for 2 years continuously, all the individuals within the herd would have changed each year. Only in female herds did herders care for the same individuals continuously over several years, although the young were passed to other *suur'*. Thus, the bloodline continuity was not maintained in the common herds that were owned by the cooperative and cared for by the member herders.

II. How was the Individuality of Common Animals Recognized?

When the cooperative entrusted the common animals to the herders, they checked the number of animals and weighed each individual to calculate and record the gross weight of the herd. Thus, the common animals were treated as numbers and weights. Then, the animals were entrusted to the herders, who were instructed to achieve many types of norms, such as birth and survival to adulthood rates for female herds, weight increases for nonpregnant herds, and mortality rates. If herders could not achieve the norms, they would not obtain a reward, i.e., they had to compensate for the loss by forfeiting money. Those who achieved good results, especially for several years continuously, were entrusted with more animals. The basic salary of these herders increased, and they were rewarded in milestone years, such as in the third or fifth year of achievement. Thus, herders with good results struggled to continue their high achievement, even compensating for the loss of common animals with their own private animals.

In conclusion, common animals were measured by their number or weight. They were exchanged for money or other individuals of the same species, sex, and age category. When a herder did not meet the required number or weight of common animals, the loss was converted into a monetary value and he/she compensated for the loss by a reduction

in his/her salary. When a herder exceeded the required number or weight of common animals, the increase in productivity was rewarded by money and objects. The fact that each individual from the group of common animals was exchanged for another individual or money suggests that the common animals were recognized collectively.

MANAGEMENT AND EVALUATION OF PRIVATE ANIMALS

I. How were Private Animals Managed?

In Deren District, herders were allowed to own a limited number of private animals. The limit varied over time from 75 to 150. Private animals were also governed by norms for milk, wool, and meat production. The cooperative paid for dairy products, but the price was very low.

These animals were the private property of the herders. Private animals were bred by the herders and their family lines continued for generations. Herders mixed their private animals with their herd of common animals from the cooperative and took them on herding day trips. If it was not possible to herd the private and common animals together because of differences in species, sex, and age, herders entrusted their private animals to other herders who took care of common animals of the same category.

II. How was the Individuality of Private Animals Recognized?

Lattimore (1966 [1962]), who visited cooperatives in Mongolia, indicated that herders could identify each private animal. He noted that private animals sometimes had ear markings, although this was not always the case, even when they were entrusted to other herders. He observed a herder herding 1000 head of sheep and goats; the herder caught several sheep and said that they were entrusted private animals. The herder also explained each animal's age and when they were entrusted to him (ibid. 201). Thus, each private animal was identified individually and its age and ownership were known.

Next, I will examine the narrative of the DD-family about their private animals and suggest the value of private animals for herders under the collectivization. First, the formation of DD's private horse herd is described.

[Case 1]

DD, born in 1925, bought a young mare (about 30 months old) for 50 *to'g* (= *to'grog*, Mongolian currency) in the early 1940s. In 1944, at the age of 20 years, DD was conscripted and sent to the eastern border to defend against the Japanese army. From the winter of 1944 until the spring of 1945, Deren District was attacked by a serious *zud*, a disaster in which many animals became weak and died due to extreme weather conditions. The DD-family tried to save its horses by moving them far south. One night after the family had been leading its horses for many days, the herd went beyond the Chinese border. The family secretly entered into Inner Mongolia, China, to find the herd, but was unsuccessful. The DD-family lost most of its horses at that time.

Most of the DD-family's private animals died or were lost during the *zud* of 1944-1945. When DD returned home, however, the young mare still remained in the herd; it had survived the *zud*. Afterward, although there were several harsh winters and springs, including the notorious *zud* of 1967-1968, the mare's offspring slowly increased.

Even today, there are descendants of the mare in DD's herd. They are identified individually and their family line is recognized. DD identified several mother-offspring pairs and some castrated horses that were the mare's descendants.

The mare that DD bought before collectivization survived the harshest *zud* in DD's experience, and in modern Mongolian history. It left many descendants, which also survived many harsh winters, and some of them are still living today. This is the oldest family of DD's livestock. Considering the changing natural and social environment in Mongolia, it is surprising that the family line has continued for 60 years.

What does the continuity of the horse lineage signify? First, in regards to the natural environment, there may be an effect of natural selection on the mare's family continuity. In the *zud* of 1944-1945, many horses were lost due to fatigue, illness, and accidents during the long-distance herding. During and after the *zud*, there was secondary damage such as theft. Afterward, Deren herders experienced hard winters approximately ever 12 years, and lost many animals. It is likely that herders do their best to protect their animals because livestock is their biggest property; however, large numbers of animals were lost.

Second, in regards to the social situation, there may be an artificial selection effect that allowed a certain individual or family to survive the *zud*. The herders' ownership of private animals was threatened under the collectivization, because any private animals over the allowed limits were socialized, and, in addition, changes in state policy often altered these limits. Although the ownership of private animals was limited, the mare and its offspring remained DD's. The mare's family was recognized as a strong, excellent bloodline and given a high use value and consequently, was selected artificially.

Furthermore, it is remarkable that the relationship between today's extant individuals and a past individual is recognized so clearly, although the mare lived about 50 years ago. The recognition of a bloodline over several generations is based on the recognition of each mother-offspring pair relationship. The fact that the mother-offspring pair relationship is recognized suggests that there was individual identification.

Finally, the most impressive part of this case is the special relationship between DD and his horses. When he talked about a certain individual horse from the past, it reminded him of his own and his family's past, which he then also shared.

Next, I discuss the case of a private animal that has received special status because of its growth and interaction with people.

[Case 2]

In the early 1980s, DD received a young (about 20 months old) female sheep from another herder in exchange for some money and objects. When the sheep came to the DD-family, the family's oldest daughter, Tg, was studying in the sixth grade at Deren School, located at the center of the District. The youngest daughter, Ot, was 3 years old and played every day sitting on a wooden box that belonged at that time to the DD-family. The winter was quite harsh, although it was not a *zud*. The sheep survived the winter, and grew up to bear young.

One of the sheep's offspring bore a female lamb in spring 1998. The mother died soon after; thus, the lamb was raised by artificial suckling from a feeding bottle made of a cattle horn called *ugj*. The lamb itself was called "Ugj," as is common for lambs suckled by *ugj*. This occurred when the DD-family formed a *suur'* with a herder, Sukhbaatar, and cared for the cooperative's sheep and goats.

The lamb became attached to people. It often followed people because they gave it fried dumplings and candy. In time, the DD-family named it "Delbee" (Delbee>*delbe*: penal, ear

lobe) because it had big white ear lobes with black spots called “*tsetsegtei*” (with flowers) that expanded (*delbegnekh*) when it ran.

When Delbee was 1 year old, DD and his wife gave it to their youngest daughter, Ot. Because she was 9 years younger than DJ, her closest brother, all the members of the DD-family loved (*khairlakh*) and spoiled (*erkhlekh*) her. Consequently, no one could kill Delbee, Ot’s sheep. Delbee lived a natural lifespan and died at the age of 12 years in 2000, leaving many offspring. Today there are seven of Delbee’s descendants in DD’s sheep herd, as well as 20-30 relatives, including the lineages from Delbee’s grandmother.

This case indicates three important facts. First, a private animal was exchanged between herders under collectivization, indicating that private animals were commodities. Second, private animals symbolize a part of family history or a period of family life. Animals played roles as triggers of memories. When a herder talked about past memories of an individual animal, the animal made him/her remember his family life during the same period. Third, an animal’s value changed over time as interactions between the animal and its owner accumulated. This process occurred as follows: DD acquired a sheep as a commodity and the number of its descendants increased in his herd. A lamb, its granddaughter, was endangered because of its mother’s death, but it was raised by the care of the DD-family. The experience of artificial suckling resulted in a bond between the lamb and the people. The lamb was discriminated from others and was given the name “Ugj.” The lamb became attached to people and the DD-family loved it in return. As time passed, it was given the name “Delbee” because of its unique ear shape. Furthermore, it was given to Ot, a special member of the DD-family. Consequently, it was treated as a pet and was never killed.

DISCUSSION

I. Characteristics of Animal Management under Collectivization

At the core of animal husbandry under collectivization was the production and management of common animals. Animals were divided into herds of uniform individuals by categories such as species, sex, and age, and the cooperative entrusted the categorized herds to the herders. The period of the trust agreement was 1 year, in principle; thus, herders cared for different individuals on a yearly basis. Animals were treated as numbers or weights. The cooperative assigned herders norms to achieve, such as the gross weight increase of a herd and the growth rate of newborns. If herders failed to achieve the norm, they had to compensate by paying money or with other animals of equivalence.

What kind of relationship did such an animal management system create between people and animals? A herder had little knowledge about the individuals that he/she cared for, because he/she cared for certain individuals for only a short period. However, if the herders cared for the same individuals continuously for several years and reproduction occurred repeatedly in the herd, the herders might have more knowledge about those individuals than about others. This might evoke the feeling that the animals were theirs. Thus, the cooperative’s management system, which prevented the fixed combination of herders and animals, might have been intended to, as an institution, clearly demonstrate the cooperative’s ownership of the common animals.

Second, because common animals were managed by number and weight, herders tended to treat the herd as a collective entity, rather than recognize individual animals. Thus, an individual animal that belonged to a certain category (species, sex, and age) was recognized as exchangeable with another individual belonging to the same category. In fact, when an animal died, another individual replaced it. Although animals' bodies are dynamic and change over time, the management system of dividing animals by category and changing the individual composition of the herd from year to year ignores this nature. For example, a herd of sheep and goats that were 6-18 months old this year and a herd of sheep and goats 6-18 months old next year would consist of different individuals, but would be recognized as the same herd, whereas the animals in the herd this year would be considered different items next year.

The characteristics of the management of private animals were different. Private animals were, in principle, also commodities, organized into a planned economy and assigned norms. However, the human-animal relationships differed from those with common animals. Private animals remained with one herder to grow and reproduce. Consequently, herders identified private animals individually. On the basis of individual identification, herders accumulated knowledge about changes and continuity such as growth, death, and reproduction, at the level of individuals and families.

II. Evaluation of Animals under Collectivization

The socialist regime tried to increase the production efficiency of animal husbandry based on the logic of scale economy, by maximizing the number of animals in one herd and promoting specialization and the division of labor. At the same time, it introduced the concept of measuring animals by number or weight, i.e., to see equivalency among animals. The cooperative recorded the results of labor in terms of the number and weight of animals, and rewarded successful herders with money and objects, including animals.

However, even under collectivization, 20% of all animals were private animals. Private animals were mostly identified individually, and mother-offspring relationships and family lines were recognized. Furthermore, the individuality of some private animals was recognized strongly, and some animals were given special value and cultural meaning. Therefore, the desingularization and commoditization of the socialist regime did not change the entire method of evaluating animals. Even though the state economic system aimed for the division of labor, specialization of production, and large-scale production, not all animals were recognized by category and quantity. Some animals were recognized as individuals.

Consequently, although the macroeconomic system was a commodity economy and common animals were recognized as commodities under the collectivization, Mongolian herders did not commoditize all livestock. Private animals took on multiple values, such as commodities, self-consumption goods, gifts, and triggers of past memories. In Mongolia, even under a socialist regime, local, cultural human-animal relationships were maintained.

CONCLUSION

I have focused on the individual identification of animals in Mongolian pastoral society and showed that domestic animals were special objects that should not settle in people's

intention or social institution because they are living things, and could take on special meaning when they had interactions with people. Mongolian pastoral society experienced socialism for 70 years; in principle, livestock was a commodity for the entire period. For herders, however, animals were sometimes triggers of past memories concerning personal and family identities. This is similar to the culture of pastoral societies in East Africa, where each animal is identified individually and every man recognizes a certain cattle as himself. The relationship between Mongolian herders and animals continued in a peripheral sphere under the collective production system that aimed to increase productivity by applying animal husbandry specialization and scale economy.

NOTES

- (1) Kazato (2006) clarified the human-animal relationship and the evaluation of livestock after privatization since the beginning of the 1990s.

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