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PASTORALISM IN MONGOLIA AS AN ESSENCE OF THE NOMADIC CIVILIZATION.

Z. BATJARGAL, B.ENKHJARGAL[1]

In this paper highlighted is the result of an analysis aimed to identify the reasons for :

1) How the nomads in Mongolia were able to survive the high magnitude variability of harsh climate conditions in the deep inland area of Eurasia and live there, developing a very unique form of nomadic civilization based on pastoralism?

2) How were they able to manage to sustain life relying on the very limited and changeable natural resources, while managing not to make any destructive interventions in the natural order?

A simple superposition of reconstructed trends of climate parameters, particularly, the temperature trends at the global and regional scales and Mongolia's historical timeline could give an impression that certain commonly accepted perceptions about nomadic tribes could be revised. Most scholars concluded that Mongols and their ancestors had been migrating with war and attacks of their neighbors due to the worsening climate conditions. Nevertheless, a detailed analysis can provide a diverse evidence, which include opposing views.

Nomadic lifestyle was created as a way of life for human beings to survive the unstable harsh climate conditions with added stresses due to prolonged cooling and dry periods. Nomads were forced to live relying on the limited resources, which in most cases had negative impacts on growth of the population. When severity of climate conditions had exceeded their survival threshold, it could have lead to diminishing capacity of communities to sustain life, resulting in shrinking of their population. It can be assumed that expansion and migration were possible only when the climate conditions shifted to its positive phases (more warm periods with increased or regular rainfalls) supporting the population's capacity building to expand their area of inhabitation and to maintain other capabilities. Conflicts or clashes with neighbors, in most cases, probably had been occurring for the "life style", but not for the "life space".

One can say that the Chinese Great White Wall had served much less purpose in preventing sporadic attacks from the nomadic tribes of North. In fact, it stands almost as a border line between the nomadic and settled life styles, preventing mass migrations from both sides. Apparently, this unprecedented endeavor of human beings had benefited more those whom the Wall had intended to stop. Nomadic tribes, obviously due to their tiny size of population in comparison with those who were settled inside the Walls, might not have been able to avoid or withstand the possible radical assimilation during the long period of their history, unless the Wall shielded them from this very possible ill fate.

Generalized analysis can lead to the assumption that sedentary and nomadic civilizations were responding to climate change in very different ways with non identical impacts on themselves as societies and on the environment.

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1. Монгол судлаач

Sedentary civilization, as a rule, transferred their own risk to the ecosystems (as an additional burden) using more and more material and energy resources for shelter, heating, cooling and other necessities, as well as for producing surplus, in addition to the Basic Human Needs (BHN). It was, to some extent, causing double stress on the ecosystem. Such overloading on ecosystems had intensified since the Industrial Revolution (18th century) leading to the modern day's worldwide ecosystem degradation and global climate destabilization.

Lifestyle choices made in the industrialized countries indirectly affect the livelihoods of those people who have an imperceptible footprint on the earth, living the way their ancestors had maintained generations ago. For instance, residents of small islands in the Pacific, who never contributed too much to the common pool Green House Gases (GHG) in the atmosphere, are threatened to lose their homeland due to the global warming attributed sea level rise or to be washed away by tsunami, if it were to happen.

Nomadic civilizations, on the contrary, took the risk onto themselves accepting it as one's dues. They were able to reduce burden on the given ecosystem by moving to other places with adequate carrying capacity, in some ways unloading the stress from ecosystems.

The societies in Mongolia during the country's long history had been able to overcome and survive high amplitude of social turbulences, economy turmoil and climate variability, thanks to their lifestyle based on pastoralism. Moreover, it enabled them to maintain a life sustaining system with a guaranteed provision of the BHN, without stepping over thresholds up and down in the life line.

Life in Mongolia was sustained on the tireless efforts of every member of society, on the contribution of every member of family, both junior and senior. People in Mongolia have a saying " Every new family member will add own portion to the family foodstuffs"; in order words, life unsustainability in family, in community and in society was not linked to the number of human beings, to the increase of the population. Well maintained function of every single unit of society, starting from an individual household, was the primary guarantee for sustainability of life in Mongolia through its long history. Unfortunately, not every social system, even the most sophisticated in the modern interpretation, had inherited the above mentioned performances imperative to be called sustainable.

Conflicts between a closed system as a living environment with limited capacity (pasture, for instance) and an open human system without forced limitation of the population size have been solved thanks to consistence of production and consumption patterns with natural cycles. Production involving renewable resources and consumption with fully recycling principles were guaranties for environmental sound life sustaining system.

This simple governing structure of nomadic pastoralalism could yield enough output for human life with a minimum input from exhaustible natural resources while avoiding too much harm on the ecosystem functions involved in interactions between humans and the nature.

All possible life sustaining elements integrated in the most efficient ways were solid basis for high resilience of the local communities, despite their maximum exposure to external stresses like climate variability and other shock factors. There are noticeable linkages between balanced stresses and strengthened resiliencies of local communities. Smart interaction with nature and wisdom of people in everyday life could even reverse the unfavorable factors into favorable ones. Fragmented grass conditions and vegetation covers, due to the complexity of topography and highly variable precipitation patterns, , in fact, where the root causes of the harsh reality for non stopping migration. But these negative factors can be reversed as positive ones thanks to the balanced human mobility to minimize risks from natural disasters and from environmental degradation.

Seasonal mobility scheme with flexible timeframe and customary adjustments among householders were helping people to reduce stress from the spatial and temporal variability of climate factors, including extreme weather events.

Traditional way of life in Mongolia associated with pastoralism is considered as the sound and more feasible option in response to climate change, thanks to the high adaptive capacities of the local communities to their rapidly changing living environment. Despite the climate associated pressure and society induced disturbances, the essence of traditional livestock breeding in Mongolia is not obliterated yet because of its organic inter linkages with the land features that created this unique form of life supporting system.

The following arguments can be put forward in favour of the traditional livestock system, particularly, as an option for adaptation to climate variability:

1) Pasture based livestock was the only way to sustain the net level of production for BHNs in arid areas where vegetation cover is patched and grass yield is fluctuating in spatial and temporal scale, depending on various, mostly unpredictable factors;

2) It has high enough returns in terms of economic efficiency, mobilizing in maximum the potential of ecosystem services of natural systems without interrupting their core functions;

3) It can make a priceless contribution to natural heritage by preserving the gene pool of animals with high tolerance to harsh climate conditions and by preserving a portion of grasslands where grazing exercise is still controlled by the natural order, but not by human greed.

The so-called "tragedy of commons" has not revealed itself within the traditional subsistence livestock husbandry in Mongolia in the past, thanks to customary regulations within the demands of the BHN. This is fully consistent with the findings of fundamental theoretical work of the modern prominent scholars, particularly by Prof. Elinor Ostrom, author of the "Governing the Commons".

Looking back, the essence of human wisdom could give some ideas for solution of modern problems, particularly, on critical issues of sustainability of life, particularly, in terms of environmental degradation.