Special Issue: Dispersed & Connected

Mobilities, Materiatilities and Belonging(s) in Mongolia and beyond

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Contents

Introduction

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This special issue of *Acta Mongolica* features a compilation of articles presented at the first International Mongolian Studies Symposium Vienna, held at the Weltmuseum Wien from 23 to 24 January 2020. The planned series of Mongolian Studies Symposiums Vienna originated in the idea of focusing on social and cultural anthropology and interdisciplinary approaches including Mongolia-related research on archaeology, history, arts and natural sciences. The symposium aims to be a forum for international Mongolian Studies scholars and artists to present and discuss theoretical and empirical research, exchange knowledge and enhance networking and communication on current research issues and approaches. We intend to bring researchers, scholars and artists together biennially with the aim of discussing recent investigations and works, ongoing research projects and experiences.

The first symposium was generously supported by the National Council for Mongolian Studies, Institute of Mongolian Studies of the National University of Mongolia, Eurasia-Pasific Uninet, the Weltmuseum Wien and the Austrian Academy of Sciences. It was organized as part of the research project *Dispersed and Connected: Artistic Fragments along the Steppe and Silk Roads*.[1] The symposium entitled *Dispersed and Connected: Mobilities, Materialities and Belonging(s) in Mongolia* focused on various kinds of movements of people, animals, and objects and their socio-cultural, economic and environmental transformations in Mongolia. It further discussed the impacts of global and geopolitics, mega development projects, and infrastructure constructions on everyday life of

individuals, materialities, art and artefacts, and belongings. Hence the mobilities entail a broad range of temporal and spatial movements mediated through a variety of agencies, (infra)structures, and platforms.

The overarching research project *Dispersed and Connected* deals with narrations, images and imaginations, fragments and artistic expressions of Mongolian belonging along old and new Steppe and silk routes, which link dispersed and connected biographies, artistic traditions, cultural monuments and memories. The project idea arose as a reaction to China's announcement of a "New Silk Road" or "One Belt and One Road" policy in 2013, labelling future global long-term infrastructure plans and the concomitant proclaimed "connectivity", "partnership of dialogue" and "win-win cooperation" (Frankopan 2018). The impacts of existing and new roads and routes, of course, go far beyond the officially promoted political discourse. The transformations occur on many levels and layers – they affect among others individual life histories, forms of local knowledge, cultural and archaeological sites, resources and natural landscapes, transnational migrations and transfers of people, ideas and artefacts.

This issue consists of articles that could be divided into three sub-topics – mobilities, materialities, and belongings – and ordered accordingly. However, there is a density of thematic entangling and interweaving among the individual articles as well as between these three topics.

Mobility entails not only movements but also "means different things, to different people, in differing social circumstances" (Adey 2006, 83). Diverse kinds of movements signify bonds between people, place, and culture across time and space (Salazar and Smart 2012). Historical and archaeological findings show that (contemporary) discourses of urbanization, cosmopolitanism, globalization, and cultural diversity could be featured in (pre)historical contexts and settings. The long-standing conceptual lens has defined societies with characteristics of (im)mobility, categorizing them as either nomadic or sedentary. The opening article co-authored by Hendrik Rohland, Christina Franken, Ulambayar Erdenebat, and Tumurochir Batbayar departs from "materialities" – in this case recent archaeological findings – and introduces cities in a nomadic environment

which further questions clear-cut distinctions of (im)mobility. Dealing with the urbanization processes of the two historical sites of Karabalgasun, the Uyghur capital from around 745 until 840, and Karakorum, known as the historic capital of the Mongol Empire, the authors argue that the "nomadic societies developed some degree of urbanization" which is "not an evolutionary transition from nomadic to sedentary societies" but "a specific type of urban place." This further presents the incorporation or combination of sedentary societies and the nomadic world order and interactions between nomad elites and sedentary subjects.

Going back in chronological time artefacts from a burial tomb of a nomadic Turkic aristocrat built in the 7th century at Shoroon Bumbagar near Ulaan Kherem in Bulgan province excavated and documented by Erdenebold Lhagvasuren make it possible to enlighten the manifold processes of interaction and cultural transfer along existing (steppe and silk) roads of that time (Erdenebold, 2017). For this article the excavated coins with inscriptions were chosen to show the movement of artefacts.

From the pattern of construction and (infra)structure of (pre)historical cities and the mobility of artefacts, the paper by Baatarnaran Tsetsentsolmon and Maria-Katharina Lang takes the reader to the historical and contemporary narrations about existing and emerging railways and roads in Mongolia. Presenting the rapid transformation processes of new railways and roads juxtaposed with slow narrations by individuals, it shows parallel strains of velocity, distancing and mapping that differ between the (inter)national power-structure and everyday life of herders. While the government aims to accelerate the connections and speed as a transit zone and also at taking part in the new mega projects such as New Silk Road or Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), herders and animals endure environmental changes but also enjoy "effective slowness" (Delaplace and Humphrey, 2020).

The following two articles further discuss the Chinese policy of the BRI and its impacts on Mongolia and other parts of the world. From a sinologist's perspective, Manlai Nyamdorj presents the political, economic and cultural contexts of China in which the current concept of the BRI formed. Collating the BRI, as "a complete set of strategy and policy proposals in the form of infrastructure development and

financing", with postmodernity – the global capitalist order, Nyamdorj argues that China is re-identifying the global capital system by "accelerating its expansion into previously marginalized countries while strengthening its own posture in the global capitalist system." Contrasting with the discourses on contemporary infrastructure networking, Shagdarsuren Egshig's article seeks historical traces of the Silk Roads from the time of the Mongolian Empire. With her accurate comparisons of historical and contemporary Silk Roads not only as routes but as complex constellations, Shagdarsuren argues that the New Silk Road project is grounded not only the concept but the structure with "soft and hard factors".

The BRI has defined key areas as "policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds."[2] The aim of "facilities connectivity" is to establish an infrastructure network connecting various Asian sub-regions with other parts of Asia, Europe and Africa. Although countries including Mongolia are listed due to their affectedness and connectedness within the BRI in microeconomic indexes such as "China Connectivity Index," published in 2016 by the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China and the Standard Bank of China,[3] the promised and promoted "connectivity" of roads and railroads is questionable. All these national and transnational infrastructure plans, maps of routes and transport lines remain as an "abstract distance-speed calculation" (Humphrey 2020) but have not been sufficiently materialized. Historical imaginaries of roads and routes have been re-formulated and instrumentalized to legitimize modernization projects. Meanwhile people, materialities, and commodities are being mobilized, (dis)connected, and dispersed in their own ways (Lang and Tsetsentsolmon 2020).

The next set of articles, on the topic "belongings", concern human-animal relations, place attachment and the mobilities of animals. Developing on his theories on the notion of *nutag*, which means "birthplace, homeland and country

2   Belt and Road Portal (*Yidai yilu*), "The Belt and Road Ecological and Environmental Cooperation Plan" https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/zchj/qwfb/13392.htm. Accessed on 3 February 2020.

3   Conner Judge and Sanchir Jargalsaikhan, "Guest Post: China's Belt and Road Initiative—Mongolia Focus," Strategic Analysis: Contemporary Mongolian Politics, Resources, Society, 12 March 2019, http://blogs.ubc.ca/mongolia/2019/obor-bri-mongolia-sco-neasia/. Accessed on 3 February 2020.

of origin", Bumochir focuses on *nutag* in human-animal relationships and presents the ways in which it is shared by both people and animals. The histories of mutual relations between humans and animals are narrated only by humans (Ingold 2000). Bumochir describes the process which horses are "nationalized" in Mongolia and portrayed in artistic representations such as stories, films and poems in the state socialist and global capitalist realms. He calls "the naturalization of nationalism through drawing an analogy between man and horse" as animalification in which nationalist sentiments towards territoriality and place attachment are embodied in the imagery of animals.

While Bumochir's contribution discusses *guideg mori* – horses running back home – the mobility of the *khulan* (wild ass), moving across wild steppes and desert plains is presented in the article by Petra Kaczensky, Oyunsaikhan Ganbaatar, Nandintsetseg Dejid and Bayarbaatar Buuveibaatar. The article highlights the importance of the high mobility of the *khulan*, which are identified as the flagship species for the "ecosystem functioning of the Mongolian Gobi, including large-scale seed dispersal and provision of water holes for other wildlife." The authors provide insights into the economic, social and ecological affections to the degradation of *khulan* mobility such as infrastructure construction, resource extraction, livestock increase and herders' perceptions. Moreover, they suggest a set of tools to "maintain *khulan* and other wide-ranging ungulates at current population levels throughout the Gobi–Steppe Ecosystem" where the *khulan* would need "the multi-use landscape between protected areas and a high degree of landscape connectivity." There is a controversial ratio between the mobility of *khulan* and development impacts.

The series of articles collected in this special issue comprise interdisciplinary perspectives on discourses of mobilities, materialities, and belongings. Despite of the regional focus, the topics cover a vast area of spatial, temporal, and social mobilities. Taking a variety of historical and archeological records, artefacts, narrations, and artistic representations, this compilation contributes to expanding the existing knowledge, categories and views with insiders' perceptions. It further presents discourses of ongoing transformation processes, increasing migrations,

various forms of mobility, disturbed environments, human-nature, human-animal and human-artefact interactions, and distribution of materialities.

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Karabalgasun and Karakorum

Nomad Cities as Means of Communication between
Nomad Elites and the Multicultural Subjects

Hendrik Rohland, Christina Franken, Ulambayar
Erdenebat and Tumurochir Batbayar

Abstract: This paper introduces the phenomenon of urbanism in the context of the medieval empires of the steppe from a historical-archaeological perspective. Several of the Inner Asian empires that emerged from predominantly nomadic societies developed some degree of urbanization. However, it seems inappropriate to regard this as a transition from nomadic to sedentary societies. On the contrary, we argue that the cities of these polities represent a specific type of urbanism that could only exist in this form in a nomad environment and served to facilitate interactions between the nomad elites and their often-sedentary subjects, allies and enemies. In this paper we present some of the archaeological evidence from two of these sites: Karabalgasun, the Uyghur capital from around 745 until 840 and Karakorum, which was allegedly founded 1220 by Genghis Khan and came to be known as capital of the Mongol Empire. In the comparison of the archaeological remains and the representation of these sites in the written sources of different cultures lie the hints that provide an insight into the purposes these cities served for their builders[1].

Keywords: archaeology, urbanism, medieval, Steppe Empires, Mongolia, Mongol Empire, Uyghur Empire

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Fig. 01 The view on the Orkhon Valley from the slopes of the Khangai Mountains shows its vastness and abundance of water and rangeland. 2002, photo by H. Wittersheim.

Introduction

The nomad empires of Inner Asia played an important role in the global history. In recent decades, this role has become increasingly appreciated by scholars, often with respect to contemporary phenomena of globalization. This holds especially true for the Mongol Empire. It had close relationships with, or even incorporated, neighbouring sedentary cultures such as those of China, Persia, Central Asia and Eastern Europe. The mobile elites of the nomad empires became agents of cultural exchange between these cultures by means of warfare, diplomacy, trade and scientific and religious debate (Allsen 2009; 2001, 193). It is an interesting characteristic of the steppe empires that they developed a certain degree of urbanization within their principally nomad setting (see Honeychurch and Amartuvshin 2007, Rogers 2009, Hüttel and Erdenebat 2009, Waugh 2010). Since 2000, Mongolian and German archaeologists have been conducting research on the capital cities Karabalgasun of the Uyghur Empire and Karakorum of the Great Mongol Empire. This paper will give a short overview over this research and the insights into the structure and function of these interesting sites.

The Archaeological Heritage of the Orkhon Valley

Karabalgasun and Karakorum are both located within the Orkhon Valley World Heritage Site. The protected area stretches along the upper and middle reaches of the Orkhon River in Mongolia, which originates in the Khangai Mountain range. From Mount Suvraga Khairkhan it flows northeast through the high mountains. In the foothills of the Khangai range the narrow valley opens towards a wide plain through which the river takes his course, meandering northwards (FIG. 1). The plain is dotted with the herders' *gers* (yurts) and their animals, as it has been for thousands of years. Throughout history, the Orkhon Valley and its surroundings have played a crucial role in the emergence of nomadic steppe empires in Central Asia. Xiongnu burial places and walled enclosures, Turkic memorial complexes and the two great "capitals" of the Uyghurs and the Mongols bear witness to the history of the valley and justify its inclusion in the UNESCO world heritage list in 2004. The valley and its surroundings have often been considered a sacred heartland which served as a centre for several nomad empires, such as that of the Xiongnu, Turks, Uyghurs and Mongols (Hüttel 2016, 72; Rogers et. al. 2005, 872). This may be due to the fact, that the Khangai region is one of the most humid and fertile areas of the northern Mongolian steppes[2] while at the same time being protected against foes and agrarian colonization from the south by the Gobi Desert. The significance of the area already in Xiongnu times has been critically discussed with respect to an apparent lack of archaeological evidence for elite burials of the Xiongnu period in the upper and middle Orkhon valley (Bemmann 2011, 456f). However, this discussion seems to be too narrowly focused on the upper and middle reaches of the Orkhon, where the famous monuments of the Türk, Uyghur and Mongol periods are located. When the Austrian sinologist Arthur von Rosthorn called the lush pasturlands along the the Tuul and Orkhon rivers and the Khangai Mountains *"the stronghold of Central Asia"* and connected them to the Türk term Ötükän, he referred to the fact that the peoples occupying this land often achieved dominion over other nomadic groups roaming the Central

2   Di Cosmo 2015, 73-78, proposed that favourable climate and grassland productivity might have been the main reason to locate the Mongol capital in the Orkhon Valley.

Asian steppes and beyond. His delineation of this heartland includes the areas of the Orkhon, Tamir and Tuul rivers. Rosthorn derived the localization of the nomad's imperial centre from the Chinese accounts of military expeditions against the Xiongnu, Rouran and Türk (Rosthorn 1921, 287, 289-93). He concluded that the summer residence of the Xiongnu ruler must have been to the north of the later Uyghur capital Karabalgasun (Rosthorn 1923, 291, 297). On a conference on toponymy held in Ulaanbaatar in 2017, Akim (2021, 48) proposed that the site of Karabalgasun in the middle Orkhon Valley might have already been the place of the capital of the Xiongnu empire, too. His assumption is based on his reading of the history of the Liao Dynasty, the Liáoshǐ, which was compiled in 1345. Until now, our archaeological explorations of Karabalgasun haven't yielded any evidence supporting such an early dating. In 2020, the debate was revived by a team of Mongolian archaeologists, who excavated the remains of the Xiongnu period site of Kharganyn Dörvölzhin in Ölziit sum, Arkhangai, about 67 km north of Karabalgasun on the left bank of the Orkhon (Iderkhangai et al. 2020). Rooftiles from this excavation bear inscriptions referring to the Xiongnu ruler as "Son of Heaven". The team claimed to have identified the site of the Xiongnu "Dragon City", which was widely acclaimed in the Mongolian media and public (e.g., Tsetseg 2020). A preliminary report has been recently published and tentatively repeated that claim, which is supported by the density of Xiongnu period sites and burials in the close-by Valley of the Tamir river (Iderkhangai et al. 2020, 26; Iderkhangai 2012, 27). If the new site can be identified as the "Dragon city" beyond doubt or not—the findings of the team confirm the significance of the Orkhon valley as a central place of imperial residence already in Xiongnu times.

After the Xiongnu, successive empires arose from this cradle of nomadic civilizations, including the Göktürk, Uyghur and Mongol empires. The memorial inscription for Kül Tegin[3] (d. 731) clearly indicates that this very region, called the *ötükän yıš*, was a central source of political legitimacy and power:

3   Kül Tegin was the brother and co-regent of Bilge Qaghan (r. 716-734), the last ruler to reign successful over the second Eastern Turkic Empire. For both, memorial complexes with famous inscription stones next to each other at the eastern banks of the Orkhon river were erected.
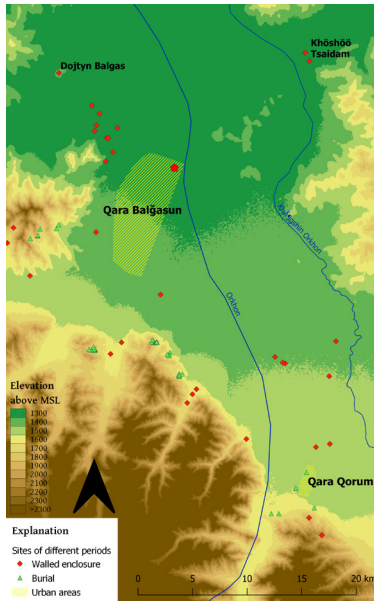
Fig. 02 The map shows the situation of the sites of Karakorum and Karabalgasun and other archaeological sites. As a centre of the medieval nomadic empires and because of its advantageous conditions for pastoral nomadism, the Orkhon Valley features a particularly rich archaeological heritage. By H. Rohland.

if the Türk Qağan possesses/resides in the Ötükän yıš, there
will be no sorrow in the polity/imperium […] the Ötükän yıš
was the land (suitable) for governing the polity/imperium
(Golden 1992, 49).

Almost 500 years after these words were carved in stone, the rulers of the emerging Mongol empire occupied the region and decided to establish their capital city Karakorum right here, thereby adopting the claim of universal rule (Allsen 1996, 124-28).

The Orkhon Valley and its surroundings, perhaps more than any other region, is a suitable research area for a detailed investigation of the phenomenon of the emergence and foundation of urban centres as fixed points in otherwise nomadic cultures. What does sedentism mean in that context and does this frequently used term actually describe the processes which took place here in the medieval era?

The whole area features a remarkable density of archaeological sites (Fig. 2) and a lively nomadic culture up to the present day. The excavations of recent years yielded

many insights into the complex relationships between the ambitious nomad elites and their subjects, nomads and sedentary dwellers alike, which were addressed by the building of cities in various ways.

This paper will briefly summarize the archaeological research at the urban sites of the Orkhon Valley within the last 20 years conducted jointly by the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, the National University of Mongolia and the German Archaeological Institute. Excavations by the research group have taken place both in prestigious and modest buildings of both cities, accompanied with more extensive surveys of the sites. The insights gained from these efforts in terms of architecture, city planning, and material culture will be used to discuss character and degree of urbanism as well as the function and importance of these cities within the nomadic society and for the communication between nomad elites and their various subjects.

The Uyghur Empire: Karabalgasun

The Uyghurs, a nomadic group formerly belonging to the Gökturk empire, seized the opportunity and filled the vacuum left by the perishing of their former overlords around 744. They became important military allies of the ruling Tang Dynasty in China and supported the Tang emperors in putting down uprisings threatening the very existence of the dynasty. In doing so, the Uyghurs managed to secure close political and economic relations with China, which were often exploitive. The Tang Dynasty was too dependent on Uyghur support to reject their requests for payment of military service and favourable trade contracts (Barfield 1989, 158–59). The enormous influx of wealth from China, e.g., in the form of silk and luxury goods, enabled the Uyghurs to become agents in and to benefit from the trade of the silk roads. The trade itself was most likely facilitated by the Uyghurs' cooperative relationship with the Central Asian Sogdian people. The Sogdians were an eastern Iranian people. Their homeland was in Central Asia in the valley of the Zerafshan River and the important cities of Samarqand and Buchara. They also maintained a trade diaspora from Central Asia to China and were important middlemen in the Silk Road trade (Pelliot 1912, 104–5; Skaff 2003). The adoption

of the Manichaean religion by the Uyghur rulers (762) and the occasional usage of the Sogdian script indicate the influential position that the Sogdians had in the Uyghur state and society.

Fig. 03 The remains of the Uyghur capital of the 9th century, Karabalgasun, are perfectly visible until today in the landscape of the valley. 2018, photo by M. Riemer

A Brief Look into History

The first Khaghan ruler of the Uyghurs, Qutlugh Bilge Köl, united them under his rule in 744. He or his successor Moyanchou or Bayan Čor (r. 747–759) asserted his claim to power, as shortly thereafter he had a new capital, called Ordu Baliq, built in the sacred lands of the Orkhon (Golden 1992, 158). Today its remains are called Karabalgasun or Kharbalgas ("Black Ruins") (Fɪɢ. 3). In addition to the capital, a larger number of fortified settlements spanning northern Mongolia and southern Siberia were built during the Uyghur period, including the city of Bai-Balik founded shortly after Karabalgasun on the banks of the Selenga by command

of the same Moyanchou. Many of these settlement sites are frequently mentioned on stone stelae erected by order of the Uyghur Khaghans and may mostly be interpreted as administrative centers or seasonal military camps (Dähne 2017, 140–53). Only little of the history and development of Karabalgasun is known. It is certain that the city existed for only around 100 years and was destroyed in 840 during a raid by the Kyrgyz, with whom the Uyghurs frequently engaged in warfare. The Uyghurs abandoned their territories in the steppe and founded kingdoms in the Turpan Oasis area of Eastern Turkestan and in the Gansu region. While some information is known about Uyghur history from Chinese sources (Mackerras 1972), the Uyghur stone stelae inscriptions, scattered throughout Mongolia, mention the capital of Karabalgasun at best indirectly. The tales passed down from the Persian traveler Tamīm ibn Bahr al-Muttawwi'I provide some details on the Uyghur capital:

> He reports that this is a great town, rich in agriculture and surrounded by rustāqs full of cultivation and villages lying close together. The town has twelve iron gates of huge size. The town is populous and thickly crowded and has markets and various trades (tijārāt). Among its population, the Zindīq religion prevails. [...] He says that from (a distance of) five farsakhs before he arrived in the town (of the khaqan) he caught sight of a tent belonging to the king, (made) of gold. (It stands) on the flat top (saṭh) of his castle and can hold (tasa') 100 men
> (MINORSKY 1948, 283).

While some parts of the report seem topical and cannot be proven by the archaeological remains, such as the twelve iron gates, the distinctive feature of the golden tent is also mentioned in the annals of the Chinese Tang-Dynasty (Tángshū) in the chapter on the Kirghiz (Minorsky 1948, 295; Mackerras 1972, 153–154). Further information about the town and its history can be gathered from the Chinese annals. The importance of Uyghur support for the Tang emperors is

illustrated by the ability of successive Uyghur rulers to secure marriage alliances with the Chinese ruling dynasty. The dynastic history of the Tang recounts an embassy that accompanied a Chinese princess to the Uyghurs in 821:

> *When we got to the barbarian court, we selected an auspicious day to give the princess her appointment as Uighur qatun. The qaġan first ascended his tower and sat facing the east. […] she mounted a sedan chair with a curved screen. Nine ministers carried the chair to the right around the court nine times. When she got down from the chair, she ascended the tower and sat with the qaġan facing east. […] The qaġan made generous presents to the ambassadors* (Mackerras 1972, 118).

Both accounts give the impression of an imperial residence that was not only a place of trade and craft production, but also a center of diplomatic gatherings and displays of power by rituals like a royal marriage. The "castle" or "tower" seems to have been an outstanding feature of the site. The Chinese Tángshū also gives some details on the end of the Uyghur Empire and its capital:

> *Before long, the great chief Chü-lu Mo-ho, together with the Kirghiz, brought together 100,000 cavalry and attacked the Uighur fortresses, killed the qaġan, executed Chüeh-lo-wu and set fire to their court. All tribes were scattered* (Mackerras 1972, 124).

Another impressive testimony of the thriving cultural exchange between different people and the close relations between Uyghurs, Chinese and Sogdians in the town is the famous trilingual inscription stele of Karabalgasun (Fig. 4). It praised the achievements of the eighth Uyghur Khaghan Ay Tängridä Qut Bulmish Alp Bilge Khagan and his predecessors and the conversion of the Uyghurs to Manicheism. The text was carved in Chinese, Sogdian and Turkic runic script (Yoshida 2010).

Fig. 04 The trilingual inscription stele of Karabalgasun praised the achievements of the eight' Uyghur Khaghan and his predecessors and also the conversion of the Uyghurs to Manicheism. The text was carved in Chinese, Sogdian and Turkic runic script. 2014, photo by H. Wittersheim

The Archaeology of Karabalgasun

The remains of Karabalgasun are clearly visible in the Mongolian steppe landscape. The Mongolian-German Orkhon Expedition was founded in 2007 to further the investigation of the Orkhon Valleys cultural landscape and to answer questions about the foundation and emergence of nomadic cities more comprehensively. Its partners, the Mongolian Academy of Science and the Commission for the Archaeology of Non-European Cultures at the German Archaeological Institute, and the National University of Mongolia (which officially joined the Expedition in 2014), are actively investigating the city and its surrounding area today.[4]

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4   The Gerda Henkel Foundation has kindly provided many years of financial support for the project.
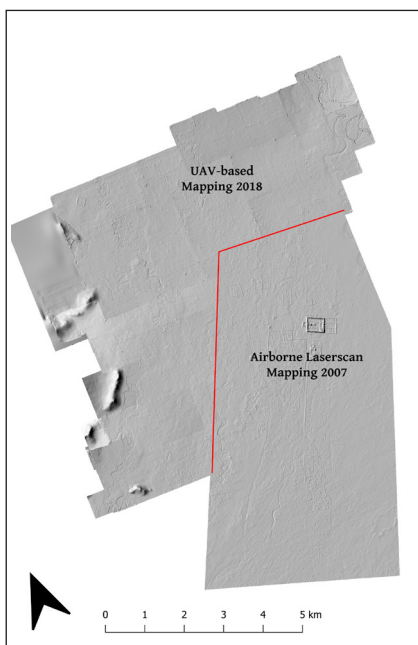
Fig. 05   The Digital Elevation Model of Karabalgasun was partially generated from Airborne Laserscan Data (Arctron GmbH) and partially from photogrammetric data (HTW Dresden). By visualizing the slight undulations of the terrain, the structure of the whole city becomes visible again.

A significant basis for the work is a Digital Elevation Model of the cities' remains derived from airborne laser scanning data gathered in 2007 (Hüttel 2010, 282-87). This was extended to the north and west in 2018 and 2019 with the help of UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles or Multicopters) and Structure-from-Motion image processing with the support of the HTW Dresden (University of Applied Sciences) (Block-Berlitz et al., 2021). The plan illustrates the layout of the city in detail (Fɪɢ. 5; Franken et al. 2020). The terrain retains numerous visible remains of the city and the archaeological opportunities for exploring it are almost perfect. As with many sites in Mongolia, the sparse vegetation and extensive land-use by nomad herders have minimized the impact of later human activity on the site.

The first modern-era investigations of Karabalgasun took place at the beginning of the 19th century and, due to physical proximity—the ruins of both cities are a mere 30 kilometers apart—were initially connected with the search for the old Mongolian capital of Karakorum. Research expeditions to the borders of the Qing Empire and Mongolia and therefore also to the Mongolian Orkhon Valley were

undertaken primarily in the second half of the 19th century and usually took a holistic scientific approach. In 1873, the Russian I. Paderin was the first to describe the high-walled and still visible area of the city (Paderin 1873). Twenty years later, after N. Yadrincev had successfully surveyed and drew attention to the archaeological remains in the Orkhon Valley (Jadrincev 1889), an expedition directed by W. Radloff completed the first precise description and city map, which he published in 1892 in his *Atlas der Alterthümer der Mongolei* (Radloff 1892). During the 20th century, the expeditions of Kotwicz in 1912, D. Bukinič in 1933/34, S. Kiselev and Kh. Perlee in 1949 dug test trenches on the site but published only cursory reports (Kiselev 1957, 93-95; Perlee 1961, 49-51, Dähne and Erdenebat 2012, 247). In 1976 and 1979 part of the site was surveyed by Ju. Khudyakov (Khudjakov 1982).

The aim of the current projects by the Mongolian-German Orkhon Expedition is to investigate the construction and structure of the two nomadic cities of Karabalgasun and Karakorum, their economic significance, the construction techniques used and their integration into the natural and cultural landscape of the Orkhon Valley and its environs. To date, there have been few investigations of the archaeology of the early Uyghurs, thus there are limited opportunities to draw parallels and the project must be firmly set in the realms of fundamental research and data acquisition.

The archaeological investigations by the Mongolian-German Orkhon Expedition have so far focused on three topics regarding the city: 1) the imperial complex, its layout, architecture and purpose; 2) the building complex around the trilingual inscription stele; and 3) the general layout of the city as a whole and representative sample of structures within it to gain insights into the economic, ethnic, demographic and symbolic structure of the city.

Fig. 06 The imperial complex is situated in the centre of Karabalgasun. The citadel lies at the south-eastern corner of the enclosing wall. Excavation have shown magnificent, prestigious architecture. 2018, photo by M. Riemer

The Imperial Complex of Karabalgasun

So far, it has been possible to gather the most comprehensive information on the function and construction of the central areas of what is called the imperial complex, a large walled enclosure at the centre of the city, containing major buildings and a citadel (Fɪɢ. 6). The inside of this imperial complex is primarily characterized by two raised buildings. One is a large structure resembling a stupa in the western half of the encircling wall and the other is the citadel in the south-eastern corner.

While the investigations at the stupa are not yet finished, two buildings immediately to the east have been explored more closely. Between 2009 and 2011, excavations revealed that these were two rammed-earth podiums with square buildings, which could possibly have been used as Manichaean places of worship.

The evidence suggests that they may have been a central sanctuary of the Uyghur state. One example of this is the portico of the western building. It featured nine column-bases with lotus flower-decoration in the style of contemporary Chinese architecture (Fig. 7). However, the number of nine columns neglects the Chinese column order. This may have been a deliberate choice by the Uyghur builders, to signify the nine tribes of the Uyghur confederation as pillars of the state (Dähne 2017, 129–31). The significance of the number nine is also supported by the account of the Tang embassy to the Uyghur court cited above, where the ministers circled around the royal court nine times, carrying the Chinese princess on a sedan chair.[5] Dähne (2017, 130) related the architectural remains found here to the architecture of contemporary Central Asian Buddhist temples with ambulatory, such as the temple of Ak-Bešim.

Fig. 07 The building in front of the "Stupa", may have been a Manichaean place of worship. The image shows the foundation of the main portico with its lotus-shaped column-bases. 2011, photo by B. Dähne

5   Interestingly the number nine is a highly venerated number also in the Mongolian tradition and appears prominently in Mongol Buddhism, Shamanism, traditional law, popular piety and epic literature (Shukowskaja 1996, 130–34). See also the sacrificial deposits of the "nine treasures" in the section on the archaeology of Karakorum below.

The citadel was extensively investigated between 2013 and 2018. The man-made podium pile with an area of 60 × 70 meters at the top still soars about twelve meters above the surroundings (Fig. 6, 14). The citadel was accessible from both the west and north through two gateway constructions. The northern access turned out to be significantly larger and more elaborate. It likely served as the main entrance. In the southeast corner there was a tower-like building with a footprint of around 20 × 20 meters. Walls made of rammed earth and wood subdivided the western half of this building. Three rows of column bases supported the columns of a prestigious hall in the eastern half. Outside there was an open and paved courtyard flanked along its east, north, and south by narrow buildings of lightweight construction, presumably open ambulatories under single-pitch roofs (Fig. 8). At the western side of the citadel was a prestigious building, presumably in the style of a Chinese temple hall (Fig. 14). The configuration of buildings on the citadel can be hypothetically reconstructed as a courtyard, that was surrounded by porticos on all four sides, resembling the Sogdian four-Ivan palace with porticos, which ultimately was developed from Persian and Graeco-Bactrian influences (Arden-Wong 2021, 107; Lurye 2016, 18).

A large circular pit was discovered in front of the western building in the courtyard. During the time-consuming excavation of the 15-meter-deep structure, it turned out to be an excellently preserved well with a hexagonal stone casing in its lower parts (Fig. 9). Artefacts of exceptional quality were preserved here. This includes a bronze bell (Fig. 10), fragments of jade books (Fig. 11), a gold-plated iron padlock, lacquered wooden poles (Fig. 12), and other wood-carvings, finely worked stone bases and terracotta animal masks (Fig. 13). The animal masks and the stone bases are witnesses of Chinese building decoration and construction methods. The bronze bell most likely belonged to the roof as well and was hung from a corner, as can still be seen at Chinese-style temples today. Interestingly, the buildings of the citadel used Chinese principles of roof construction and decoration while the layout of the complex resembles Central Asian citadels and palace architecture. This mix of styles and concepts seems characteristic for urban sites in the steppes. Another striking example is the great Buddhist sanctuary at

Fig. 08 On top of the citadel, a prestigious courtyard and several buildings, that formed a palace compound have been unearthed. The image shows a view into the courtyard during excavation, with remains of the pavement and the enclosing wall visible. 2014, photo by M. Riemer

Fig. 09 In the courtyard of the citadel, a well was discovered. It supplied the citadel with fresh water. The image shows a view into the lower parts of the well with visible scoop vessels at the bottom, 2018, photo by H. Rohland

Fig. 10 The well contained a lot of artefacts, which presumably fell in there during the destruction of the building. The bronze bell with the Chinese inscription: '8-fold happiness and 6-fold virtues may reach the 10 heavens' possibly once adorned the corner of the roof of a building on the citadel. 2018, photo by M. Riemer

Fig. 11 So-called Jade books were used for imperial decrees and religious texts and almost exclusively reserved for the imperial court of the Middle Kingdom. The presence of many fragments of such inscriptions on the citadel of Karabalgasun testifies to the close diplomatic and political ties between the Uyghurs and Tang China. 2018, photo by M. Riemer

Fig. 12 A floral design was carved into the surface of this black lacquered wooden pole. The object might have served as a pole for a tent or baldachin and was conserved excellently in the water-logged environment in the well. 2018, photo by M. Riemer

Fig. 13 These apotrophic animal masks most likely belonged to the decoration of the roofs and where meant to keep evils away from the respective building. Similar pieces are well known from Tang period imperial architecture. 2014, by H. Wittersheim

Mongol Karakorum, where a Tibetan-Buddhist ground plan was blended with a Chinese-style construction (Franken 2015, 140; see below). The fragments of jade books are special objects, a type of highest-ranking imperial decree, which can be linked to the Chinese imperial court. They testify to the close diplomatic relationships between the two polities (Arden-Wong 2011, 83–85).

The wooden carvings, one of them portraying a wolf, and the lacquered poles, maybe belonging to some kind of tent or baldachin, can be seen as the rare evidence of the material culture of the nomadic elite. These artefacts reinforce the exceptional significance of the imperial complex and the citadel and justify its identification as a prestigious centre of the Uyghur Khaganate (Franken et al. 2018, 2017).

The Layout of Karabalgasun

The remains of the city spread out over 44 square kilometres to the north, south and west of the imperial complex. The built-up area to the north seems to have been characterized by rows of walled enclosures and only sparse remains of buildings, stretching almost to the damp and marshy lowlands of the Orkhon River. Most likely, some of the structures have already been washed away by the river. The development to the south of the imperial complex seems more diverse in its appearance. As a central axis, there is a 200-meter-wide main street that extends at least five kilometres to the south. There are traces of construction along both sides of this axis. The highest building density can be identified inside a wall-enclosed area immediately to the southwest of the imperial complex. The roads and buildings inside are roughly aligned to the north-south orientation of the outer walls. A gateway (Renners and Franken 2017) leads from the main street into the quarter where a large, elongated plaza stretched to the west, which may have served as a marketplace or place of assembly. A survey on foot yielded large quantities of pottery and three smoothing irons, which may have been used to process silk. This, together with the higher building density and the proximity to the imperial complex suggest a permanent settlement of craftsmen and other experts in service of the Uyghur court.

To the east of this area, on the opposite side of the main street, there is a distinctive walled enclosure in the most eastern row of buildings. It contained a central building consisting of a raised podium accessed by ramps. The beforementioned trilingual inscription stele was set up in front of this structure. Because of the findings in the area around the central building, it can be interpreted as a Manichaean sacral complex (Dähne 2017, 65–68).

Investigations of the site with remote sensing technologies, including satellite imagery and a UAV photogrammetric survey of the surface have provided more comprehensive data on the layout of the city (Block Berlitz et al. 2021). The whole built-up area of the site has been covered by a high-resolution digital terrain model, making it possible to draw conclusions on the structure of the city (Franken et al. 2020, 268–271). Looking at the plan of the site, it becomes clear that the main organizational scheme is an arrangement of several rows of buildings, with the largest and most prominent in the eastern row. The other buildings are placed behind and to the sides of the imperial complex, leaving the space to the east completely untouched (Fig. 15).
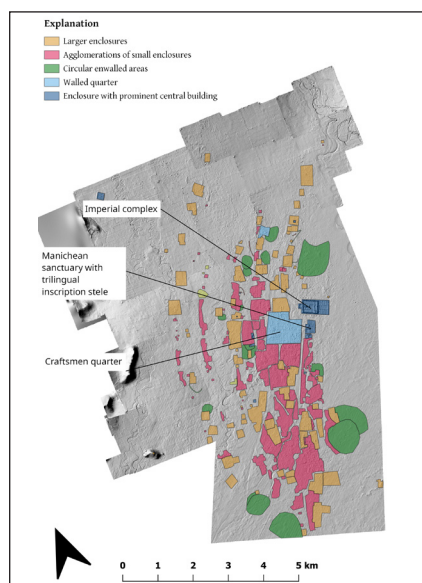
Fig. 15 A preliminary analysis of the Digital Terrain Model of Karabalgasun shows the layout as a crescent centred at the imperial complex. The spatial layout resembles a nomad encampment, as it is known from written reports. By H. Rohland

The structures are arranged around the imperial complex in the form of an arc. The imperial complex can therefore no longer be said to be located at the northern corner of the city. On the contrary, it is right in the centre of the city's sharply delineated eastern border.

Notions of Karabalgasun following mainly Chinese (Arden-Wong 2012, 37f) or Sogdian (Dähne 2017, 158) principles of city planning cannot be upheld. Instead, it follows a genuine nomadic pattern, following the tradition of a nomad encampment as it is described in William of Rubruck's Journey to the Mongols (1253–1255):

> *A court (curia) is orda in their language, and it means*
> *"middle," for it is always in the middle of the people, with the*
> *exception, however, that no one places himself right to the south,*
> *for in that direction the doors of the court open. But to the right*
> *and the left they may spread out as they wish, according to the*
> *lay of the land, so long as they do not bring the line of tents*
> *down right before or behind the court* (Rubruck 1967, 122).

From at least the time of the Mongolian empire until today, the south has been the preferred direction for the orientation of gers, buildings, temples and burials in Mongolia. In the days of the ancient Uyghurs, it has been the east or south-east, as can be seen in the example of the elite burials around Karabalgasun (Očir et. al. 2019, 52). In the light of these thoughts, Karabalgasun seems to be an urban site that is mainly organized on the native principles of the steppe people, while Chinese and Sogdian technologies of planning, building, craft and writing were applied where needed or deemed appropriate (Franken et al. 2020, 270–271).

Another interesting element of the topography of Karabalgasun are the burial sites. In the surrounding mountains, where valleys slope down towards the east, there are smaller cemeteries or burial sites with various features clearly attributable to the Uyghur period. As observed in the *Olon Dov/Khotont Soum* cemetery, these were mostly square burials containing chambers with walls of fired and unfired bricks and roof tiles (Erdenebat, 2016). Some of the walls feature painted plaster

and are comparable in their building techniques and structures to the buildings of the city. More elaborate beehive-like tombs from the same period can be found in a slightly south-facing side valley. Several larger graves of the Uyghur elite are situated there in the Valley *Kulkhijn* am in the mountains south of Karabalgasun. The inside of one of these was painted with red lotus flowers on a white background. There are different types of tombs, which can feature round or rectangular, vaulted brick chambers (Odbaatar 2016, 222–29). One of the domed burial chambers had trumpet arches in the corners to facilitate the transition from the square chamber to the small dome (Očir 2015, 104, Plate 25). This technique is genuinely central Asian and may be attributed to Sogdian influence on architecture.

There are so far no known traces of a re-occupation of the site of Karabalgasun after its destruction in 840. However, Mongol era burials were repeatedly found during the excavations. From time to time, the deceased had been interred in the still upright ruins of the city's buildings. Together with remains of cremated animal bones and vessel deposits, this indicates that the site had still some significance after it was abandoned, maybe as a place of ancestral worship.

Karakorum – The Capital of the Mongol Empire?

One of the most outstanding monuments in the Orkhon Valley is the site often termed the "capital" of the medieval Mongol Empire, Karakorum. After a research history of more than 100 years, this site has been subject to intense archaeological study again since 2000. A cooperation agreement was established between the German Archaeological Institute, the Mongolian Academy of Sciences and the University of Bonn in autumn 1998 on the initiative of Prof. Klaus Sagaster from the Institute for Mongolian Studies at the University of Bonn and in the presence of the presidents of both countries. Its objective was the archaeological investigation of the old Mongolian capital of Karakorum.[6] Only 30 km south from the ruins of the Uyghur metropolis, the Mongols had founded Karakorum, which became an important centre of their emerging empire. Almost 400 years after the perishing of

6   The research project of the Commission for the Archaeology of Non-European Cultures was sponsored by the German Research Foundation and the Gerda Henkel Foundation.

Karabalgasun and the Uyghur Empire, the Orkhon Valley again was the centre of a steppe polity.

Karakorum – The Written Accounts

According to the Karakorum inscription of 1346, Karakorum was founded in 1220 as the first capital of Genghis Khan's emerging Mongol Empire (Cleaves 1952, 29; on the history of Karakorum see Sagaster 1999; Barkmann 2002, 2010; Hüttel 2005, 2016; Èrdènèbat 2018). The Franciscan monk William of Rubruck travelled from Western Europe to Karakorum, crossing the whole Eurasian landmass, and spent several months in the city in 1254. He provided an exceptionally lively description of life in the Mongol Empire and its capital Karakorum in the middle of the 13th century. He reports on the Saracen Quarter and the Chinese Quarter, in which permanent houses had been built, describes the palace district, and mentions different places of worship. Numerous Buddhist temples, two mosques and a Christian church demonstrated the great religious and ethnic variety of life in the city. Other sources confirm his depiction of Karakorum as a melting pot of the most varied cultures with an international character and highlighted the tolerant behaviour of the Mongol Khans towards religion. While the city's origin myth describes its founding in 1220 under the reign of Genghis Khan, the construction of the permanent walled city reportedly took place in 1235 under the rule of his son Ögedei. The city was regarded as the capital of the Mongol Empire only until 1260, during this period serving as a centre of administration, as a place for treasure accumulation, the highest place for trials and a gathering point for people from the most varied communities in the empire and also for prisoners of war (Hüttel 2005).

Because of internal struggles within the empire, Karakorum lost its importance as imperial residence in 1260, but remained an administrative centre and of high symbolic significance. Its importance as a manufacturing city, in which numerous Chinese artisans worked in the north of the Mongol Empire, apparently increased in this period. During the 13th and 14th centuries, the city managed to repeatedly recover from military conflicts, lootings, and demolitions. After the expulsion of

the Mongol Yuan Dynasty from China in 1368, the sources fall increasingly silent on Karakorum. The site was once again briefly named as the capital in the 16th century, but it is not entirely clear if any kind of permanent settlement still existed here. The Erdene Zuu Monastery was constructed on its site in the second half of the 16th century, thus suggesting at least awareness of the former significance of the site (Barkmann 2010, 322f). Mongolian sources of the 19th century explicitly refer to the site as the place of the city of the Great Khans. (Galdan 2006, 183).
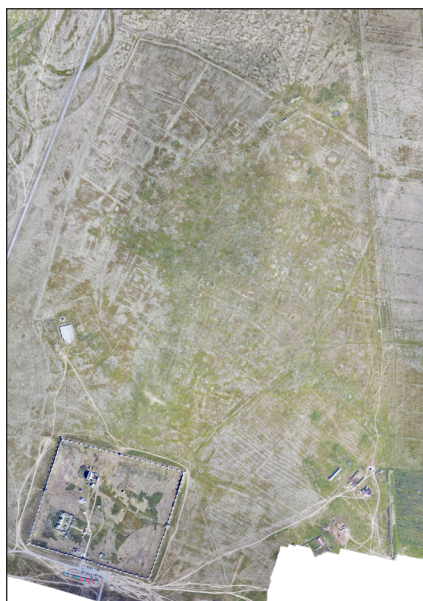
Fig. 16 The aerial view shows the ruins of Karakorum, the capital of the medieval Mongol empire. In the south, the enclosing wall of the monastery Erdene zuu is visible. by HTW Dresden
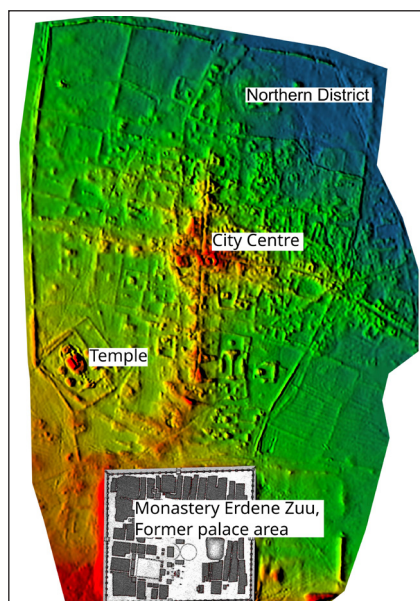
Fig. 17 In the Digital Elevation Model of Karakorum, it's layout with two main axes and a central crossroads is clearly visible. In the southwestern corner is the platform of the Great Hall, which is rotated against the main orientation of the site. by HTW Karlsruhe

The Archaeology of Karakorum

The monastery is still partly preserved today and is a major cultural and tourist attraction in Mongolia. The site of ancient Karakorum is situated to the north of the monastery's surrounding wall. Today, only inconspicuous remains testify to the dynamic history of this important site of the Mongol Empire, which in its

heyday stretched from Eastern Europe to the Pacific Ocean. Only a trained eye can recognize the remains of a city hidden under the gentle undulations of the steppe landscape. Aerial imagery shows that the city was surrounded by an earthen wall with four gates. It enclosed an area of 1.2 square kilometres divided into quarters by a central crossroads (Fig. 16, 17). Initial excavations of the area were undertaken in the first half of the 20th century by D. Bukinič in 1933/34 (2007), S. Kiselev and Kh. Perlee in 1948/49 (Kiselev 1965) and N. Ser-Odčav, D. Bayar and V.E. Boitov in 1976–1985 (Bajar 1999, Vojtov 1990). While Bukinič excavated numerous small test sections across the entire area of the city, Kiselev carried out large-scale investigations at the eastern gate, in the city centre and its southwest corner. These two excavations were used as a basis for the start of work by the Mongolian-German Expedition.

The city's remains were documented in a digital elevation model. A team from the University of Applied Sciences Karlsruhe painstakingly measured 80,000 elevation points in the field. The resulting plan clearly shows the central crossroads and the roads running from it to the four gates in the surrounding walls (Fig. 17). The city centre was densely built-up, while the building density becomes more and more sparsely towards the outer walls. The outer wall has an irregular shape, vaguely approximating a tapered rectangle. To the south the walled area is completed by the still standing northern wall of Erdene Zuu monastery's rectangular enclosure. To the east and north, traces of densely built-up areas show that some of the city life took place outside its walls. The structures north of the wall were not part of the surface survey but can be clearly seen on satellite and aerial imagery. The Mongolian expedition in the 1970s excavated some Muslim-rite burials here (Vojtov 1990, 128–29). More recent investigations making use of geomagnetic, geodetic and archaeological survey methods have yielded a much more detailed mapping of the site, now also including the surroundings outside the walls.

A Chinese model of city planning has been proposed as the underlying pattern for the layout (Steinhardt 1999, 150) but this interpretation is superseded by newer archaeological findings. In the light of the results of the excavations in recent decades, we prefer an interpretation more grounded in the Mongol nomadic

organization of space. This will be further elaborated after a brief overview of the archaeological investigations of the last 20 years in Karakorum.

From 2000 to 2005, the Institute for Pre-Historical and Early Historical Archaeology at the University of Bonn dealt chiefly with the investigation of a Chinese artisan quarter to the south of the central crossroads (Pohl 2009). They found numerous indications of the internal divisions of the city and the significance of trade and crafts.

Fig. 18 From 2000 to 2005, the Great Hall (top right) was under intense archaeological study. Close to the building, an array of four kilns where used to produce building materials on site (lower left). 2000, photo by C. Franken

The Great Hall – A Central Sanctuary of the Mongolian Empire

At the same time, the Commission for the Archaeology of Non-European Cultures (KAAK) at the German Archaeological Institute re-investigated and continued Kiselev's excavations in the southwest area of the city (FIG. 18). A building with

a square ground plan on a man-made raised platform was excavated here. The building stood out from the rest of the city not only by its size, but also by its orientation, which deviated from the main axes of the roads. Instead, the four corners of the buildings pointed towards the cardinal directions. Foundation deposits in the lower layers of the podium consisted of pottery jars filled with millet and items known as the "nine treasures," consisting of objects made of gold, silver, coral, pearls, turquoise, lapis lazuli, shells, copper and steel. They were supposed to bring luck, blessings and health to the building and to its visitors (Franken et al. 2017, 401–5). On top of the podium, granite columns in an eight-by-eight arrangement divided the inside of the hall and supported the wooden construction of a skeleton structure in traditional Chinese-style timber-framing technique. The centre of the building was occupied by a stupa surrounded by four life-size Buddhas. The archaeological material (including thousands of Buddhist votive offerings known as *tsatsas*) and the iconographic program clearly indicate its sacred use as a Buddhist temple. The predominant theme of pictorial art in the temple— primarily in relief statuary—is the five cosmic Buddhas, or Five Tathagatas, with their typical companions, such as Avalokitesvara or Padmapani. Buddhist art from the Great Hall shows the coexistence of at least three artisan styles in both the relief statuary and in the murals, all representative of the "international style" of the 12th to 14th centuries. Indian-Nepalese and central Tibetan influences can be identified in the art of Karakorum. In 2000 the expedition excavated several kilns, which were located immediately beside the temple, similar to a European cathedral workshop. Models and decorative components showed that not only the bricks and roof tiles were manufactured in Karakorum itself, but so were the clay statues and votive stupas in the hall (Franken 2005).

In connection with his excavations, the Russian archaeologist Kiselev identified the podium with its column bases and the remains of a floor as a former palace (Kiselev 1965, 138). However, as shown in the context of the large-scale KAAK excavation 50 years later, his interpretation cannot be upheld. Countless Buddhist artefacts, the atypical orientation of the building complex, and the stone turtle formerly carrying a stone inscription stele in front of the building ultimately

lead to the conclusion that this is the site of the "Pavilion of the Rise of the Yuan" mentioned in the Karakorum inscription from 1346 and therefore relates to the Buddhist centre and sanctuary of the empire (Hüttel 2009; Franken 2015, 161-62). The inscription states, that the Pavilion was five-storied and almost 100 meters high (Cleaves 1952, 29). Doubts regarding the statics of such a high wooden construction in the harsh climatic environment, led to a more modes reconstruction of the site (Franken 2015, 140)(Fig. 19).
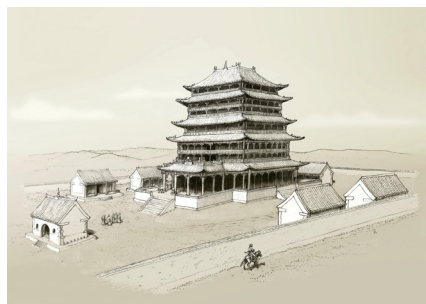
Fig. 19 The reconstruction drawing was made according to the archaeological record and the information given in the Karakorum inscription. It gives a lively impression, how the temple might have looked in its heyday.
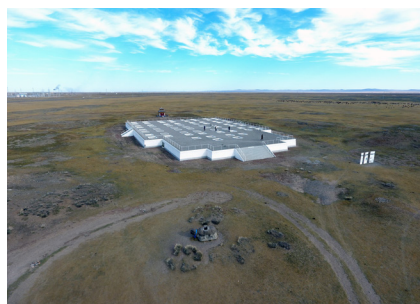
Fig. 20 The temple podium has been reconstructed and is available to visitors as an open-air museum. Information boards give insight into the results of the researches. The stone turtle in the front once bore the Karakorum inscription of 1346. 2020, photo by T. Batbayar

In the context of celebrations for the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Germany and Mongolia in 2014, the temple podium was re-erected in its original form based on archaeological evidence. This, along with the information boards on the history of the city, now offers a starting point for visitors to the ruins and allows them to appraise the former magnificence of the Great Hall (Fig. 20).

The identification of the Great Hall as a temple raised another interesting question again: Where was the palace situated? It was erected by Ögedei Khan and is mentioned independently in several written accounts. It must have been of considerable size, but so far, no immediate traces of it have been unearthed in Karakorum. An import trace lies under the wall around the Erdene Zuu Monastery, which was constructed in the 16th century. It has a very irregular foundation made up of granite building blocks but laid at alternating levels. Obviously, it was built

on top of an older rampart (Radlov 1892, 9). A total of eight excavation sections along this wall showed that the same area had already been encircled by a massive wall in the 13th century. This makes it reasonably likely that the palace city of the old capital was located immediately to the south of the city area (Hüttel 2007, 406–8). The location of the palace has important implications for the discussion of the role, that the Mongol elite had in the planning and construction of the city.
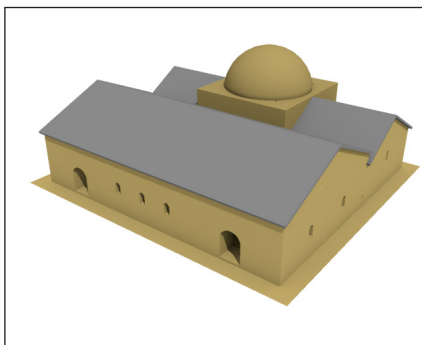
Fig. 21   The hypothetical reconstruction of the older phase of the central building in the northern district. The architecture allows the interpretation that the building was used as a place of worship by an eastern Christian community, by H. Rohland

Fig. 22   Some of the artefacts uncovered in the northern district support the interpretation as Christian church. This fragment belonged to a beaded cross, which was the usual form of the cross used in the eastern churches, by H. Wittersheim

A Christian Church in the Northern Quarter of Karakorum[7]

In the northern quarter of the walled city, an ensemble of structures with a central building and three smaller auxiliary buildings aroused particular interest. The building complex resembled the layout of a small temple in the Chinese tradition, but it was accessed from the west, with the main building situated in the east. This orientation is quite rare for Mongolian religious buildings but would have been a requirement for a Christian church. Although William of Rubruck mentioned a Nestorian church on the edges of the city in his descriptions, excavations between 2006 and 2009 could not prove this supposition beyond doubt (Hüttel 2012, 414-15). However, the excavation yielded some indicators. An older phase of the

7   The detailed study of the findings of the excavations in the northern district of Karakorum was made possible by a Grant of the Gerda Henkel Foundation.

central building resembled central Asian adaptions of elements of ecclesiastical architecture of the Eastern Church. Furthermore, some artefacts such as fragments of a possibly eastern Christian bronze cross (Fig. 22) and a presumable candelabras foot in Mediterranean or Western tradition make such an interpretation entirely possible (Rohland 2020, 414–15; Batbayar 2022, 117–18).
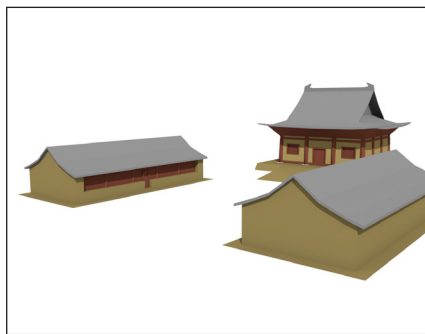
Fig. 23   The younger phase of the ensemble in the northern district resembled a typical Chinese style temple. However, the layout and the artefacts indicate, that it still served as a church after it had been rebuilt, by H. Rohland

The earlier phase of the building shows distinct Central Asian influences (Fig. 21). It was built in the first half of the 13th century, according to the radiocarbon dating of some timber elements in its foundations. The younger phase consisted of a newly built central building and two auxiliary buildings and a presumable gatehouse (Fig. 23). The building retained its orientation with the entrance in the west and the main building in the east, but the architecture underwent a complete change. Instead of Central Asian religious architecture, the building was now built in the fashion of a small Chinese temple. The rebuilding took place in the end of the 13th or the even the first half 14th century, according to radiocarbon dating. This change in architectural layout is a good example of how the Mongol urbanity was entangled with the urban and architectural traditions of people incorporated into the empire. During the first third of the 13th century, Mongol expansion was directed more towards Central Asia. In 1209 the Uyghurs acknowledged the supreme power of the Mongol Khan, 1219/1220 Khwarezm was subdued, while the northern Chinese Jin-Dynasty still withstood the Mongol onslaught. Consequently, Central Asian influences are more present in Karakorum at that time. Later in the 13th century,

first the Jin (1234) and then the Song (1279) dynasties fell, and China became an integral part of the empire. In 1260 Kublai Khan occupied the throne and established the Yuan dynasty. While struggling against his brother Ariq Böke, who was the champion of a more traditional, steppe-centred Mongol empire, Kublai embraced Chinese culture and administrative technology, which provided him the resources to win against his opponent. In the wake of these events, the Karakorum region lost its status as residence and political focus of the empire and became a—still important—provincial centre. The Chinese cultural influence became even stronger when the empire divided into warring factions, cutting connections between the Yuan Dynasty and the Central Asian Chagatai Khanate. In line with these developments, the building in the northern quarter was reconstructed in a Chinese manner, after it had been destroyed, maybe during a raid by one of the warring Mongol factions in the late 13th century. However, it possibly still served as a Christian church, since the Eastern Church was well established among the Mongols, Turkic and some Chinese inhabitants of the Yuan Empire at that time (Rohland 2020, 184–85).

Fig. 24 In 2009, a further Kiln district was uncovered near the Orkhon river. It served for the production of building materials and decoration for Karakorum. 2009, photo by M. Riemer

The excavation of a kiln and pottery workshop district on a small hill near the river, about three kilometres southwest from the gates of the city, on which about 14 kilns and several workplaces had been maintained for various functions, shows that the wider area of Karakorum was also surrounded by large manufacturing districts (Fig. 24). Architectural pottery such as bricks and roof tiles were produced here, while smaller ovens also produced glazed items and pottery figurines. On the west bank of the river, further kilns were excavated in the context of a project by the University of Bonn. This enabled a clear picture to be drawn in archaeological terms of a flourishing manufacturing city with large religious structures (Hüttel 2010, 293–96).

Discussion: Karakorum and Karabalgasun–Nomadic Capitals?

The social and ethnic composition of the cities' inhabitants and the proportion of Mongols among them cannot be precisely known. Clearly identifiable open spaces within the city walls have frequently been interpreted as yurt quarters, i.e., spaces for traditional Mongol dwellings. Whether or not this is correct is difficult to determine. Even today, the question of what significance this city had within the Mongol empire is highly interesting but can only be answered in a rudimentary way (see Sagaster 1999, Hüttel 2016). Another glance at the written record may help to shed light on this problem. It is clear from the written sources that Karakorum was not an administrative centre in the sense of a capital of a modern polity. Although there were administrative facilities, the centre of the empire was the traveling court of the Great Khan. It is striking that variations of the term "capital" are attributed to Karakorum only by chroniclers of sedentary cultures, e.g., Chinese, Iranians or Latin westerners. At the same time the *Secret History of the Mongols*—a source of genuine Mongolian origin—never mentions the building of temples, palaces or even a city at Karakorum, although it was certainly written to glorify the deeds of Genghis Khan and his son Ögedei—the city's founders. While the foundation and building of a prestigious city seems to be a central element for the representation of a ruler in the sedentary cultures, it remained an alien concept for the Mongol Great Khans. For the Mongols and their nomad retainers, the occupation of the holy

lands at the foothills of the Khangai Mountains, the Ötüken of the ancient Turkic royal ideology, was presumably much more important, as it established the claim to rule over the people in all directions (Allsen 1996, 124-28; Hüttel 2016, 73). The building of the city then manifested this claim towards the sedentary cultures in a language of power familiar to them—in the language of prestigious urban architecture (Rohland 2020, 201–2).

Genuine nomadic conceptions of spatial and thereby social order are reflected in the layout of the city. Since the palace seems to have been in the area of today's monastery Erdene Zuu, the layout of the city adheres to the scheme of the imperial camp described by Rubruck, cited above. The place of the ruler is in the south, while others had to gather behind and to the sides. The layout of the city thereby somewhat resembles those discussed in the case of Karabalgasun. The palace area is in the most prominent part of the city, in that case the south. In close proximity is the quarter where the courts servants live, craftsmen, traders, religious and administrative experts. This is the enwalled area, which Rubruck most likely identified as the city itself, given his western-European understanding of a town. However, the occupation of Karakorum stretched far beyond the walls (Bemman 2022, 165). Maybe this area is to be interpreted as an analogue to the craftsmen's quarter of Karabalgasun. As such, it would have been the mere part of the city, where foreigners in the service of the court lived permanently. This settlement was embedded in the itinerant court of the Great Khan, that would occupy the area in and around the palace and the walled city, when the Khan visited Karakorum twice a year.

Bemmann et al. (2022, 177) called for breaking away from the European cityscape as a model to understand nomad cities and tried to grasp the phenomenon of nomad urbanism with his concept of an "implanted city". This implies that the Mongol Great Khans had these cities built by decree and for political reasons and that "these cities remained foreign entities, the continued existence of which was unimportant for the pastoral nomads, as they were not dependent on them" (ibid., 176). This falls somewhat short of the claimed break-away from European perception of urbanism, as it is to narrowly focused on the buildings in and around

the walls. But these were indeed of less importance for the nomad elite and the pastoral nomads. The Karakorum region was important for the nomadic state and society mainly because of its sacred geography (Allsen 1996) and its role as part of the nomadic itinerary of the great khans (Boyle 1974). It is in this sense, that Karakorum and also Karabalgasun can be called a capital. The Karakorum region is the place of the itinerant court during summer as the centre of political power. The built-up sites, that we can grasp archaeologically, are additions to these ephemerous capitals, that provide services to the court and formed an interface for the symbolic communication of the nomadic elites with their settled subjects. Bemman and Reichert (2020, 18) stated, that "all these urban places or fixed settlements quickly declined after the overarching political system vanished". This seems to be true for the urbanism in the narrower sense of the fixed buildings, but does not account for the continued central role of the Karakorum region and the Orkhon Valley from the times of Xiongnu until the Mongol period and beyond. We have to consider a possible continuity of ephemerous camps and events of political, religious or military character, that are occasionally and temporarily supplemented by fixed settlements for trade, craft, religion and administration. This happened, when larger polities emerged from the steppes, that where able to channel the necessary resources and had an interest in such settlements, i.e. when the nomad elites controlled considerable tracts with a settled population or had close interaction with them. These settlements indeed vanished, when the preconditions weren't met anymore, but what apparently didn't cease was the importance of the heartland as "capital" of the nomads.

In Karakorum, as in the case of Karabalgasun, the architecture of sedentary subjects was used within the context of a nomad encampment made partially permanent, thereby incorporating the settled into the social order of the steppe society. This at the same time shows, that the nomadic elite was not dependent on their sedentary subjects to conceive and establish a city. They just had them integrate their sedentary settlement structures as a sub-unit into the sites of their itinerant royal camps.

Conclusion

The historical sources and archaeological findings both allow some insights into the processes that led to the establishment of permanent (capital) cities in the context of the medieval nomad empires of the Uyghurs and Mongols. Both cities exhibit traces of cosmopolitism in terms of multilingualism and a variety of different people and their architectural and cultural traditions. In the case of Karakorum, religious tolerance and diversity can be added, a trait which currently cannot be proven directly for Karabalgasun. Both cities where places for political gatherings and diplomacy, as is stated by the written record. What is puzzling in both cases, is the seeming underrepresentation of the nomad elite in their "capital cities." Excavations yielded traces of foreign architectures, Chinese, Sogdian and other craftsmen, as well as prestigious and religious buildings, but they failed to yield many traces of the daily lives of nomadic elite households. This can partially be explained by the written accounts. Rubruck (1929, XXX 1) and Chinese sources (Masuya 2013, 234–35) state that the Mongol Khans visited Karakorum only twice a year. Tamīm ibn Bahr related that he encountered the Khaghan of the Uyghurs encamped "in the neighborhood of his town" (Minorsky 1948, 284). In fact, the autochthonous writings of the nomadic people, such as the Uyghur inscriptions or the *Secret History of the Mongols*, never ever use a term like "capital city". Terms like "royal city", "city of the king", "residence", "capital" and the Chinese dū 都 (= capital) are attributed to Karabalgasun and Karakorum by the authors from sedentary people like the Chinese, Persians, and Latin Westerners (Rohland 2020, 54–55). This shows that these cities were regarded by these people as a focus of encounter with the nomad polities and as an important centre of political, diplomatic, and economic exchange. But this importance was mainly given for the encounter between nomadic and sedentary people. According to this notion, the cities would have been fixed places of communication and cultural mediation, where the sedentary people were spatially, symbolically and in real transactions incorporated into to the nomadic world order.

Fig. 25 The depiction of Ikh Khuree in 1912/1913 shows the layout of the city. It is clearly visible, that major temple and palace buildings had a free space south of them, adhering to ancient conventions of nomad urban planning. The image also demonstrates the ephemerous nature of most of the dwellings of the city, even after the city had been settled on the same site for more than 100 years. The housing consists mainly of Gers. Permanent and massive building structures are reserved for major temples, palaces, and the houses of the foreigners, such as Chinese and Russian merchants. The painting was drawn by the Mongolian artist Jugder. It is kept in the Bogd Khan Palace Museum, Ulaanbaatar.

The traces of these cities, that we can see or excavate today, are not representative of the whole phenomenon of nomadic urbanity. They do represent the foreign component, the traders, craftsmen, clerks and diplomats of the subdued sedentary cultures, while the nomad elite and population retained their lifestyle without turning to sedentism. Only when the royal encampment settled in and around the walls of the city, it really served as a capital. It is interesting in this context, to have a look at the youngest capital city of Mongolia: Ikh Khuree or Örgöö, which became todays Ulaanbaatar. If we look at the depiction of the city in 1912/1913 (Fig. 25), it consists mainly of the Gers of the Mongolian nomads, while permanent buildings are limited to the palaces and temples and the Chinese and Russian quarters. The city also still adhered to the principles of the nomadic city layout, we identified in Karabalgasun und Karakorum with the help of Rubrucks description: The central, most eminent temple-palace complex, the Shar Ordon ("Yellow Palace") of Züün Khuree features a large, empty space to the south, providing an unobstructed view to the sacred Mountain Bogd Uul to the south. The further palaces of the Bogd Khan are located south of the rivers, again unobstructed by any development

in front of them. The Gers and other parts of the city gather behind and to the sides of the palaces. Even in the socialist period, when the city was renamed to Ulaanbaatar and the parliament building was built just south of site of the former Shar Ordon, the Mongolian urban architects still adhered to these principles. The space south of the parliament and the great plaza was used as large park and kept largely free of buildings. Intriguingly, it was the very same guiding principle that determined Mongolian urban planning at least from the time of the Uyghurs until modern Ulaanbaatar. This principle remained unchanged under the varying foreign influences, be it Sogdian, Chinese or European/Russian. Only in the age of capitalism, the adherence to nomad urban planning loosened somewhat, with tower buildings now occupying the southern Sukhbaatar square and parts of the former park area. But still, until today, if one stands in front of the parliament and looks to the south, one can see the peaks of the Bogd Uul rising over the silhouette of Ulaanbaatar.

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Paradise Lost

Gold Coins from the Underworld

Lhagvasuren Erdenebold and Ah Rim Park

Abstract: In 2011, the Mongolian and Kazakhstan joint expedition, dates approximately to the seventh century (A.D. 650–670), excavated a tomb of Shoroon Bumbagar, decorated with a wall painting, in Bayannuur sum of Bulgan province. The structure of the Shoroon Bumbagar tomb, murals and burial objects clearly exhibit tastes of nomads who resided along the Silk Roads and the Steppe Route. Comparing to funerary art traditions in East Asia such as Chinese and Koguryo mural tombs, it represents nomadic culture as well as the broad interactions from Byzantine Empire to China. With wall paintings and burial objects, this newly excavated mural tomb in Mongolia reveals significant information about the cultural exchanges between nomads and settled people along the Silk Roads. The burial objects excavated from the tomb include male and female figurines, either standing or riding on a horse, two tomb guardian figures, two tomb guardian animal figures, animal figurines, gold and bronze objects, fragments of a golden floral crown ornament, and Byzantine coins of the Emperor Heraclius, dated around the 630s. It is certain that the remarkable new findings from the tomb would bring a new perspective in the study of the history of tombs and demonstrates cultural exchanges and transmissions of the funerary arts of Asia along the Silk Roads.

Keywords: Shoroon bumbagar tombs, Byzantine gold coins, Sassanid silver coins, imitations

Introduction

Researchers have paid great attention to the tomb discovered in 2011 at a place called Shoroon Bumbagar, on the territory of Bayannuur sum of Bulgan aimag, Mongolia. The tomb with murals, specific ritual settings, and rich artefacts has

been found without any damage. As this type of tomb has never been discovered before in Mongolia, it is necessary to comprehensively study all its artefacts. In particular, we need to study coins, important artefacts of the ancient east-west social and cultural relations. It has a great importance for a historical study of ancient states that established their statehood on the territory of Mongolia. A total of 41 gold and silver coins were discovered in the tomb, information on which is given below.

Even though we have not identified who was buried at this tomb, all the structure and composition of the burial place, the funeral custom and other valuable and unusual findings discovered from the burial place prove that they were among the top-ranking aristocrats of the time. Considering all its aspects, we can say in advance that this tomb was built in the second half of the 7th century.[1]

The gold coins, which could have originated in the west, were found over the course of the excavation at the Shoroon Bumbagar site of Bayannuur sum. Not only have these findings attracted much interest from researchers, but they are also worthily considered valuable and unique artefacts for historical study. The gold coins, unearthed in the tomb's main chamber, have unique images on them. Furthermore, these types of coin have been found for the first time in Mongolia. The tomb consists of three chambers with the deceased buried in the main one. The wooden coffin has three layers of which the inner one had a silk bag containing the ashes of the deceased. The box containing ashes had gold and silver coins, accessories wrapped in silk at the bottom. In the archaeological excavations, 41 coins have been discovered which are imitations of Byzantine Empire gold coins as well as the imitation of Sassanid silver coins of Persia ("黄金" 仿 制品). There are 37 gold and four silver coins.[2]

1   Erdenebold, L., Preliminary "Excavation Finding from Shoroon Bumbagar Ulaan kherem Mongolia," in *Interaction in the Himalayas and Central Asia: Processes of Transfer, Translation and Transformation in Art, Archaeology, Religion and Polity*, Vienna, Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2017: 275-311; Erdenebold, L., "Uighuryn Shoroon bumbagaryn dursgal ba torgony zam," [Uighur Shoroon Bumbagar Monuments and Silk Road], In *Nomads of the Great Steppe and Silk Road*, 2015.

2   Ochir, A., Erdenebold, L., Karjubai, and Jantegin, *Ertnii nuudelchdiin bunkhant bulshnii sudalgaa* [Research on Mounds of Ancient Nomads], Ulaanbaatar, Soyombo Printing, 2015.

After studying the gold coins found at the tomb, the Chinese researcher Guo Yunyan (郭雲艷) has classified them into the three following groups:

- Coins imitating the background design of Sassanid silver coins of Persia
- Coins imitating the Byzantine Solidus gold coins as well as imitations of the Byzantine style of coin
- Damaged coins which are hard to classify.

Furthermore, the coins in the Byzantine style and their imitations were classified into three further groups as follows:

- Semissis imitation of Byzantine gold coins
- Solidus imitation of Byzantine gold coins
- Imitations of a Byzantine Solidus or coin types of Solidus.

Among the gold coins discovered at Bayannuur sum, there are imitations of the Byzantine Solidus and Solidus coin-types which are relatively thick and have images on both sides.

If we sort all coins discovered in the tomb we can see as follows:

- ten coins that imitate the background of silver coins of the Sassanid Empire of Persia.
- four coins that imitate the Semissis Byzantine gold coin and the front of the Tremissis from the 6th-7th centuries.
- 17 coins that imitate the front of the 6th-7th-century Byzantine Solidus.
- four coins that have imitate the Solidus.
- nine small gold fragments (小金片) in their original form whose variety is difficult to identify. Generally, these fragments are 16-20mm in diameter and are the same shape and size as the Byzantine Solidus and Semissis.

It is clear that the coins were valued, as they were used as a personal adornment and for a symbolic rather than commercial purpose. Most of them have buckles for hanging objects but others have small holes, which were probably been used for nailing onto something or for hanging from a thread.[3]

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3   郭雲艷,「論蒙古國巴彥諾尔突厥壁畫墓所出金銀幣的形制特征」,『草原文物』, 2016年第1期.

Fig. 1   The Tomb of Shoroon Bumbagar, Bayannuur sum, Bulgan province, 2011 © L.Erdenebold
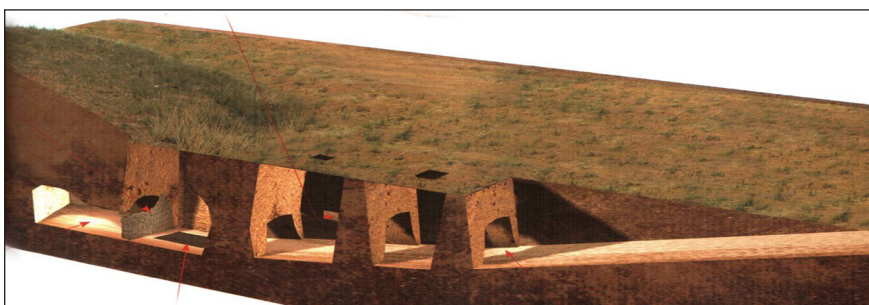
Fig. 2   The Tomb Structure of Shoroon Bumbagar, Bayannuur sum, Bulgan province, 2011
© L.Erdenebold

Fig. 3   The entrance passage of Shoroon Bumbagar, Bayannuur sum, Bulgan province, 2011
© L.Erdenebold

Fig. 4 Gold coins were found for the first time in the tomb. Shoroon Bumbagar, Bayannuur sum, Bulgan province, 2011 © L.Erdenebold

Fig. 5 Gold coin of Shoroon Bumbagar, Bayannuur sum, Bulgan province, 2011 © L.Erdenebold

Fig. 6 Gold coins of the Sassanid Empire of Shoroon Bumbagar, Bayannuur sum, Bulgan province, 2011 © L.Erdenebold

Fig. 7 Coin engraved with the image of Heraclius Solidus of Shoroon Bumbagar, Bayannuur sum, Bulgan province, 2011 © L.Erdenebold

Fig. 8 Coin engraved with the image of Semissis and Tremissis of Shoroon Bumbagar, Bayannuur sum, Bulgan province, 2011 © L.Erdenebold

Fig. 9 Coin engraved with the image of Phocas of Shoroon Bumbagar, Bayannuur sum, Bulgan province, 2011 © L.Erdenebold

Fig. 10 Coin engraved with the image of human of Shoroon Bumbagar, Bayannuur sum, Bulgan province, 2011 © L.Erdenebold

Imitations of gold coins discovered at Bayannuur sum (sub-district) are usually thin. They imitate the front of a Byzantine gold coin and the reverse of a silver coin of the Sassanid Empire. There are many imitation gold coins with a portrait of Heraclius, the Byzantine Emperor (610–641) on the front. An imitation coin with the Heraclius' portrait has two portraits of kings: a bigger one on the left and a smaller one on the right.

The ten intimation coins with the image of Heraclius imitate the original gold coin of Heraclius. However, the location of the two portraits is reversed, with a smaller one on the left and the bigger one on the right. This means that they depicted images in a different way than was conventional, which was typically to display the obverse to the left (or above) and the reverse to the right (or below). In contrast, the gold coin of Heraclius found in China had the larger image on the left.

The coin classified as a gold coin of Heraclius[4] has different images on either side and on the front ring two persons' images are depicted at the top. On the front, there are full-face images of two kings but an image of the king on the left is larger. They show the king's crown with decorations on both sides. There is a cross on the crown and even a cross is shown between the two persons. It has letters on both sides but they are too small to read. At the back, there is a cross above the four stars and with the inscription "CONOB" as well as the inscriptions "VICTORIAAVIUI" on the left and right sides. According to the mass, design and form, the coin has special features of a Solidus related to the early period of a gold coin from Heraclius I's reign.

Another interesting coin found in the tomb is a gold coin with a full-face image of King Phocas. He is wearing a crown with a on the upper part on both sides. A cross is also shown on the top of the crown and the king is holding a ball-shaped item in his right hand. The coin has a buckle on the right side designed to set something in. The inscription "CAS — PЄAPΛ VCT" is written on the front. On the reverse there is a cross above the four stars and below it the inscription "COHO". It has the inscription "B9 V?-NΛIPO>THC" on both sides. It is known that the inscription

4   The coin is registered with numbers of XXM2012.5.142 and with a diameter of 20.44mm, thickness is 0.79mm, and the mass of 4,701grams.

"VICTORI –AVCCC" had appeared on the reverse of Byzantine Solidus coins since the 4th century.

The inscription at the back of the gold coin is extraordinary and has never been seen on a Byzantine coin. As we know, these two kinds of image did not appear together on a Byzantine Solidus. Although the image on the back was not spread during the reign of the Byzantine emperor Phocas (602–610), this type of method was used to imitate a Byzantine Solidus. Two images from different periods depicted together on an object shows us a real example of imitation.

Some researchers consider that these coins are related to imitations of a Semissis or Tremissis in relation to observational evidence on form and design of the four-piece gold coin discovered at the tomb of Bayannuur sum.[5] As for imitations of a Semissis and a Tremissis among the Byzantine coins, there is no significant difference in its shape and design and these coins have the same profiles of a king. The shape and design of the Solidus at the core of the Byzantine monetary system had always changed. The king's right-facing profile was depicted on the front of a coin from the fifth century. However, on early Byzantine gold coins of the 6th–7th centuries the king's head was full face rather than in profile, and later in the middle of the 7th century the king was shown either alone or with somebody else. While form and design of the Solidus always changed, the Semissis and Tremissis remained unchanged for a long time, i. e. from the beginning to the end, the profile depiction of a king was unchanged.

We think that some coins[6] can be classified as Byzantine Semissis. They produced the coin by piercing one side of it with a hummer (單面打壓). On the edge we can see a beaded pattern (聯珠式) and an upper part of the king's portrait is in profile. He has a thick moustache and is wearing a crown and a long coat. The inscription around his head is illegible. From the shape and design of this coin, it seems that

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5　郭雲艷,「論蒙古國巴彥諾尔突厥壁畫墓所出金銀幣的形制特征」,『草原文物』, 2016年第1期.

6　The coins registered with numbers XXM2012.5.122 (Diameter: 20.05-20.11mm, width: 0.08mm, weight:0138g); XXM2012.5.123 (diameter: 18.33mm, width: 0.14mm, weight: 0.171g); XXM2012.5.124 (diameter: 16.45-18.43mm, width: 0.08mm, weight: 0.115g); and XXM2012.5.127 (diameter: 18.2мм, width: 0.09mm, weight: 0.125g)

it is either an imitation of a Byzantine Semissis or of a Tremissis. At the centre of the gold coins, there are three to seven holes which were probably used for sewing onto knitted goods. It is shown that this kind of coin use was different from other gold coins. Particularly, an image at the front of a gold coin classified as a Semissis is hard to differentiate from a Byzantine gold coin or its imitation.[7]

The average weight of original gold coins of Byzantine discovered in China is 3.15 g while an imitation coin is at least 0.8 g and not less 1 g. These kinds of gold coins usually have one to four holes.

Here some examples of gold coins discovered in China are similar to the Byzantine gold coins found at the tomb in the Bayannuur sub-district. One piece of an imitation Heraclius gold coin was found in the second grave of Tomuni village in the western region of Xiani, one piece from Hezhiya village in southern region of Xian (related to the middle period of the XIII century), and one piece from a Tang dynasty grave (朝陽雙塔區唐墓에서) in the Shuanta region of Chaoyan city.

Imitations of Byzantine gold coins found in a graveyard of Badamu at Turfan, a graveyard of Munar, and a Sogdian graveyard of Gousi of Zhiohe have similar shapes and designs to gold coins from the tomb in Bayannuur sub-district. We therefore consider that imitations of Byzantine gold coins are likely to be used first among the Sogdians and even these kinds of gold coins may have been made by Sogdians. It is extraordinary that forty pieces of the Byzantine gold coins that were usually found in the grave of Sogdians only in one piece were buried at the same time in the tomb in Bayannuur *sum*. It is very rare to find a large quantity of Byzantine gold coins in one grave. There was one case to find five gold coins in northern Zhou in a Dyani Hun grave (北周田弘墓). Moreover, a large quantity of original Byzantine gold coins was found at once at Kubrat of Pereshepino in Ukraine. They consist of gold coins made during the reigns of Byzantine emperors such as Heraclius, his son (637–638) and Constans II (642–646). [8]

7   Saran Solongo, Ayuadai Ochir, *Chronology of Mural Paintings and Terracotta Figurines from a Royal at Ulaan kherem in Shoroon Bumbagar* (Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, 2016).

8   Vera Zalesskaya ed., *The Treasures of Khan Kubrat* (Saint Petersburg: The State Hermitage, 1997), 94-99.

Kubrat was the ruler of the Bulgars who established the Old Great Bulgaria. It is clear that a number of Byzantine gold coins were used as jewellery or to put in a grave, as we have seen from relations of the Byzantine Heraclius with the Avars and the Turks. However, it has a slightly different meaning from the funeral ritual of the Sogdians. Because the Sogdians only placed one coin in a grave, as payment to ferry the soul of the deceased to the next world.

Researchers assume that the imitation of Byzantine gold coins related to the 7th century found at a Sogdian grave in Turfan was probably made in Sogdian territory. As reported by Naymark on his study of a Sogdian grave related to the 6th and 7th centuries, a large quantity of Byzantine gold coins can be found in Sogdian territory, most of them one mm thick and weighing less than a gram. A few gold coins were found in a grave but others were discovered at a church offering (神廟) or at a place where people lived. We also consider that Sogdians not only used gold coins for monetary purposes but also as a symbol of wealth, prestige and power.[9]

The Byzantine gold coins and their imitations spread through China because of socio-economic, political, and cultural relations between the Byzantine, Western Turkic, and Sassanid Empires, as reported by Lin Yin (林英) in her research.

Yurii A. Prokopenko established that the Byzantine gold coin was used for the first time in this region in the early the 5–6th centuries. Imitations of Byzantine gold coins may probably have been produced in that region, as he reported in his study of the imitation of a Byzantine gold coin found in the territory where Kazakhs lived in the 5th-9th centuries. A lot of imitation golden coins related to the Byzantine Heraclius, Heraclius Constantine /613–625/, Constans and Constantine II /613–625/ were discovered in this region. We think that the Kazakhs imitated a Byzantine gold coin for war compensation (the Byzantine-Turkish war), a vivid appreciation showing the rank of a deceased person or as a charm. Moreover, it can be seen that they not only misspelled the inscription on a Byzantine gold coin but also, they

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9   Aleksandr Naymark, Sogdiana, *Its Christians and Byzantium: A Study of Artistic and Cultural Connections in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages* (Ph. D. Dissertation. Bloomington: Indiana University, 2001).

engraved the Runic alphabet of Eurasia and mentioned its holder.[10] Thus, like the Sogdians and Kazakhs, Tele Uyghurs have the same symbol. It is possible that a great number of imitation Byzantine gold coins could be buried in a grave.

Conclusion

Byzantine gold coins have not previously been found in well-known Turkic monuments such as the ritual places of Kultegin and Bilge Khan, the graveyard of ordinary people, or the Turkic grave of Ashina Chung in China. Hence this means that the tomb in the Bayannuur *sum* where Byzantine gold coins were buried is not associated with Turks. It is quite possible that it belongs to another ethnic group, i. e. the Tele tribe. They apparently used imitation Byzantine gold coins with many holes as costume jewellery or charms. Like a gold decoration with human and animal images, they were used in a symbolic context too.

The gold coins found in the territory of present-day China have varied in numbers and designs buried in the tomb. This shows that the nomads' introduction, distribution, access, methods of use, and symbolic meanings of the Eastern Roman coins are different from those in China. Perhaps it shows that there was a real relationship between the Sassanid of the Tele and the Eastern Roman Empire through political and trade ties in that period.

As for the distribution of Byzantine gold coins, we have taken into consideration the date for mintmarks, the period of their introduction into Central Asia and China and their usage as money, and the period of their use as jewellery. However, these are not important factors to determine the historical age of a tomb. The evidence shows that we can identify the owner's occupation and their funeral ritual at this tomb where gold coins were buried with the deceased.

Gold Heraclius coins have been discovered in remote areas such as Sichuan, Liaoning, and Chaoyang, which demonstrates that they had spread eastwards, i.e. to the territory of Liaoning county, near present-day Kogurio, far from ancient

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10 Yurij A. Prokopenko, "Byzantine coins of the 5th-9th century and their imitations in the Central and Eastern Ciscaucasus", *Moravia Magna*, vol. V. (2008).

tribes with of tradition of burying of the deceased accompanied by gold coins. It is possible that they conducted political, military and commercial activities.

As a result of analizing the artefacts and plaster of murals in the tomb at Bayannuur sum, it is estimated between 670±70; therefore, the tomb is supposed to date from 675.

Although it does not give us much help in determining the age of the tomb, district by the peculiarity of the spread of Byzantine gold coins, we consider that it gives us an opportunity to ascertain cultural relations in the above-mentioned territories along the road of the west-east relations in comparing it with tombs of other places with similar findings.

The findings of over 40 Byzantine gold coins from the tomb in the Bayannuur sum are different from those found in China in terms of the numbers, methods and technology, and the accompanying ritual.

With regard to the tomb with the imitation Byzantine gold coin, we should take account of issues such as artefacts expressing a nomadic culture and the rank of the tomb's owner, the way in which gold coins spread in the region, what they were used for and the place they were minted. It is possible to restore and clarify west-east cultural relations more clearly. Furthermore, if we conduct complex research not only on the Byzantine gold coins but also on the funeral ritual at the tomb in the Bayannuur sub-district and the variety of accompanying artefacts and their location, it may be possible to identify the owner of the Bayannuur tomb, who, like the culture he represented, is still unknown.

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Erdenebold, Lhagvasuren. "Preliminary Excavation Finding from Shoroon Bumbagar Ulaan kherem Mongolia", In *Interaction in the Himalayas and Central asia. Processes of Transfer, Translation and Transformation in Art, Archeaeology, Religion and Polity*. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2017: 75-311;

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From Childhood Trains to Minecarts

Imaginaries and Realities of Railway in Mongolia

Baatarnaran Tsetsentsolmon and Maria-Katharina Lang

Abstract: This paper explores the historical and contemporary railroad constructions in Mongolia and socio-cultural transformation due to the infrastructural changes. In order to transport the minerals to markets in and above all outside Mongolia, especially China and Russia, states and private companies invest in rail and road transport (plans). When the first long distance railway was built as 'a gift from Stalin' between 1947 and 1949, herders who never had seen engine techniques, imagined the railway as a 'metal snake' (tomor) that drilled mountains and crossed rivers. Today many people have high hope of this infrastructural modernization and expect better economic development and quality of life as result of the railway expansion. Until now most of the planned new infrastructures such as "The Steppe Road" exist on paper and in the minds. In this research, we are investigating recently realized railway projects in Selenge province in northern Mongolia. The presentation of this infrastructure focuses on the social encounters of and the cultural impact on involved workers, herder families and the natural landscape (including spirit beings). Which economic, ecological and sociocultural changes go hand in hand with the development of the railway? The investigation, based on fieldwork in the years 2017–2019, includes studies on material and visual culture using primary and secondary sources.

Keywords: railway construction, infrastructure projects, political narratives, social and environmental encounters

Introduction

"If there was a train
Taking you to your childhood
Everyone would get on it
Thinking I am now and then."

(Khüükhed nasand khürgej ögdög
Galt tereg khervee baidag bol
Kün bükhen suunadaa gej
Khaaya bi boddog yum)

In Mongolia today children and adults could both easily recite this passage of a well-known children's song from 1986.[1] Although it is about the charm of childhood nostalgia, the metaphor of "the train taking one back to one's childhood" (*khüükhed nasand khürgedeg galt tereg*) describes the positive image of trains or railways derived from state socialist development projects. The imagery of the railway was shaped as a vehicle (for everyone) to travel spatial and temporal journeys due to state socialist infrastructure projects and their propaganda. Although the first railway was built to transport coal from the Nalaikh mines in the 1930s (Fig. 1), it grew further as part of Soviet-style modernity to connect Russia and China and became its own "railway kingdom" (*tömör zamyn vant uls*). Railway issues have been and are central for politicization and instrumentalization both in socialist and post-socialist Mongolia. Consequently, the contemporary discourses concerning railway construction, whether about investors, route or gauge sizes, focus rather on the transport of mineral resources than the connectivity of people and places.

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1   The music teacher S. Galmandakh and the well-known poet Z. Tümenjargal wrote this song, which was titled "I Will Always Love My Childhood" (*Khüükhed nasaa bi khairlaj yavna*).
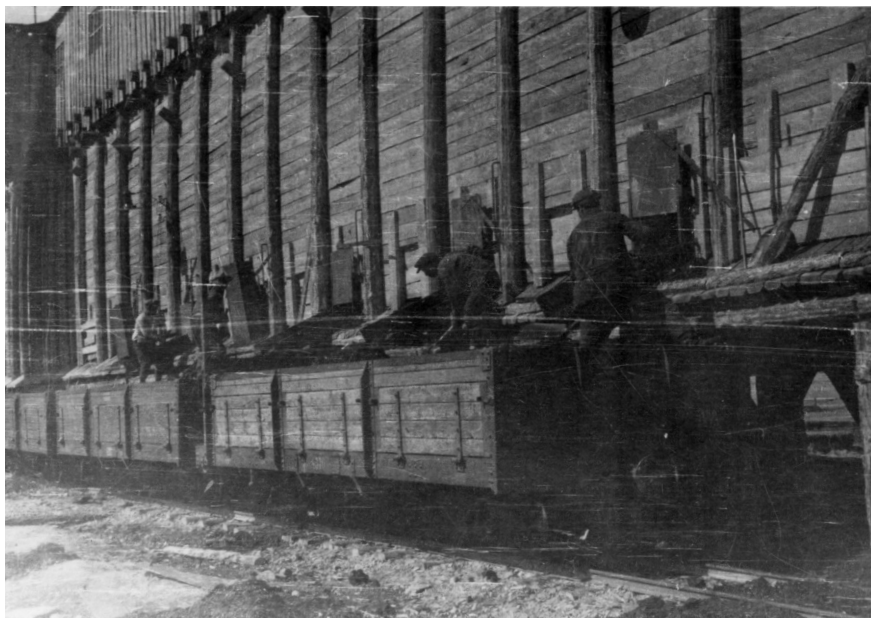
Fig. 1   Loading coals on narrow gauge wagons, 1940 © Mongolian State Archive

This article[2] presents historical and contemporary narrations about existing and emerging railways and roads, which transform the landscapes and the daily lives of herders and animals in Mongolia. Rapid transformations processes as a result of new railways and roads are juxtaposed to slow narrations by individuals.

Historical or imaginative roads such as the "New Silk Road" and the "Steppe Road", relating to the historic ancient network of trade routes connecting Asia and Europe, have become major themes in global political economy especially in the last decade. In addition, the railway in Mongolia is not just an infrastructure issue, but also one with profound geopolitical implications (Bulag 2014). Alongside

the Chinese initiation of the "Silk Economic Belt" (or "One Belt One Road") in 2013, nowadays called "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) and the Russian Eurasian Transport Network project, Mongolia proposed a "Steppe Road" in order to promote regional economic integration. The "Steppe Road" project was presented as an infrastructure to connect Russia and China through Mongolia with five main rail lines, a road, oil and gas pipelines and energy links. With the aspiration to intensify its economic development and increase investment by connecting the two giant neighbouring stakeholders, the government of Mongolia initiated the "Steppe Road National Programme" in 2017. It includes various rail and road infrastructure projects, mainly to connect mining areas to border ports. In May 2017 the Mongolian government issued another program or re-named the old programme as the "Development Road Program", to be implemented in connection with the BRI. Conferences, meetings, workshops, agreements and discussions have continuously been held at national and international levels. Most of the above infrastructure and transport lines crossing Mongolia still exist only on paper and in the mind – few have been realized yet, some very recently decided.

The not even 30-km railway in the Khüder sub-district of Selenge province is one of the very few railway projects to be realized recently by the Mongolian government. It also has a historical implication, being linked to the main railway, the Ulaanbaatar Railway (*Ulaanbaatar tömör zam*) that runs to the Chinese border in the south and to the Trans-Siberian Railway further north. We conducted field work in Selenge, Ömnö-Gobi, and Övörkhangai Provinces from 2017 to 2019 and interviewed railway workers, herders, miners, private gold miners and administrators.

New infrastructures mostly imply development of and promise connectivity to often very remote areas. The impact of existing and new roads and routes, of course, go far beyond this. The transformations occur on many levels and layers – among others they affect individual life histories, forms of local knowledge, cultural and archaeological sites, resources and natural landscapes, transnational migrations and transfers of people, animals, spirits, ideas and artefacts. Some of the main questions leading this research are: What are the individual and local

responses, reactions and agencies to these processes of transformation? What changes are visible and which narrations are told on the sidelines of the newly emerging roads and the existing old routes? Is it possible to speak of reviving "pre-modern" transport networks?

"An Iron Sheet" as Stalin's Gift

This part of the paper elaborates historical highlights of the railway in Mongolia in narratives of J. Nyamdash, a retired railway journalist, whose life had been connected to the railway from its establishment to the present. His life story thus demonstrates the different phases of the railway history, the social impacts of this infrastructure, and most importantly people's perceptions about the process of introducing a completely new type of transport. Furthermore, informal narratives reveal some implicit discontent among herders despite the intensive propaganda and oppressive communist regime, which one would not find in an official historical record.

From the beginning the history of railway construction in Mongolia has been connected to mineral extraction. The idea of establishing a railway through Mongolia (from Kyakhta to Khüree, today Ulaanbaatar) and from Khüree to Kalgan (Zhangjiakou) had been discussed by Russia, China, the US, Japan and Germany in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The "Agreement to Build a Railway" (*Tömör zam barikh geree bichig*) was part of the tri-partite treaty between Russia, Mongolia and China, known as the "Treaty of Kyakhta" signed on May 25, 1915. Highlighting the importance of connecting Mongolia to the nearest railroad network because trade with Mongolia was flourishing, the government of Mongolia and the Imperial Russian Government defined the Siberian Railway as the nearest, and mutually agreed on building the appropriate connecting railway in Mongolia (National Legal Institute 2010, 113-14). The agreement states that the authority to build a railway in Mongolia was issued by the Imperial Russian Government and if transferring the authority to others the Mongolian government should consult with the latter to ensure it would not harm Russian interests and military concerns.

Regardless of the above agreement and negotiation, the first short, 43-km stretch railway[3] from the Nalaikh coal mines to Ulaanbaatar was built only in 1938. Being built after the establishment of the industrial factory (*Aj üildveriin kombinat*) and the power station (*Tsakhilgaan Stants*), the railway belonged to the Soviet Union until October 15, 1940. Then the 237-km broad-gauge railway from Bayantümen in Mongolia to Solovievsk in Russia was built for the military purposes of the Battle of Khalkhin Gol on the eastern border in the late 1930s. As Soviet military construction workers built this railway, it belonged to the Zabaikalsk Railway until 1956. The first 400-km long-distance (broad-gauge) railway connecting Naushki, the Russian border town, and the Mongolian capital, Ulaanbaatar, was constructed between 1947 and 1949 under the agreement with the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Soviet Union. The main workforce was the "no. 505 construction group," which was mainly based at Soviet rail sites such as the Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM), the Lime-Urgal, the Komsomolsk-Sovetskaya Gavan and the Taishet-Bratsk.[4] The labour force of up to 40,000 workers, including professionally trained railway workers in communications and locomotive construction as well as Russian prisoners of war, was approved by the Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs. The opening ceremony for the Naushki to Ulaanbaatar railway took place in Ulaanbaatar on November 7, 1949 (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2
Opening the Naushki-Ulaanbaatar railway, 1949
© Mongolian State Archive

3   This railway for coal transport had narrow-gauge of 750 millimeters.
4   Some specialists, such as Gvozdevski as the head of the 505 group, D.V. Uspenskii as the Lieutenant-Colonel, and Gilner N.K. general engineer, were transferred to Mongolia from the western management of BAM (Baikal-Amur Mainline).

While the former two railways were one-track and restricted to mining and military transport, the latter was part of the Soviet-style "high modernity" (Scott 1999) that led to social transformation in the spheres of mobility, materiality and belonging. Herders were mobilized, settled and turned into railway workers. Since the Mongolian-Russian joint venture Ulaanbaatar Railway (*Ulaanbaatar tömör zam*) began operation in 1951, official campaigns were launched to recruit railway workers from seven western provinces.

In 1948, after her husband died, the mother of J. Nyamdash, Punsal, left her home town of Bayantes in the sub-district of Zavkhan province for Ulaanbaatar, 1,000 kilometres away, to seek a better life. Soon after, J. Nyamdash who stayed behind, heard a rumor that his mother had been sent to prison and was held in a place of the *balai shavi* [protracted pronunciation of A. Vlasov[5]] (crazy disciple). When J. Nyamdash asked about the meaning of "crazy disciple," Zaanaa, who was believed to know much, explained: "The teacher J. Stalin had many disciples. One of them went crazy and became friends with a 'man-eater' (*makhchin*) called Hitler. He was such a bad guy that he wanted to kill the teacher Stalin. That is how he became called 'crazy' (*balai*)" (Interview with J. Nyamdash, 2018). This anecdote shows the imagination of the people in a remote distance to understand the political situation and describe it in their own ways. For example, Stalin was seen as a great teacher with disciples around him – just like a Buddhist monk. Then, A. Vlasov who betrayed the 'teacher' J. Stalin was portrayed in a negative way as an enemy.

Later, J. Nyamdash and local people discovered that his mother Punsal was not in jail but had started working for the no. 505 railway construction camp, which consisted of Russian and Mongolian workers. According to J. Nyamdash, the no. 505 construction group included political prisoners who worked on the BAM railway in Mongolia from 1947 to 1954. "They were not criminals but were put

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5   Andrey Andreyevich Vlasov (1901–1946) was a Red Army general who later adopted pro-Nazi stance and headed a Russian liberation army. Soviet generals and officers who joined the Vlasov army personally experienced cruelties committed by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (*Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del*) during the Great Purge. Political prisoners working for the Soviet railway construction group in Mongolia were generally named as the 'Vlasov army people' (*Vlasovyn armiinkhan*).

into jail during Stalin´s repressions. After the death of Stalin, they were released. They mainly worked for the Naushki-Ulaanbaatar Railway. In the south, in the town Choir, some of them worked until 1954," J. Nyamdash says (Interview with J. Nyamdash, 2018).

In the autumn of 1949, J. Nyamdash was sent to his father's friend at the centre of a *sum* (sub-district) who was planning to bring him to Ulaanbaatar. J. Nyamdash spent the winter there and heard the word "railway" (*tömör zam*) for the first time during a New Year's party. As it was the year of its opening, the word railway (*tömör zam=iron road*) and the names Kh. Choibalsan and J. Stalin were mentioned several times during the party. J. Nyamdash remembers that a "winter old man" (*övliin övgön*), or a Russian version of Santa Claus (*ded moroz*) was saying that the "Teacher Stalin" (*Sitaalin*[6] *Bagsh*) presented the railway as a gift (*tömör zam beleglekh=iron road gift*) to "Father Choibalsan" (*Etseg Choibalsan*). As a little boy, J. Nyamdash then imagined that the old man (winter old man) had a father called Choibalsan and a (Buddhist) monk teacher called Stalin who handed him a long sheet of iron (Interview with J. Nyamdash, 2019).

Political propaganda was a significant part of the process of the railway construction and the topics of the railway and "Stalin's gift" further became central in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. A competition for railway songs was organized among composers and writers for the opening of the Naushki-Ulaanbaatar Railway. The song Steel Road (*Gan zam*) by Ch. Lkhamsüren and L. Mördorj, which won the second place, was especially popular and became a hymn of the Mongolian railway.[7] The composer L. Mördorj once described how he got the inspiration for the melody. He was lying on the ground near the Emeelt railway station and felt the sounds and rhythms of passing trains (Interview with Rash, 2018). The lyrics

6   This is how J. Nyamdash heard of the railway for the first time. Due to the phonetic feature of the Mongolian language with vowels in-between consonants, this was the way to pronounce the name of Stalin.

7   The song was performed for the opening by the well-known singer L. Tsogzolmaa and recorded with the voice of the opera-singer G. Khaidav accompanied by a symphony orchestra. (https://montsame.mn/mn/read/206268)
     The Ulaanbaatar Railway Administration Office built a monument in honor of this song and pays tribute to it during celebrations and anniversaries of the railway.

were revised three times, modifying to political conditions and railway changes. In the original it said: "This is a gift of J. Stalin, A broad transportation of good." (*Ene bol Staliny beleg, Ed tavaaryn örgön teever*). After J. Stalin died in 1953 and the Moscow–Ulaanbaatar Railway was established, it changed to "Connecting Moscow and Ulaanbaatar with Eternal Friendship" (*Moskva Ulaanbaatar khoyoryg; Mönkh nairamdlaar kholbodog*). When the railway between Ulaanbaatar and Zamyn Üüd was established in 1956, it changed to: "Connecting Moscow and Beijing with the Capital of Mongolia" (*Moskva Beejing khoyoryg; Mongolyn niisleltei kholbood*) (Interview with J. Nyamdash, 2019) (Figs. 3a-3b).

Fig. 3a
Building the Ulaanbaatar-Zamyn Uud Road named Friendship, 1954
© Mongolian State Archive

Fig. 3b
Building the Ulaanbaatar-Zamyn Uud Road named Friendship, 1954
© Mongolian State Archive

These changes reveal not only the external and internal political shifts but also point to the ambition, to position the socialist nation-state of Mongolia as a transit zone connecting Russia and China.

The railway program of state-socialist modernism aimed to (trans)form people's visions, imaginations and perceptions. Ideological institutions such as the Railway Cultural Centre, the Railway Literature Unit, and the "propaganda train" (*ukhuulgyn galt tereg*) served to propagate the railway project and party ideology either to railway workers or the general public. The "propaganda train" was an additional wagon attached to general trains where cultural figures, writers, musicians and singers travelled and performed ideological events at each railway station. The well-known writer D. Törbat, who started his career at the Railway

Literature Unit, collaborated in the propaganda train for three years with various artists on the line between Selenge in the north and Zamyn-Üüd in the south. "The wagon was detached at one station. We were eating, sleeping, reciting poems, and singing on the train. Then it was attached to the next train and moved to another station."[8] According to D. Törbat, the first novel about railway workers, The Comrades (*Nökhöd*) was written by D. Darjaa in 1963. The railway administration paid writers to write about railway topics. State socialist propaganda worked on shaping imaginative perceptions (Sneath 2009) to see the railway as the greatest and most prestigious community, as a "railway kingdom".

Animal metonymies

The railway was advocated by the socialist modernist state as an essential part of development and modernity, referring to the common notion of "development follows the roads" (*zam dagaj khögjil*) (Lang and Tsetsentsolmon 2021). Nevertheless, informal narratives describing railways in animal metonyms reveal some implicit discontent among herders despite the intensive propaganda and the oppressive regime. In the early years of railway construction in Mongolia, herdsmen who had never seen engine technology imagined the railway as a "metal snake" (*tömör mogo*i) that drilled through mountains and crossed rivers (Bulag 2014) or as a "Russian black stallion" (*orosyn khar azarga*) (Nyamdash 2009). Although horses and snakes are both positively accepted animals by Mongolians, the former as a "precious topaz" (*molor erdene*) and the latter "an animal of land spirits" (*lusyn amitan*), qualifications such as "metal" and "black" have negative connotations that might refer to suspicion and doubt. J. Nyamdash recalls a story he witnessed as a small child during the camel caravan journey to his mother in Ulaanbaatar in 1950. A man called Jambal was leading the caravan. When he saw a steam train (*parovaz*) going uphill superbly making a loud noise and frequent signals and running fast downhill, he said: "Stalin teacher says 'meat and fat, meat and fat, GIVE ME!' (*öökh makh, öökh makh ÖGÖÖÖCH!*). Then, on the way back he says "I've had enough

8   http://www.garag.mn/a/62103. Accessed on November 25, 2020.

and I am full" (*Khanalaa, tsadlaa. khanalaa tsadlaa*). Jamba imitated the sound the steam train made going up and back down. However, his message was that the Soviets were coming to take something from Mongolia and went back after getting it.[9] Despite the government's propaganda, ordinary people knew what was given to them and what was taken from them, although they could not express it for fear of political repression.

In 1956 J. Nyamdash and his mother later moved to Sainshand near the Chinese border when the railway from Ulaanbaatar to Zamyn Üüd, on the southern border with China started. Experienced and trained workers from the "old railway" (*khuuchin zam*) from Naushki to Ulaanbaatar, started work on this "new railway" (*shine zam*). There is an anecdote that after the completion of the railway line to Russia, Yü. Tsedenbal, the leader of the Mongolian People's Republic from 1940 to 1984, when he was invited by Mao Zedong, asked him if he should come to visit China by camel caravan.[10] Then finally, in 1956, the new railway called the "Friendship Road" (*Nairamdalyn zam*) between Russia, Mongolia and China was inaugurated. Although many Chinese worked on the construction of the railway, this was not officially mentioned due to the tension between China and Mongolia caused by the Sino-Soviet split. A short story titled "A Train is Coming" (*Bogoon irlee*) by J. Lkhagva describes the imagination of the railway among the people in the Gobi. It narrates:

> *By the 1950s, the rumour about railway building was*
> *spread in a remote Gobi place and inside herder households*
> *in interesting ways. Everyone was saying: "A train had arrived*
> *(Bogoon irlee)." Yet, nobody knew what bogoon or wagon was.*
> *Once an old man who led a camel caravan to Bayantümen*

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9   The writer Alexander I. Solzhenitsyn also records a story of a railway-builder prisoner and a Mongolian herder. He writes, "During the construction of this railroad the unguarded prisoners were ordered to tell the Mongols that they were Komsomol members and volunteers. When the Mongols heard this, they replied: 'Take back your railroad, give us back our sheep.'" (Solzhenitsyn 1973-8, 592)

10   http://www.garag.mn/a/62103. Accessed on November 24, 2021.

stated: "Coming from the USSR (Seseer), it must either be
exhausted or have backache. It cries loudly on the way. After it
arrived, it scrabbles, moans and foams at the armpits." Hearing
it, I imagined a train was a huge animal. Nowadays, seeing a
steam train (parovaz) in films, it reminds me of the old man's
talk and it looks like an animal to me.
(Lkhagva, A Train is Coming, 561)

Both, narration and literary work reveal that animal metonyms were used to describe engine technology such as railways or wagons when they were first introduced. While having descriptive connotations of doubt, fear and criticism, trains were likened to horses or camels, with which herders had been familiar (as riding and pack animals) and communicated for long time.

Minecart 1

In 2009, six decades after the establishment of the Mongolian-Russian joint cooperative Ulaanbaatar Railway, the Mongolian government initiated the Mongolian Railway (*Mongolyn tömör zam*), a state-owned company. Due to "a mineral turn of Mongolia's economy" (Bulag 2014) in the 2000s, the government aimed to build a national railway network connecting major coalmines to the Chinese border. The State Policy on Railways approved in 2010 presents plans and directions for infrastructure construction of 5683.5 kilometres, most of which connects mining areas to the Chinese border towns. So far, they have not been completed, due to external and internal political and economic factors such as the instability of the government, discontinuity of state policy, corruption and pressure from neighbouring countries. Two brief ethnographies in this section show that the current railway issues focus mainly on mineral transport, while the existing main railway, the former state socialist construction, remains overloaded with passenger transport and freight.

The short railway line where we conducted our investigation in the Khüder sub-district (*sum*) of Selenge province (*aimag*) is the only finished state-funded railway

in the recently planned Mongolian Railway lines (Fig. 4). The Tsagaan Khaalga crossroads or junction, where we started our investigation, is an interesting place, an intersection of three railway lines: the Ulaanbaatar Railway, the Mongolian Railway and the Bold Tömör Yöröö Gol Railway. Recently new railways and roads have been built to access a major Mongolian iron deposit, called Khüder in this area. A new 135-kilometre line has recently been built from the Yöröö depot of the existing main line to the Tömörtei depot in Khüder. The 84-kilometre line, known as the Bayangol Railway, to a place called Khandgait, or Bayangol Mining, was built with Chinese investment and belongs to a private company called Bold Tömör Yöröö Gol.[11] The Bayangol Railway lies along three junctions (zörlög) and two depots (called Tsagaan Khaalga, Khan Chuluut, Tal bulag and Khandgait). From 2005, iron ore was transported from the mines to the main railway line by truck. Bold Tömör Yöröö Gol started building a new railway line with the Chinese Railway Bureau no. 20, completed within three years. The rest of the new line, about 23.5 kilometres from the Khandgait depot to Tömörtei, belong to the state-owned Mongolian Railway company, a transport infrastructure for iron ore from the Darkhan Metallurgy Industry Company. The ore is washed on the spot, to separate iron from earth, and transported directly to China (Fig. 5). Depending on the traffic, it takes a week to reach the Chinese border town of Erlian and to return. From Erlian the extracts are distributed to different metallurgy factories in the north of China. The Mongolian Railway rents wagons and lines to the Ulaanbaatar Railway and the Bold Tömör Yöröö Gol Company, using its own wagons and locomotive, only pays for the track.

11   It was the first railway line in Mongolia owned by a private company. The Mongolian Trans Logistic, a subsidiary of the Bold Tömör Yöröö Gol deals with railway transport and further built 10.8 kilometres of railway in the Altanshiree sub-district of Dornogobi province and 4.3 kilometres of oil and gas pipelines in Zamyn Üüd, the southern border town.

Fig. 4
Rail works, Selenge Aimag, Mongolia 2017
© Maria-Katharina Lang

Fig. 5
Train with iron ore loads leaving for China, Khüder,
Selenge Aimag, Mongolia 2017
© Maria-Katharina Lang

While the newly built and planned rail lines promise economic benefit to the company or the government, herders and animals in the railway area suffer from reduced and divided pasture land (Fig. 6). Herders who sell their milk, dairy products and animal hide enjoy the increased speed through a new road parallel to the new railways. According to Ch. Davaanyam, a herder from Javkhlant sub-district of Selenge, whose family spends the summer along the newly built roads and railways, the fixed road has brought some positive changes to access the market. He says: "It is much better now. Before, it took two to three hours to reach the crossroads (Tsagaan Khaalga) which is 30 km off-road. Milk and meat might deteriorate when it is hot. Now, it takes only 20 to 30 minutes" (Interview with Davaanyam, 2017). Although the paved road was built to access the mines, it helps connect herders to the economic system. As Brian Larkin says, "Infrastructures mediate exchange over distance, bringing different people, objects, and spaces into interaction and forming the base on which to operate modern economic and social systems."[12] However, herders are not interacting or are entangled with the accelerated speed and connected distances of the railway construction. Trains fully loaded with iron ore pass the pastures and farming fields day and night.

12   Brian Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," The Annual Review of Anthropology. 42 (2013): 327-343, here 330. https://doi:10.1146/aanurev-anthro-092412-155522.

Fig. 6   Khüder sum, Selenge Aimag, Mongolia 2017 © Maria-Katharina Lang

Minecart 2

The other location we investigated in 2018 was Tavan Tolgoi in the South Gobi, where major Mongolian coal, copper and gold mines are located. New infrastructures in this area have also not been established for the welfare of the inhabitants of the areas but to connect the mines to transport resources, mainly to China. Just shortly after we arrived in the South Gobi to document the impact of Mongolia's major coal mine, Tavan Tolgoi, and copper/gold mine, Oyu Tolgoi, after ten years of discussions and scandals an influential governmental decision concerning new transport lines was made: the decision to build a railway and new road from the Tavan Tolgoi mine to Gashuun Sukhait at the Chinese border (Fig. 7). It had been decided to sell 30% of Tavan Tolgoi on the international stock market. Another joint-stock railway company, the Tavan Tolgoi Railway, was built on August 8, 2018, by the Erdenes Tavan Tolgoi (ETT) (66%)[13] and the Mongolian Railway (34%), which will build the line from Tavan Tolgoi-Gashuun Sukhait. The

13   ETT is a coal mining company established in 2012. It extracts coking coal from an open mining and directly sells it in raw to China. ETT is located 270 kilometres from the border, which means from the port of Gashuun Sukhait.

Fig. 7 Building the Tavan Tolgoi - Züün Bayan railway, Mongolia 2019 © 24 tsag.mn

task of building the line from Tavan Tolgoi to Gashuu Sukhait was transferred from the Mongolian Railway to the Tavan Tolgoi Railway. According to Sh. Bayarkhüü, a division manager of ETT, the company's goal is to build the railway to the company's area. He states: "the main problem is transport. We transport the extracted coal for 270 kilometres to the border by truck. If we transport it more cheaply by rail, it would positively affect the price of coal. Once we have the railway and get to the border, then it could be sold to customers in China, Korea and Japan" (Interview with Bayarkhuu, 2018). There are two routes from the Tavan Tolgoi area to the border by truck: one to Tsagaan Khad (on the Mongolian side) and the other to Gants Mod (on the Chinese side). The ETT sends five hundred coal trucks to Tsagaan Khad. Once the number rises to a thousand it causes a long tailback due to the low capacity of the local port of Gashuun Sukhait.

Hence the rail line from Tavan Tolgoi and Gashuun Sukhait has been a priority for the government. However, the plans have been changed recently to build a new 414.6-kilometres broad gauge (1520 mm) line from the Tavan Tolgoi mine not directly to the Chinese border but to Züünbayan sub-district of Dornogovi province. About 37 minefields are located within a 30-kilometre radius of the line from Tavan Tolgoi to Züünbayan. This railway would also join the main line, the

Fig. 8   Coal trucks on the way to China, Ömnögovi, Mongolia 2018 © Maria-Katharina Lang

Ulaanbaatar Railway, which further connects to the eastern Chinese Kaczensky ports or to the Russian port of Vostochnyi in Vladivostok. The Ministry of Road and Transport Development of Mongolia signed a contract to cooperate with the Russian Railways (*Rossiyskie zheleznye dorogi*) as an open joint-stock company on the newly planned railway (on November 5, 2019). (The plan is to finance the new line with profits from the Erdenes Tavan Tolgoi coal-mining company by buying Mongolian Railway bonds.) The labor force would be provided neither by the Ulaanbaatar Railway nor by the Mongolian Railway but the Mongolian army general staff.

While governments and parliaments have repeatedly been changing decisions, long queues of trucks with open loads of coal still travel on the mostly unpaved roads (Fɪɢ. 8). Discourses on railway construction have become (new) anecdotes so that people say "nobody would be surprised if the President said he would build a railway to the moon."

Conclusion

This paper presents historical and modern highlights of railway construction, which are mainly connected to mineral resources in Mongolia. It shows how the first railway project, as a part of Soviet modernization, influenced people's

visions, perceptions, and individual lives. State socialist propaganda changed the imagination of the railway from the metaphor of a "metal snake" to being "Stalin's gift", "bringing development", and as a "vehicle for journeys." However, unofficial narrations also show that people expressed their contested views in sarcastic ways although not speaking publicly.

The New Railway Project (from Tavan Tolgoi to Züün Bayan) and the directions for future railways mentioned in state policy are heavily dependent on mining in the area and increasingly related to Chinese stakeholders. Both ethnographies, from two different places in the north and south of Mongolia, show that the focus of the new infrastructure projects is rather to transport mineral extracts than to connect people and places. Railways here rather disperse materialities, commodities and people. People mostly still have to use the unpaved dirt roads. The highly praised "connectivity" and "win-win situation" of the "New Silk Road" or China's BRI remains more than questionable when travelling on side roads of the "Silk Roads." Although Mongolia aspires to gain advantage as a "transit nation" (Bulag 2014) between Russia and China, and a demanding "coal supplier" with its imaginative roads, in reality, it is in "a long (and slow) queue" waiting to be connected to international transport networks and trading routes.

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Connected but Dispersed

Navigating Postmodernity in the Belt and Road Spaces

Manlai Nyamdorj

Abstract: "Postmodernity" or the "postmodern condition" is described as a cultural condition when capitalism penetrates further into the cultural world. Previously outside of global capitalism, Mongolia as one of the third wave of democracies after the fall of the Soviet bloc, is now slowly entering this state of postmodernity with increased exposure and connectivity with the global capitalist system. As postmodernity in effect, societies where cultural life was previously free of capitalist incorporation now left to navigate the world of competing ideas and narratives at increased speed, saturated by information through media presentations and hyperbole. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the most recent all-round project to add to an already saturated condition with its stream of information. As the BRI seeks to increase regional connectivity with China and subsequently with the rest of the world, further strengthening the global capitalist system, it welcomes another channel of various other forces further saturating and exhausting the postmodern condition. Often framed as an anti-exploitative alternative to globalization, the BRI brings competing narratives, ideas and cultural frameworks, fragmenting rather than binding together various other existing bubbles and dispersing them like atoms. Communities and localities located in the BRI sphere, though physically connected, now must navigate a very chaotic flow of information directed at them.

Keywords: Postmodernity, postmodern condition, BRI, capitalism, globalization

Introduction

Postmodernity/The Postmodern Condition

"Postmodernism" or "postmodernity" are contested terms that can have various meanings. In this paper, I will use postmodernity or the postmodern condition interchangeably, contrary to the use of postmodernism, to refer to a cultural condition developed in the long tradition by the likes of Jean-Francois Lyotard (1979), Jean Baudrillard (1981), Fredric Jameson (1991) and Mark Fisher (2009). While postmodernism is generally understood as a trend or historical stage in philosophy, art and culture that will come after what has been described as modernism, postmodernity is better understood as a cultural condition when capitalism further penetrates the cultural world. Derived from the Marxian notion of base and superstructure[1], thinkers from the Frankfurt School along with French structuralists have analyzed this long process of what can be described as an incorporation of components of the superstructure into capitalism. This process of incorporation was complete for Mark Fisher as he made a case in his book Capitalist Realism: Is there no Alternative? (2008). As the precursor to Mark Fisher's Capitalist Realism, postmodernity or postmodern as a buzzword comes in handy to describe things happening around us in this stage of global capitalism in places other than Western industrialized societies. Though historically precedent, I will therefore use postmodernity rather than capitalist realism to refer to the cultural state or condition that will be observed throughout this paper.

Though coming from two different lines of thoughts, specifically that of French structuralism and Marxism; what connects above-mentioned thinkers into a single category of postmodern thinkers is that, they have all reacted and diagnosed the so-called transition from the modern to the postmodern by examining a wide range of shifts in everyday life: looking at the economy – consumerism, culture – new forms of media and its impact on art and aesthetics which have

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1   Base and superstructure in Marxist theory, in simplest terms, are two components of society: one that comprises economic production – base, the other – superstructure – which refers to the realm beyond economic relations that can be taken in the form of institutions, social structures and culture.

led to fundamental changes in the social order disrupting political and social life. Each of the thinkers have contributed in their own way to diagnosing this new condition. The term postmodern was first used by Lyotard to refer a new historic period where all the previous explanations of the way things work could no longer explain the changing (computerized) world, which he calls the crisis of narratives – the loss of belief in metanarratives (Lyotard 1984). In essence, the idea here is that an all-encompassing framework or system of thought is no longer possible, because every such metanarrative is in conflict with each other and therefore faces a legitimation problem. Treating knowledge as subjective, Lyotard presents the decline of universality in any such metanarratives and instead asks: who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided (ibid, 9)? The agency behind the knowledge then lies in the hands of the prevailing powers: those of governments and corporations. Jean Baudrillard, another French theorist, described the postmodern condition with characteristics that he calls hyperreality (Baudrillard 1994, 1). With the advancement of new media and communication technologies in the 1980s, the introduction of personal computers and satellite TV as the main media, Baudrillard gives various examples of how people make sense and relate to various world events between the representations and the reality that are projected at them in the form of signs and images. As the new media technologies increasingly shift towards screen culture, a field where signs and images constantly circulate, it is difficult to differentiate between representation and reality. However, this does not mean that representations are fake per se, but instead the very fact that reality is masked into the representations creates a simulation. According to Baudrillard, in the postmodern condition representation is primary. These representations are presented to us in the form of simulacrum – a copy without an original – the repeated use of a simulacrum thus creates a hyperreality. In hyperreal postmodern societies, with the appropriation and consumption of signs and images, new forms of identity then emerge beyond the previous fixed identities that were mainly based on economics – those of class hierarchy. In this way, as individuals take up different identities based on their cultural and consumer experience, subjectivities start to weaken and therefore the old framework collapses. In a way

this explains the current surge of identity politics in the Western world, where individuals are assuming various other identities that fragment society into smaller pieces, blurring the line between previously fixed boundaries and structures. While Baudrillard's position towards this new social situation can be described as indifference, together with Lyotard merely observing and describing by providing a new framework, Fredric Jameson, on the other hand, engaged with a more traditional Marxist angle. Generally following a similar description to the other two thinkers, Jameson, though pessimistic, sought to overcome this condition and bring about the return of politics. That is, even though the proliferation of signs and images has created an obstacle to what he calls a banal culture of pastiche, he nevertheless stuck with the Marxist framework of political economy centered around mode of production. That is why in Jameson's writing capitalism is now embodied in something completely different from its previous stages, in the form of multinational/consumer capitalism or what he describes as late capitalism. In that sense, capitalism is still functioning, its inherent contradiction is still apparent and therefore it needs to be overcome.

There are several characteristics and causes that led to the postmodern condition. First and foremost is the shift in capitalism in the West from an industrial economy to what can be described as a service or consumer economy (Jameson 2005). Jameson describes this as "late capitalism", where previously theorized monopoly capitalism has breached global boundaries with the emergence of new multinational and transnational business organizations, as forming the current world system, which has transformed the workplace and national and cultural bonds and led to better connectivity. This newly-formed world system was then stabilized with the development of communications technology, from satellite TV to the Internet and smartphones. With it, the circulation of cultural products and various other narratives was embodied in signs and representations – a culture of pastiche[2] that dominates our modern discourse. Because social life had undergone significant changes due to the shift from industrial capitalism to consumer capitalism as well

2   Jameson describes the postmodern condition as "culture of *pastiche*" where pastiche refers to the revival of dead styles without its original intent or essence.

as advent of communication technologies, the metanarratives of earlier times, such as Christianity, Marxism and liberalism, though still present in everyday life, were no longer in position to describe the new condition. Even if one considers globalization as a version of the liberal metanarrative hand-in-hand with Francis Fukuyama's "end of history,"[3] The current developments in world politics are already showing signs of reappraisal as China strengthens its position in global capitalism. As a result, culturally it creates a state of limbo, where universality is no longer applicable in various other localities.

While at the time what can be described as postmodernity or the postmodern condition was only observable in developed Western societies which were entering the consumer stage of (late) capitalism, Jameson declared that "modernization was complete" (Jameson 2005). Such a conclusion, however, pays no serious attention to the rest of the world, which was still far from completing modernity, and in some cases was only just entering global capitalism. Since then, discussions around postmodernity or late-capitalism have often revolved around societies in the West, with little regard being given to societies on the peripheries of global capitalism. In some instances, postmodernity was assumed as a universal experience that, though initiated in the West, could spread to the rest of the world with the advent of new communication technology. While it is to some extent true that postmodernity as a cultural phenomenon has an overwhelmingly expansive nature, the very basis of a capitalist foothold was absent in the newly integrated societies at the end of the Cold War. I will argue that, around forty years after China's entrance to the global capitalist system and 30 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new nation-states of the former Soviet bloc often labeled as third wave democracies that started with peripheral positions in the global supply chain with greater exposure to global system, including to its institutions and cultural inflow, are now going through the period that can be described as the postmodern condition.

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3   Francis Fukuyama has famously argued that the current and surviving political system of liberal democracy is the final form of the political system (Fukuyama 1992).

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Introduced for the first time in 2013 by Chinese president Xi Jinping during his visit to Kazakhstan (CCTV 2013), the Belt and Road Initiative has now taken the form of concrete strategic plans with its two components of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, together known as the One Belt One Road Initiative (一带一路 *yidai yilu*). The economic belt of the Silk Road or One Belt refers to the land network of Silk Roads linking China to Europe and various other localities along the way, one of which is the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor. The BRI is described both by Chinese and foreign experts as an extensive all-round plan to connect its member countries' infrastructure, to open their markets for trade as well as an increase in people-to-people exchanges and to align economic development policies with China.[4] As of 2020, 138 countries and 30 international organizations from all five continents have signed around 200 cooperation documents and Memorandum of Understanding with China from all five continents (Belt and Road Portal 2020). As part of the Silk Road Economic Belt, countries that follow the path of the proposed BRI corridors, including Mongolia, will take part in large infrastructure projects that will eventually connect China to Europe via railroads, pipelines and ports.

While the core of the BRI are economic activities to fund and execute large infrastructure projects in receptive countries, further integrating their economies into the global system, the BRI also presents a whole package of overarching Chinese-initiated projects, plans and strategies that have geopolitical implications. It includes cultural exchange and diplomacy with the individual countries as well as potential political influence that might come in various forms. Through this lens, the BRI can be seen as an early sign of what has been discussed in the West as the "Rise of China". Though BRI itself as a slogan is often criticized for its vagueness, it also coincides and fits with various other Chinese initiatives and slogans that predates BRI. "China's peaceful rise" (中国和平起 *zhongguo heping jueqi*), "Community of a shared future for mankind" (人类命运共同体 *renlei*

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4   Mercator Institute for China studies https://merics.org/en/analysis/mapping-belt-and-road-initiative-where-we-stand

mingyun gongtongti) and more recently Xi Jinping's key concept of "China dream" (中国梦 *zhongguo meng*) and the "Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (中华民族伟大复兴 *zhonghua minzu weida fuxing*) are all fits well with the general outlook where China returns to its deserved place in the world affairs as it should be while BRI opens up new channels. In this way, the economic aspect of the BRI is almost certainly supplemented beyond economic processes providing cultural and political frameworks. Firstly, more in the political and economic realm, one of the most iterated of such narratives is China's approach/solution (中国方案 *zhongguo fangan*) in dealing with various other global issues. Listing several strong points including but not limited to those of economic development, political stability, efficiency, flexibility and adaptation which argued as the main reasons that have China fared well in the 2008 global financial crisis as well as more recent success dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic in comparison to Western democracies are now used to promote the China model superior to the Western model. The second point is more drawn to culture and has been framed as "Chinese international relations (IR) theory" derived from the ancient Chinese worldview where China posits itself as the center of the world. The idea derives from the reinvented version of the concept of *tianxia*[5] – "all under heaven" – which portrays China as a civilizational state unlike nation-states, which are widely considered as byproducts of the Peace of Westphalia.[6] It imagines a world without borders but with a unifying culture or civilization (in this case the all-encompassing Chinese civilization) which communities and peoples but not nation-states adhere to and from global governance under a moral and cultural framework. Complemented by *tianxia*, those that fall beyond China's dominion are connected to the civilizational state via a tribute system, and while not directly involved with the center are to conform to its moral and cultural superiority. Following this line of thought, though could be seen as an overstretch, the BRI with its participating countries could be framed as

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5   The concept of *tianxia* derives from the classical Chinese thought system coined/reinvented in the modern sense by Zhao Tingyang in 2005 (see Zhao Tingyang 2005).

6   The Peace of Westphalia is widely considered as the foundation of sovereignty of modern nation-states.

a reinstating of a similar type of relationship, where China represented by the PRC places itself at the center while everyone else – the contemporary nation-states – find themselves on the peripheries. Though overemphasized in various Western circles, similar style of thought production is very evident in Chinese academia where search for narratives is looked not in the Western thought tradition but in Chinese one.[7]

In addition to these two main ideas, there are many ways culture can play a role, via cultural diplomacy, conveying the various invented and reinvented ideas, ideologies and thought systems as well as importing Chinese cultural products. As the PRC understands its soft power deficit around the world, it has been increasing both its production as well as the transmission and circulation of new cultural products and platforms across the world. Cultural production may include various types of traditionally understood cultural products that come in films and other new media formats, turning the ideas, narratives and rhetoric into a body of work which is later circulated through its already established media channels. These range from state-run media and official institutions that carry out cultural diplomacy to components of popular culture – music and movies – that are all subject to various kinds of censorship to be shaped into a final form and made ready for circulation. Generally, two-way media channels – those directly under state projection as well as voices from the more independent China's media industry transmit various content and media discourses to the outside world. In recent years, we have seen the increased presence of Chinese state-run English-language media such as CGTN, Global Times, China Daily and CRI, which provide Chinese stories to counterpoint the Western media on various issues China is in dispute with. In addition to English language reportage, its services are provided in other major languages such as Arabic, French, Russian and Spanish, as well as adapting to individual countries' local languages. Another transmission channel is through popular culture resources. With the hyper-commercialization of China's media industry, with its sheer magnitude of popular media in the form of films

7   See Daivd Ownby's "Reading China dream"
     https://www.readingthechinadream.com/voices-from-chinas-century.html

and music, though not to the extent of Western popular culture, it nevertheless influences its immediate neighbors or countries who have already established a cultural bond with China. In addition to the popular media coming out of China, there are those in opposition – various forms of counter-culture or subculture find an appeal outside of China, with better connectivity thanks to the Internet and the general improvement in communication technology. While popular culture resources do not take a strong and overtly political stance compared to state-run media, given the general environment of production and content creation in China it nevertheless has to follow the general guidelines and adhere to the official narrative, and most often these products end up being apolitical and compliant with the projected presentation of the Chinese leadership.

All in all, combined with economic projects already underway, various kinds of cultural channels and diplomacy have been established in individual countries to promote and win local public support. With a large amount of this information flow intensified by new technologies, the localities of the BRI projects are left to make sense of these new narratives, frameworks and systems of ideas being imposed upon them.

Postmodernity in the Belt and Road Spaces

When discussions on postmodernity were reaching their height in the developed Western societies from the late 80s to early 90s, the PRC was only just entering global capitalism. With Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Opening mandate in 1978 and in joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, the PRC made itself a full member of global capitalism. Forty years after Reform and Opening and 20 years after joining the WTO, it could be argued that only recently – as China is reaching the consumer stage of capitalism – has it been witnessing the postmodern condition. It should be noted that due to the advances in communications technology of the past 30 years, and with China as one of the key contributors to such developments, it has speeded up the process and contributed immensely to bringing about the postmodern condition. Noticing such a trend in 1979, Lyotard wrote:

The reopening of the world market, a return to vigorous economic competition, the breakdown of the hegemony of American capitalism, the decline of the socialist alternative, a probable opening of the Chinese market – these and many other factors are already, at the end of the 1970s, preparing States for a serious reappraisal of the role they have been accustomed to playing since the 1930s: that of guiding, or even directing investments (LYOTARD 1984, 6).

In a similar way, after the so-called third-wave of democracies in the former Soviet sphere of influence that lie along the Chinese-proposed New Silk Road are now following the same trajectory to enter the consumer stage of capitalism. Previously located on the margins of global capitalism, they are now full members of the global supply chain and currently seeking to stabilize their positions in the global competition. With the Belt and Road Initiative, these same countries are looking to deepen their connections to the established system, complementing and further strengthening China's position in global capitalism. Mongolia is residing on the proposed BRI topography in one of the six proposed corridors – the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor. In addition to developing and improving the rail and highway infrastructure, it was recently announced that the present gas pipeline to connect the "Power of Siberia 2" through Mongolia – and much anticipated there – is finally underway (Adiyasuren 2020). Events like these generate many public discussions on whether or not stronger economic ties with its neighbors Russia and China will have a political as well as cultural effect. Mongolia's commitment to the BRI projects also goes hand-in-hand politically with whether it should now join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) – a regional alliance with a strong emphasis on Eurasia, of which both Russia and China are leading members. Currently an observer, it is believed that becoming a full member of the organization will provide better access to various kinds of funding for BRI-related projects.

Often described as an "island of democracy" in the Western media, since the 1990s Mongolia has followed a Western model of free-market and liberal democracy and has been bombarded by various kinds of thought systems, ideologies and cultural frameworks. With the greater connectivity and exposure to a global media discourse, cultural exports of any kind and knowledge transmission have shaped its social world for the past 30 years. In other words, the precondition of postmodernity was of greater importance in the hyper-commercialization and the media spectacle in popular discourse in the present day.

With China's advance into the global system increasing its presence in all aspects, Mongolia must navigate yet another stream of information that challenges the previous set of ideas, more specifically those that came after the collapse of Soviet Union – a package that came with liberal democracy and the free market.

The Belt and Road Initiative as an Accelerator of Globalization

Though seen as a challenger in the US-led world order, in many respects, the BRI can be viewed as an accelerator of global capitalism. Since the Reform and Opening that took place in 1978 and joining the WTO in 2001, China has shown all-round progress in strengthening its overall position within the global capitalist system. Its economic miracle initiated by Deng Xiaoping in the Reform and Opening, allowing the Chinese workforce who were previously organized in collectives to work in the coastal factories, complementing the global supply chains. Such integration not only provided a cheap and unorganized labor force for transnational corporations but for the Chinese side it also built the foundation of the new Chinese transnational capitalist class that would emerge from such a symbiotic relationship.

In order to understand China's motivations behind its participation in global capitalism, a retreat from its communist commitment one must consider the historical trajectory that China has gone through. Since its first interaction with the Western sea powers, Chinese states up until today have always looked for ways in which it could resist Imperial powers of the West. To save the nation (救亡 *jiuwang*), it had to adapt Western ways to bring itself on its foot to be strong again.

From late Qing to the founding of the PRC, it went through numerous phases through nation-building processes experimenting with Western ideas. It could be argued that adoption of communism and founding of the communist party was a result of the Chinese nation-building process where creation of the international communist movement was only secondary to its nationalist project. One important instrument of China's nation-building process is the "century of humiliation"[8] 百年耻辱 *bainian chiru*, an item of early Chinese nationalism in the republican period, which the PRC has turned into a Leninist, anti-imperialist stance toward foreign powers. However, the anti-exploitative nature of Leninist anti-imperialism had to shift with China's reception of global capitalism with Deng's reform. After a period of liberalization that came with Reform and Opening which resulted in the Tiananmen tragedy, the century of humiliation again became a component of Chinese nationalism in the following Patriotic education program to bring China into the world stage. The current Chinese statist transnational capitalist class, who operate within global capitalism, are therefore not seen as an exploitative capitalist class but as a patriotic community against exploitative foreign powers.

Now intertwined more than ever before, with the economic power having the flow of foreign direct investment (FDI) between China and the West doubled its overall political and military strength, strategically China's position would be to rebalance or reconstruct the old system of which the Western transnational capitalist class was the stronghold. Such a shift in power from a Western-centered, particularly US-led world order to a multicentric one, to other members of the Global South's transnational capitalist class, is necessary for China to form an alliance to "correct" the current system. Such alliances with the countries of the Global South to counter the US and Soviet Union were prominent during the Maoist period. China's current approach with the BRI countries is also consistent with its line of thought. The iteration of various slogans of "interconnectedness", "multi-layer cooperation", "community of common interest, responsibility and

8   The century of humiliation refers to the idea when China was harassed and subjugated by
     Western imperial powers, starting with the Opium War in 1839. It is one of the main components
     of modern-day Chinese nationalism and subsequently served both Republican and PRC
     governments for nation-building purposes.

destiny" instead of "national competition" implies the rhetoric is intended to foster mutually beneficial developments for all participants along the New Silk Road in a non-exclusive manner. The way in which China-led globalization, or to put it better "re-globalization with Chinese characteristics," differs from the previous Western-centered globalization is that while, in its previous form, countries of the Global South those in Latin America and Africa were often left as suppliers with less chance of capital accumulation and found themselves on the margins to feed the transnational capitalist class mainly represented by Western corporations, China offers a new way of reorganizing – a hope of benefiting from the system – to create their own transnational capitalist class. In doing so, its modernization model, therefore, accelerates the capitalist process in the individual member countries and in theory, giving a possibility to advance its position from mere suppliers into the later stages of the supply chain. With the rhetoric of international and socialist solidarity and with China's revolutionary past struggle against the West, the new Chinese transnational capitalist class with its newly acquired alliance across the world, specifically countries in the Global South, allows China to further penetrate and elevate its position in global capitalism while at the same time accelerating the deeper penetration of capitalism in the participating countries.

The "Belt and Road Initiative" as a Breakdown of American Hegemony

At the height of the globalist movement in the 1990s, with the emphasis on trade and open borders, the projection was that there would be all-round development across the world that would turn nation-states in the expanded areas into middle-class economies with the universal virtues of human rights and democracy. This had utopian ideals of liberal progress and was based on liberal metanarrative. But thirty years after the American triumph, the optimism of all-round progress did not fully materialize either in the industrialized societies or in the newly integrated countries. Globalization now faces a long list of problems, including but not limited to rising inequality, environmental degradation, the disappearance of local cultures and subsequently the emergence and collision between identities and various other related conflicts. As China's path presented an unconventional

way of joining the global system compared to what was recommended by Western institutions, the Chinese model of development was phrased as the "Beijing Consensus" by Joshua Cooper Ramo (Ramo 2004). He identified the following three characteristics of the Beijing Consensus. First, it does not follow a dogmatic line of thought as recommended by Western institutions, instead it is characterized by policies and guidelines that resemble improvisation, a trial-and-error approach, founded on Deng Xiaoping's pragmatism – the adaptation of global capitalism to existing socio-economic conditions. Second, it breaks down the measures of economic development beyond GDP measures, considering various other aspects including but not limited to the development of key industries and social well-being that are not reflected in purely economic figures. This perspective gives an all-round picture where the state plays the primary role in the development process that considers overall development and all the other aspects as well as economic, including those of socio-political development. Third, the "Beijing Consensus" as a reaction to the Western model that prioritizes local conditions, with a strong emphasis on sovereignty and decision-making independent of imposed policy proposals promoted by international institutions like the World Bank, IMF and WTO.

Though mainly an economic process, globalization often features aspects beyond just economic interactions. The two other aspects that follow economic globalization are cultural and political globalizations. While the two are often interlinked, it is necessary to draw a distinction between them, because they generally tend to refer to different things. I will start with political globalization. In the simplest terms, this refers to a trend towards multilateral global governance with global institutions such as the United Nations, World Bank, IMF and the WTO, with a subsequent effect on nation-states, strengthening democratic institutions and building an all-round global civil society supported by emerging international non-governmental organizations. The 1990s saw a mood that was going in this direction, where American-style liberal democracies were supposed to sweep the world. Today, such a forceful transition is already in decline as China poses its alternative in the "Beijing Consensus" development model, which is both economic as well as statist

in its authoritarian form. As a result, as China is expanding its influence exporting capital as FDI in the Global South as well as to countries that have been boycotted by Western powers as it seeks to strategically accumulate wealth, integrating these countries into a China-centered supply chain, thus breaking down American-led global capitalism and strengthening its posture in the geopolitical landscape. Once we understand the global economic condition, it is therefore clear to understand China's motivation behind the BRI. The BRI therefore, though it accelerates capitalist development in the host countries further integrating them with global capitalism, also breaks down the previous balance of power, therefore strengthening China's posture in global capitalism. The BRI can then be seen as an increased effort to integrate and economically connect countries of the Global South with China and, with that connection established, to win support in the international community as well as to build up cultural and political bonds for more comprehensive relations in the future.

Postmodernity in Effect

In this chapter, I will examine how the postmodern condition was already noticeable prior to China's increased presence not only in the economic world but also in the political and cultural realms in the extended list of BRI countries. I will argue that ever since Mongolia entered global capitalism it has received supplementary forces that come in the forms of a cultural and political package, consuming and digesting the rhetoric and narratives that came in various forms. Within thirty years of such dogmatic development, Mongolia has already built up what are in many ways still shaky institutions and it has established an ethos of the liberal democratic system with a free-market economy. It took around thirty years and a still ongoing process by which knowledge and other cultural frameworks are transmitted via its connectedness both physically and virtually thanks to the development of communication technology. These channels were opened for the first time when Mongolia declared itself a democracy, opening its market with the intent to participate in the globalist movement that was taking place at the end of the Cold War. As mentioned in the previous section, though

by no means a country with little significance in global production, as Mongolia should be described as entering the later stage of capitalism, I would argue that the overwhelming effect of communication technology has forcefully dragged the country into what can be described as a postmodern condition characterized by an overflow of information through signs and representations. In addition to the previous advances in telecommunications technologies of satellite TV and personal computers, since 1995 Mongolia has been connected to the worldwide web followed by social and other personalized forms of media. In the 2019 figures, Facebook, the most popular social media platform in Mongolia, had 2.2 million users in a country of three million – nearly 70 percent of its population (Ankhtuya 2019). The Facebook/Cambridge Analytica data scandal in 2018 revealed potential ties to the Mongolian presidential election of 2017, when Mongolia was included in the long list of countries that had cooperated with Cambridge Analytica (UK House of Commons 2020). Examples such as these show that Mongolia is fully integrated into the globalized system not only via its economic relations but also in other realms of information circulation. It is therefore evident that, as previously described, countries on the peripheries of global capitalism are susceptible to various external forces that shape the ethos within the dominant system of thought. Increased competition between various other different rhetoric and narratives that flow into one locality result in a disorientation and loss of meaning – a common attribute that is observed in the postmodern condition.

With postmodernity already in effect, and with an increasing Chinese economic presence in the capacity of the BRI expansion, other aspects that fall into cultural or political expansions are increasingly evident in the countries in the BRI areas. In our case, Mongolia is welcoming another stream of information to add to the current saturated state, opening up an alternative channel of the transmission of ideas through various sources. While these new streams of information are not exceptional in comparison to others that were equally projected to a target society, I have picked up three main attributes of what China brings to the table that contributes to postmodernity.

First, the full package of ideas and models China brings to the discourse can be very easily described as another metanarrative. The systematic and interconnected line of thoughts and ideas behind China's model presents it as an alternative to the current global system. It takes all aspects into consideration: global governance – as a China-centered civilization with economic as well as other socio-political interactions with states that fall beyond its dominion – to its economic model, "the China model of development", and its way of globalization with the BRI, and all simultaneously within global capitalism. As such, its effort at a reappraisal of the global system proposes a clear alternative that poses a stark challenge to the current status-quo. But because postmodernity is described as a decline of metanarratives, the complete package that China presents is there alongside other metanarratives like Christianity, Marxism and liberalism and doomed to exist on equal terms, and when (and if?) successful, left to operate on its own fragmented space only within its sphere of influence.

My second point refers to the increase in the information flow in terms of sheer volume. As the PRC today finds itself confronting the West in many respects, it generates an equal amount of information (if not greater), and actively generates alternatives on each front in order to balance its posture on the world stage. With an expected increase in economic and political strength in the near future, its overseas information circulation is expected to grow even further. We are already witnessing such a trend, as Chinese-generated information is easily visible not only in its immediate neighbors and countries in the Global South but is also very much active in the Western countries, where a fragmentation of society based on various identities is very evident. The exploitation of different groupings based on political leanings as well as different identities is one of the tactics by which China approaches a fragmented West. In addition to the presence of Chinese state-run media in everyday discourse in Western societies, there are other subtle forms of information circulation. The most recent and notable cases of this subtle messaging often go through new forms of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Tiktok.

The last point on the way in which China further saturates postmodernity is the very nature of how the Chinese party-state coordinates its all-round external

activities with a larger toolkit and resources. Unlike Western liberal democracies, which have only a limited role in projecting and conveying their ideas and messages mainly through official channels and often through cultural diplomacy, the PRC on the other hand, controls the entire flow of information that goes abroad and carefully orchestrates and controls its circulation. Even as China's vibrant societies concentrated in the new urban centers generate a comparable load of cultural expressions and products that are on par with Western-originated popular-culture resources, state supervision and various forms of direct and indirect interventions with corrective measures result in tamed and circumcised end-products that strictly follow the party guidelines. While certain themes and features are permitted, when it comes to content production there are therefore no-go zones for artists and intellectuals to express any sort of subversive and critical stance of the party and state. As a result, receptors in the foreign localities are only exposed to very specific filtered "China stories" that align with party-state interests following the official line.

Today, all three points can be spotted in Mongolian news circulation and increasingly in the online sphere. All of the official media outlets from Global Times (*Delkhiin tsag*) to CRI (*Khyatadyn olon ulsyn radio*) are available in Mongolian language feeding the Mongolian public with its curated information flow. Its delivery of its information is found in different formats from short pieces to more subtle lifestyle-oriented presentations in the forms of popular in China livestreams often with Inner Mongolian and Mongolian hosts with standard Khalkha dialect. In addition to official channels, there are various other unofficial channels that transmit information both by design and by gradual organic flow of information given its increasing economic and cultural appeal.

With these three in combination, the societies that I have referred throughout this study with the example of Mongolia, those that are entering postmodernity with its information overload between competing and conflicting ideas are now left to apprehend another stream of polished and more organized ideas that directs at them in a very coordinated way.

Conclusion

I opened this paper by arguing that "postmodernity" – a cultural condition that was observed in the Western industrialized societies in the latter half of 20th century – was visible 30 years after the end of the Cold War in the countries that have been newly integrated into global capitalism. Although historically separate, two of the main three descriptions that are often found in describing postmodernity contributed to this conclusion. One of these is the rejection of metanarratives which has been witnessed not once but twice in the case of Mongolia. The first such rejection occurred after the end of the socialist system with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and subsequently socialist Mongolia transitioned into another metanarrative of liberal democracy, with equally utopian ideals of progress and development. However, after 30 years on that route, Mongolia is witnessing the dark side of capitalist development complemented by general dissatisfaction with liberal democracies across the world, of which mediatized representations in the form of Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter and the surge of "democratic socialism" has come to Mongolia through the Internet and smartphones. It would not be a stretch to say that the new metanarrative of liberal democracy is slowly losing its credibility. The other characteristic of postmodernity – the changing nature of the communication system with advent of high-speed new technologies – has swept through Mongolia though physically far from global production, bringing it closer to the global postmodern sea of representations, signs and images. With the Internet and smart devices, Mongolians are today very much connected to the global discourse, as they are technologically capable of absorbing and making sense of the floating and sometimes targeted information flow coming at them. I have also argued that China's efforts to strengthen its position in the global system have generated all-round activities across the world embodied in China's proposed ambitious Belt and Road Initiative – a complete set of strategy and policy proposals in the form of infrastructure development and financing, mainly in the countries of the Global South, of what can be considered as an alternative to Western-led globalization. In doing so, China does not pose a threat to global capitalism,

instead it accelerates its expansion into previously marginalized countries while strengthening its own posture in the global capitalist system.

In the final part, I have tried to show how the sheer force of Chinese activities further saturates and adds to the existing postmodern condition rather than overthrowing it and providing any kind of emancipatory alternative. I have also attempted broadly to present "the Chinese way of doing things" as another semi-metanarrative with an idealistic and hopeful approach but nevertheless only existing within the global capitalist framework. In conclusion, I argue that the areas on the margins of global capitalism, in our case Mongolia, are most affected by a never-ending stream of contradictory, conflicting and incoherent information that is constantly flowing in their direction. Once we come to such a conclusion, it is easier to grasp the ongoing developments and trends in societies on the peripheries of global capitalism with centers located elsewhere. In conclusion, in the post-industrialized societies where the postmodern condition has already been observed for some time – a field where the fragmentation and dispersion of various streams of ideas and ideologies exist alongside each other in the form of a simulacrum – the same observation can be made in the societies newly-integrated into the global supply chain. At its best, therefore, if we assume that the proposed policies are fully executed completing the physical connection or what can be described as the full integration of the base into global capitalism, the forces that follow – those of superstructure – the BRI will then fragment rather than bind them together into cohesive worldview in the receptive societies. As a result, though the BRI may be able to connect these areas physically, the dispersion and fragmentation within the system are already under way.

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The Silk Road as a Model for the BRI

Shagdarsuren Egshig

Abstract: Roads are dynamic. Among various trade roads such as the Great Inka Road, Steppe Road, Silk Road, Tea Horse Road, Tea Road and Maritime Porcelain Road, the Silk Road has been raised three times in its history. Nomads and merchant communities on Silk Road moved more frequently, they had more opportunities to make pathways. The Mongols established their horse courier stations (Mongolian: *örtöö*) in the vast Eurasian plain during the Mongolian Empire. Through the courier service, letters, oral messages and news passed extremely rapidly. The Mongolian Khans or emperors created a management of trade routes across different countries, providing and protecting peace on the territory. They established the *Pax Mongolia* (Mongol Peace) in various countries. During the time of Mongol Peace, many different commodities, methods of trade, forms of international trade, forms of financial instruments and new payment facilities were originated along the Silk Road. The Mongols "globalized" the world at that time.

Nowadays the People's Republic of China (PRC) is adopting similar operations in its current foreign and economic policies. In 2013, the Chinese president announced the "Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road" strategy; the term was further abbreviated as to the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) expressing a comprehensive economic structure for the land-based economies of Eurasia and sea routes to Europe, Africa and other Asian ports. The concept of the historical Silk Road stays behind the the BRI initiative.

Keywords: Silk Road, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Pax Mongolica, mobility, materiality

Introduction

In the world history there have been many forms of trade roads under the concept of the Silk Road for exchanges of traditions, customs, language and culture. They prosper upon the interest of people along the roads, to trade with other countries to exchange what they have and what they do not. This is the most important motivation behind the emergence of trade-road systems. Important factors that enable such an exchange can be divided into hard and soft factors. Hard factors primarily include the main goods and merchandise, secondly, traders who move the merchandise and, third, roads and pack animals that can carry them. One other hard factor can be centralized commercial cities that lie at the junctions of such roads. A soft factor is the mechanism governing trade relations. Such a mechanism is a soft or invisible connection and formed as a result of human minds. Soft factors include, firstly, monetary and financial systems that enable parties involved in trade to make profit, secondly political stability, peace and a legal system that provides safety for the road, an external environment that ensures risk-free trade, third, road (or infrastructure) and logistics solutions to connect goods, and fourth, a social, cultural and political environment of countries along the road.

In history all hard and soft factors to enable mobility on the trade roads have rarely been favourably fulfilled in all aspects in the during the time of the Silk Road establishment. The aim of this article is to compare hard and soft factors of such revival periods with those of today's New Silk Road (Belt and Road Initiative: BRI).

The Historical and the New Silk Roads

The Historical Silk Road

There were many trade routes in the vast expanses of Eurasia,[1] for instance, for jade, silk, salt, wine, horses and tea. In other parts of the world archaeological and anthropological evidence indicates that roads were important for trade, with both economic and political meaning. In South America, there is the Great Inka Road,[2] which runs along the Andes and passes through Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina and Chile today, with many crossings all leading to the ancient capital, Cusco. There were ancient Roman roads[3] in North Africa as well.

There is a tradition of naming the road after its main merchandise carried on it. It is rare to name a road after a merchant or a place name, but naming after merchandise is common.

Ferdinand von Richthofen's map puts the Tarim Basin at the centre, the Altai Mountains in the north, the lower part of two Chinese Great Tails in the east, Tibet in the south, and the Pamir Mountains in the west. East Turkestan on the whole was considered as part of Central Asia. By examining the relationship between human social development and natural landscape formation, the literature introduced "Silk Road"[4] terminology, noting the movement of silk over centuries. Today the name has become an emblem for multinational tourism, business and various projects around the world.

Von Richthofen (1833–1905), who in 1877 first mentioned the term "Silk Roads", noticed that the most reasonable and free roads were established based on the human needs of the trade process over centuries. There are such roads

1   Egshig Sh, Gereltuv D, Sukhbaatar O, Badral Yo, *Tsainy zam* [Tea Road], (Ulaanbaatar: Munkhiin useg, 2016), 11.

2   Mendieta, Ramiro Matos & José Barreiro. *Inka Administration on the Road and along the Cord, The Great Inka Road: Engineering an Empire*, (Washington, DC, and New York: National Museum of the American Indian in association with Smithsonian Books, 2015), 61.

3   Goodchild. R. G, *The Roman Roads and Milestones of Tripolitania*, Tripoli: Department od antiquities, British Military Administration, 1948.

4   Richthofen, Ferdinand von. "Über die zentralasiatischen Seidenstrassen bis zum 2. Jh. n. Chr" [On the Central Asian Silk Roads until the 2nd century A.D.]. Verhandlungen der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin (in German). 1877 (4): 96–122.

everywhere in the world, both within and across countries. The British historian Susan Whitfield wrote "Movement of the objects – including people – is essential to the concept of the Silk Road",[5] and she added: "a complex issue of materiality is the question of where, by whom, and for whom things were made. Technologies, materials, fashions and craftsmen all travelled – I would argue this is an important characteristic of the Silk Road […] the majority of such objects – everyday or luxury, traded or not, have long disappeared; food, wine, and medicines were consumed; slaves, elephants, and horses died; textiles, wood, and ivory decayed; glass and pottery were broken".[6] Another argument she made was to question the accuracy of the name "Silk Road", as it is not just silk that has been transported on this road, but various types of merchandise at different periods in history. Hence, Susan Whitfield, highlighted two main points in defining the Silk Road. Firstly, a road refers to a movement. Without merchandise, goods and movement, there will be no conception of trade roads, and as such, depending on the nature, origin and where the demand and needs of such merchandise lie, they are moved by people. Secondly, the intensity of activities of trade roads depends on the nature of each good, piece of merchandise and materials transported.

The origin of the Silk Road is attributed to the Khotans,[7] who contributed greatly to the history of Eurasia. Especially the lapis lazuli from Badakhshan Mountain in Khotan was traded in the settlement cities over 3000 years ago. It is highly probable that the Khotans were one of the early traders along the Silk Road. According to the Ukrainian scientist L. A. Mamleeva, during the Hunnic period the trade route stretched from the Roman Empire in the west to Korea in the east.[8] In fact, it was

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5   Whitfield, Susan, *Silk, Slaves, and Stupa: Material culture of the Silk Road.* (Oakland: California University Press 2018), 3.

6   Whitfield, Susan, *Silk, Slaves, and Stupas*, (2018), 3-4.

7   Liu, Xinru, "Migration and settlement of the Yuezhi-Kushan: Interaction and Interdependence of Nomadic and Sedentary Societies", *Journal of World History*, Volume 12, No.2 (Fall 2001), 261-262.
     Jeong, Su-il, "Khotan". In *The Silk Road Encyclopedia, Gyeongsangbuk-do: Korea Institute of Civilizational Exchanges.* (2016), 457-459.

8   Mamleeva, L.A., *Formation of Great Silk Road in the system of transcivilization interaction of the peoples of Eurasian.* Vita Antiqua. No.2. Kiev: Society of Archeology and Anthropology (1999), 53-61.

a trade road over 2000 years ago extending from one end of the mainland to the other, reaching the sea at both ends.

In the 138 BC and 119 BC, the ambassador messenger Zhang Qian (张骞), who was appointed to the west by the Emperor of the Han dynasty, was captured by Chanyu (单于) of the Xiongnu people and imprisoned there for several years, having children with a Xiongnu woman (匈奴). The route he took later became the central line of the Silk Road and established the largest trade route for China with countries from south-east to the west. This happened during the Western Han Dynasty (202 BC to around AD 25). A scholar from the family of historian scholars[9] in the Eastern Han Dynasty, Ban Chao (班超), abandoned the writing of history and engaged in war lasted 30 years with Huns, who controlled trade relations with countries in the west. He later managed to bring lands of Kashgar, Luolan and Khotan under Han administration in short period of time by military and diplomatic means.

Afterwards, selected western-related parts of the "History of Wei" (魏略) and the "History of Han Dynasty" were translated[10] by Western scholars. For instance, the translation and comparison of China and the Roman Orient by the German scholar Friedrich Hirth is still of great importance. In 1905, the French sinologist, Édouard Chavannes translated these history books and recalled the names of locations along the road to their original languages from Chinese, which is considered of great significance. For this reason, it is apparent that the "Silk Road" connecting Central Asia with western countries took shape before the current era. From

9   吴树平，2007《东观汉记校注》，中华书局，《后汉书》卷四十七 <班梁列传·班超> 57页
     Egshig, Sh., "The Silk Road" created by Mongols and New Silk Road concept", International Conference on Asian Studies (ICAS 2015). Compilation Vol.I , (Ulaanbaatar: Udam Soyol Publishing Co. 2015), 158-163.

10   Hirth, Friedrich, *China and the Roman Orient.* Shanghai and Hong Kong. Unchanged reprint, (Chicago, Ares Publishers 1885), 1975.
     Chavannes Édouard "Les pays d'Occident d'après le Wei lio." *T'oung pao 6* (1905), 519–571.
     Hill, John E. *The Peoples of the West from the Weilüe* 魏略 *by Yu Huan* 魚豢: *A Third Century Chinese Account Composed between 239 and 265 CE.* Draft annotated English translation, 2004.
     Yu, Taishan. *A History of the Relationships between the Western and Eastern Han, Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties and the Western Regions.* Sino-Platonic Papers No. 131 (March, 2004). Dept. of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania.

Chinese history sources, the Xiongnu (匈奴) took this road under their protection and certain duties were levied on outsiders, who travelled only with the consent of the Xiongnu.

The mindset of nomads is also dynamic, as they are in constant movement. Some researchers have traced the origin of the Silk Road in the steppe and recorded Venus figurines found from the Pyrenees up to 10,000 years ago to Lake Baikal as evidence of the Steppe Road.[11] Nonetheless, the road's development was particularly prominent at certain phases in history. The main links of the trade route connecting the west to the east were the Scythians in the eighth century BC, the Xiongnu[12] in the fourth century BC, the Göktürks in the sixth century AD, and the Mongols in the thirteenth century AD. All of these were horsemen, meaning that in these periods the roads was under control of nomads.

Ögödei Khan (1186–1241), the successor to the throne of the Mongol Empire from 1228 to 1241, sent relay horses and established the *Örtöö*[13] station centres, appointing informers and governors in all directions of the settlement cities. It was reported that the travelling representatives had several ranks, including messengers, ambassadors, merchants, apostles or traders, who travelling through *Örtöö* stations

11 Jeong, Su-il. *Prologue: Steppe Road, The Heart of Northern Eurasian Nomadic Civilization, SILK ROAD The Photographic Silk Road-Steppe Road,* Seoul: Gyeongsangbuk-Do, (Korea Institute of Civilizational Exchanges 2019), 10-17.

12 Kim, Hyun Jin. *Nomads? The Huns a heterogeneous agro-pastoralist society*, The Huns, (Routledge, London & New York: Taylor & Francis Group 2016), 4.

13 Örtöös are settled gers and other types of accommodation in territory of other countries, established by ordinance of the state or local governor along the road for travellers to stay, dine, and exchange riding livestock. Örtöös are located at around 30 miles apart taking into account natural formations, wells, and water sources. At that time Örtöös were called *zam* (road). The Great Khan khanate, the Golden Horde, the Chagatai and Ilkhanates were connected by roads throughout the empire. State and local rules of *Örtöös* were passed and implemented.The Örtöö administration was responsible for appointing '*zam*' ('yam'- 'ямъ-' in ancient Russian, '　' in Chinese), monitoring escape, collecting tax, ensuring safety, supplying food and accommodation for messengers travelling through them.

were provided with gold, silver, bronze and wooden *gerege*[14] signboards according to their rank. The Mongolian empire,[15] represented more than a hundred million people in an area of 33 million square kilometres, covering 16% of the world territory.

The *Örtöö* courier system of the Mongols was much broader than the Silk Road. The continental Silk Road was a customary trade route that was often used for hauling goods, with fewer barriers, and for cattle, while *Örtöö* stations were designed for administrative purposes such as sending news, tax collection and registration within the territory of the empire.

The *Pax Mongolica*[16] covered the whole empire, not just the Silk Road, with a framework of equal nations with the peaceful coexistence of one governing, non-racial, cultural, language and ethnic groups. It also created favourable conditions for new concepts and discovery of trade and economics. It is believed that traders' wealth and substantial capital was due to the absence of war, permitting the development of international trade and the advent of new forms of exchange, e.g.

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14   *Gerege* is a Mongolian word for "Certifying Sign". Gerege had writing in their front and back. Gereges written in Mongol, Square [Dürvüljin], Khitan, hieroglyph scripts have been found. On one side it said "Under the Power of Eternal Sky and the blessing of Great Intelligence", on the other side it showed who issued it, whether Khans of Genghis Khan's descendant, or governor of hundredth, thousandth, or ten thousandth, and their ordinance. The weight of Gerege varied, it usually has rectangular shape, *gereges* issued for military purposes had a round shape.

15   *Mongol Empire*, ResCap Mongolia 101.2011.01.24 (Resource Investment Capital) http://mongoliagrowthgroup.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/ResCap_Mongolia101.pdf Accessed June 29, 2020.

16   *Pax Mongolica*: The concept that all states and countries coexist equally in peace, under one rule, with no discrimination against race, language, culture or nation. This system created favourable conditions for the development of new concepts of trade and economics. As they were exempt from tax, monasteries bloomed and had many servants. As a result of the co-existence of nations, literature, art, painting and crafts flourished, the different languages were enriched by foreign words and masterpieces were created. Bira, Shagdar, "The Mongol Empire in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: East-West Relations". *The Silk Roads: Highways of Culture and Commerce*, (Vadime Elisseeff. Paris: Berghahn, 2000).
Weatherford, Jack, Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004), 118–119.
Abu-Lughod, Janet, *Before European Hegemony: the world system AD 1250–1350*. (New York: OUP, 1989), 356–357.
Allsen,Thomas, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia*, (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 5.

land payment instruments began to use paper money[17] instead of moving and storing heavy coins, with bills of exchange, promissory notes and even initial forms of banking.

The New Silk Road

The idea of building a New Silk Road was first put forward in 1994 by the then Prime Minister of the State Council of China, Li Peng[18], during a visit to four former Soviet republics in Central Asia. He emphasized that "we should modernize the Silk Road together and expand Asia's economic and cultural ties with Europe."[19]

China began paying attention to relations with countries that declared their independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. In December of the same year, in order to study markets for trade with Central Asia, a Chinese delegation led by the Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation visited Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In 1992 the Premier of the PRC himself opened an international trade fair in Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, as well as a railway connecting Urumqi and Alma-Ata being in the same year.[20]

During his 1994 visit Li Peng notet that the idea of historical Silk Road solution was the right approach to deepen China's trade and economic links? with Central

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17 Rules for printing paper currencies and the use of banknotes for local transactions in North China were approved by the order of Ögödei Khaan.
Delgerjargal, Purevsuren. Ed. "Trade policy of Great Mongol Empire", In *History of Mongol Empire*, Volume I, (Ulaanbaatar: Steppe Publishing, 2019), 615.
The Book of Sir Marco Polo: The Venetian Concerning Kingdoms and Marvels of the East Volume 1, translated and edited by Colonel Sir Henry Yule (London: John Murray, 1903).
http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/figures/ser_xxiv.pdf Accessed June 29, 2020.

18 Li Peng (李鹏 1928–2019) Premier of P.R. China (1987–1998).

19 Liang Zhenpeng, Chinese diplomacy in Central Asia in the 1990s, Social and political sciences, 2017, No.1, 17-21.
Duo Guoli, Chang Kai, The emphasis needs to be emphasis on trade resource, Interview with Yao Pei, former Chinese Ambassador to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (Shijie Bolan, 2013(19), 38.)

20 Babak Vladimir, 2000. Astana in the triangle of Moscow-Washington-China: Kazakhstan-China relations, Central Asia and The Caucasus No.7 (13) (Lulea: CA&C Press AB, 2000)
https://www.ca-c.org/journal/cac-07-2000/19.babak.shtml Accessed August 28, 2020

Asia and cooperate with Central Asian countries in leveraging on their enormous mineral resources and raw materials.

In September 2013, President Xi Jinping made official visits to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan, and officially announced the construction of a "New Silk Road Economic Corridor"[21]. Addressing the Indonesian parliament on an official state visit on 3 October in the same year he said: "The region of Southeast Asia was an important node on the Silk Road by sea from early times, and China would like to strengthen its maritime cooperation with ASEAN countries. Let us use the China-ASEAN Sea Cooperation Fund of the China-ASEAN countries to develop a maritime partnership, and to develop the 21st Century "Maritime Silk Road"[22] together."

China realized that an international trade-route system is one feasible variant for achieving multiple objectives at the same time, such as maintaining its economic advancement, integrating into the global economy, opening up new markets and exploring new economic opportunities. The successful implementation of the "Belt and Road" policy would have several benefits for China. First, it could offer balanced stability in international relations through cooperation and mutual benefits with the countries integrating into the New Silk Road. Second, it could largely benefit from constructing mainland railways and gas pipelines as well as sea transport. The investment would support and somehow control the China's current economic growth. Third, as part of this policy, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank was set up in 2015 to finance construction work and by 2018 it accounts as the half of the investment in the world's leading economies. With the initiative by President Xi Jinping, they have also launched funding for the "Silk Road Foundation" and the "Belt and Road" projects. These are said to be the financial guarantees for the implementation of "Belt and Road Initiative" policy.

21   ibid.

22   An important speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Indonesian Parliament, http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/xjpynghyj/index.htm Accessed June 29, 2020.

Hard and Soft Factors of the Silk Road in the "Belt and Road Initiative"

Trade roads are historical phenomena with certain factors and regularities. It has been observed that different trade roads had emerged with their own unique features in different periods of history and have disappeared in time once they have played their roles. The fact that among number of trade routes, the Silk Road is specifically becoming a topic today as a modern version of it. It has been recorded that the Silk Road has been revived three times in world history[23]. Some others suggest there were more than that.

What are the common traits and factors among these many trade roads? By revealing their features and identifying trade roads, we will be able to re-establish a similar trade road now and in the future. By finding out common and important factors we can re-plan it by levering on our social technological development and achievements.

Soft factors can be defined as set of human knowledge that in time was realized in solutions and systems. For example, thinking about the replacement of barter exchange one came up with the idea of money, as an abstract idea. In time, the use of money expanded into profit making, saving, accumulating wealth, and in ancient times, sea shells, coral, pearls, gold, silver, copper and brass functioned as money. Today forms of money further developed as paper currencies, cheques, payment cards and electronic money. In other words, soft factors were realized in physical objects.

Goods and merchandise: Archaeological evidence suggests that the pharaohs of Egypt bought precious gems from Khotans, transported through the earlier Silk Road. The gem mine of Badakhshan[24] mountain was long a site from where kings/emperors of Ancient Egypt, the Byzantine and Roman empires and ancient India obtained precious gems.

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23 Silk Road / Trade route: Encyclopedia Britannica edited by Amy McKenna
   https://www.britannica.com/topic/Silk-Road-trade-route

24 Jeong Su-il, "Badakhshan". In *The Silk Road Encyclopedia*, (Gyeongsangbuk-do: Korea Institute of Civilizational Exchanges, 2016), 87.

Transporting silk along the Silk Road, the Xiongnu imposed a silk duty on settled peoples in the south and to re-exported it to the west. Only after opening the border in the Western part (西域) during the Han Dynasty (汉朝), did China start trading its silk itself. Although silk was the main goods of trade transported along the Silk Road, other goods such as spices, perfumes, medicinal herbs, precious gems, textiles, carpets, colors, glass, porcelain, glazed ware, iron, copper, brass pots, deer musk etc. were transported by land road and by sea. At some point demand for resin increased so much that it became the main raw material for perfumes. Spices and seasoning travelled from India, Arabia and Central Asia to all around the world, with the Spice Road existing from the beginning of the millennium. According to the chronological list of foreign words in Chinese, the names of many spices became known to the Chinese by the start of the A.D. Chinese vocabulary was enriched by these words.[25]

What goods were transported along trade roads in the Mongolian Empire times? At that time, a quota on certain goods was imposed in order to supply the needs of the Mongolian Empire. For example, paper and vermillion for palace use were duties imposed on Korea.[26] The quality and appearance of the goods improved: e.g. one important period of Chinese porcelain development, the era of blue and white porcelain,[27] occurred during the Yuan dynasty. The policy was to supply better raw material than the Jingdezhen porcelain. Kublai Khan controlled strategic goods such as salt, tea and alcohol[28] and made a significant profit from it. Merchants from many nations freely transported goods they needed, sold and purchased freely

25 Wang Li, *History of Chinese vocabulary*, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2013.), 163-165.

26 Chuluunbat S, "A letter from the king of the Goryeo to Kublai Khan of the Khökh empire in 1227", *Foreign Languages and Culture Studies* Vol. 430 (19) (2015), 228.
Sumiyabaatar B, *Mongolia Korea relations documents of XIII-XIV centuries*, 1st ed. Ulaanbaatar: Academia of Science Publishing, 1978)

27 Making blue and white porcelain began at the Jingdezhen kilns of Yuan, China (1271–1368), and rapidly advanced and spread to Korea, Vietnam, and Japan, developing differently according to each country's unique aesthetics.
Kang Dae-gyu, *In Blue and White: Porcelain of the Joseon Dynasty*, (Seoul: National Museum of Korea 2015), 11.

28 Delgerjargal, P. ed, "Tribute and taxes, Great Mongol as Great Yuan", *History of Mongol Empire*, Vol. I, (Ulaanbaatar: Steppe Publishing, 2019), 292.

and engaged in free trade. Historical sources frequently mention that merchants trusted by the khans and queens enjoyed special privileges.

Merchants: Merchants were always on the move, they had got to see and hear many things first hand, so they were distinguished as people with more information and knowledge of that time. Historical literature noted that the Khans and lords, encouraged merchants to obtain information for them, bought their goods and ensured their travel safety. Using this advantage, merchants quickly became wealthy and in turn they created links for gathering information. Some merchants became close counsellors of the khans and royals in foreign countries. They contributed to improving trade route conditions and management, and cultivated good relationships with local people. The most famous merchant of the Silk Road was Marco Polo, who became popular for his notes and records of his journey. There are also notes by the envoys Plano Carpini and W. Rubruck.[29]

Roads and infrastructure: Routes and paths are created when people and livestock regularly find their ways around obstacles and geographic formations. These paths are the basis of today's infrastructure. Many modern roads are constructed along a path that people and livestock took for travel or carriage. Clearly, many modern roads based on science and technology are not built along historical roads. Roads are built for many purposes, including connecting cities and towns, connecting factories with sources of raw materials. Roads act as rivers that flow in both directions, whereas cities and towns are like lakes. Building roads that connect towns creates mobility, which clears and develops the towns in the same way as rivers replenish and clear lake water.

As camel caravans travelled on the historic Silk Road, roads usually went around high mountains and deep rivers and were fairly free of obstacles. As safety on the road was ensured, messengers, merchants were rarely held up, and were able to calculate in advance the distance and travel time depending on the *Örtöö* stations and road conditions. In the thirteenth century, the *Örtöö* stations' infrastructure

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29 Hakluyt Richard. (MDCCCCIII). *The texts and versions of John de Plano Carpini and William de Rubruquis*. London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society. (Cambridge: Printed by J. and C.F. Clay at the University Press, 1903) https://archive.org/stream/textsversionsofj00hakluoft?ref=ol#page/n13/mode/2up Accessed August 28, 2020.

was well developed so that persons and horses and other livestock were able to rest, be fed, and take on food supplies. During Mönkh Khaan's (1209–1259) reign, an administrative organization[30] for managing the *Örtöö* stations was created.

Livestock for riding, carrying and hauling: Livestock for riding, carrying, and hauling vehicles on the Silk Roads are a reflection of the development of vehicles of the time. Many countries standardized the length between the wheels of a cart and the ground clearance. For instance, the Qin Dynasty (秦 BCE 221-207), determined that length between wheels of a cart as six *chi* (尺) or 138.6 centimetres.[31] Mongolians also had a standardized size for height of a cartwheel, as was noted in *Secret History of Mongols*, in the section on the Mongolians' battle with the Tatars.[32] Mongolians bred camels, cows and horses for centuries and used them for riding and as pack animals. Mongolians used to encamp in a *khüree*[33] or circle. Forming a *khüree* had strict rules. The Khan's *ger*[34] (yurt) was to be located at the centre of the circle and others were to encamp in circles around it. When they needed to move, everyone transported their *gers* and the entire city moved to a new location together. Livestock was well trained for riding and *ger* carts were pulled by cattle. The carts' harnesses were made of leather and hair, and transport issues were well arranged independently. The people who move an entire city or town created a system and logistic solutions to transport trade from the east coast of Asia to centralized trading cities in the west, a system that was perfected during the reign of Ögödei Khan.

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30 Delgerjargal, Purevsuren. ed, "Trade policy, Yehe Mongol Ulus", In *History of the Mongol Empire*, Vol. II, (Ulaanbaatar: Steppe publishing, 2019), 616-618.

31 Road network and unification of cart axle width in Qin dynasty：
https://chiculture.org.hk/sc/china-five-thousand-years/462

32 MHT §154 (Secret History of Mongols)

33 *Khuree*: Medieval *ger* (*please see the explanation of 'ger'-yurt below*) camps were commonly arranged in a *khuree* (circle), with the leader's *ger* in the centre. Khurees were replaced by a neighbourhood arrangement in the 13th and 14th centuries during the Mongol Khanate. https://infogalactic.com/info/Architecture_of_Mongolia. Accessed June 19, 2020.

34 *Ger*: Traditional Mongol dwelling designed to be light enough for Mongolian nomads to carry, flexible enough to fold-up, pack and assemble, sturdy enough for multiple dismantling and reassembly as well as easy for regulating temperatures inside. https://www.amicusmongolia.com/mongolia-ger-mongolia-yurt.html

Monetary and financial systems: Money has taken many forms in history, changing as well as coexisting with of many other forms. Despite its many forms, its feature of exchangeability with merchandise will never change. Trade routes are associated with risks related to time and space, whereas money as a payment instrument is associated with maintaining and safeguarding it. Thus, many new initiatives, ideas and new forms of money have emerged over time. The emergence of money eased barter and made trade more flexible. However, for centuries money was in the form of heavy metal coins[35] that were not easy to carry and maintain. Some coins could not function as payment in other countries, i.e. were not convertible or exchangeable. At that time, Mongolians issued and distributed monetary bills under the name of the Great Khan,[36] which could be used anywhere on the territory of the empire. Later they created paper currencies, the significance of which was revolutionary in the history of payment instruments.

Road safety and the legal system: The Silk Road was at times safe, peaceful road across the vast Eurasian landmass, but in times of regional conflict it became risky to transport merchandise on it. Merchants therefore opted to send their goods by sea, and roads and paths on dry land faded and disappeared. During the second revival of the Silk Road, Mongolians ensured the safety of its travellers. They maintained the road, planted tall trees to provide shade and had security guards at the *Örtöö* stations to protect caravans,[37] so providing conditions for trade to thrive and for other people to travel freely at the time.

35   Helen Wang, "The Silk Road and Eastern Central Asia: Money on the Silk Road".; The Evidence from Eastern Central Asia to c. AD800, (London: British Museum Press, 2004), 46-47.

36   Delgerjargal, P. ed, "Monetary policy, Ulus of Zuchi", In *History of the Mongol Empire*, Vol. III, (Ulaanbaatar: Steppe Publishing, 2019), 238-250.
     Mongols: An Empire of Cavalry Which Ruled the World (XII-XVII centuries), 1st edited by Bayarsaikhan D., (Ulaanbaatar: Monsudar, 2016), 181-183.

37   *The Book of Sir Marco Polo: The Venetian Concerning Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, Volume 1, translated and edited by Colonel Sir Henry Yule (London: John Murray, 1903).
     http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/figures/ser_xxvi.pdf. Accessed June 29, 2020.

Although the Mongolian *Ikh Zasag*[38] (Great Law) has not come down to us in its original form, researchers noted the following provisions were about international trade, religion, stationery and taxes. For instance:

The high priest and disciples of any religion are exempt from
ordinary duty and customs"
"Do not discredit the apostle"
"It is requisite to protect cross-border trade"
"Be respectful of any religion. But no religion can claim
privileges"

However, for the native Mongols, this law provided a legal provision by which the king/khan required a highly vigilant, internally militarized organization with a vertical administrative structure and strict discipline. The governing system known as the *Ikh Zasag* therefore served the Greater Mongolian Empire fairly and equally, while the law enforcement activities were supervized by the Mongols themselves, installing guards in each region.

Road logistics and management: In creating *Örtöö* stations, Mongolians used the experience of the passage of information and physical things used in the vast steppes. The Mongols provided messengers gold, silver, copper, brass and wood *Gereges* that certified they were messengers of the Khan, and also allowed them to receive service according to their rank along to road and at the *Örtöö* stations. The messenger used the *Gerege* issued by the Khan in order to stay at the *Örtöö* stations. Each *Örtöö* had horsemen who tended horses ready for a switch, and resident staff to prepare food and accommodation for the guests. The operating costs of such *Örtöö* stations was funded by the central and local administration in accordance with precise rules, and security guards, and military units were assigned for protection.

38   Sodbileg Ch, *History of Yehe Yuan Ulus founded by Mongols*, 1st ed. (Ulaanbaatar: "Bembi san" Publishing Co., 2010), 423.

Towns at the road junctions: Any branch of the Silk Road passes through a centralized commercial city or town. These included Samarkand, Bukhara, Constantinople, Rey, Tabriz, Sarai, Damascus, Merv, Almaliq, Yarkand, Karakorum, Khanbaliq, and Xanadu. Each had its unique customs and traditions, languages and culture depending on the ethnicity, and accordingly could supply unique goods as well as having a demand for merchandize. As a result of long-standing trade such practices had become customary. A similar trait in all the cities along the Silk Roads is that they all offered travellers accommodation and a system for preserving and protecting their goods.[39]

Social and cultural bases: Morris Rossabi mentions four legacies[40] left by Genghis, noting that he supported Mongolia's great tolerance, literacy, world trade and crafts, and that he established the *Ikh Zasag* legal system.

Studying the remains of Sarai city,[41] researchers discovered evidence of an interesting coexistence of multiple ethnic groups and found number of artefacts and literary heritage. Nomadic art and culture were enriched by the influence of settled people's culture. The Yuan theatre (元曲), a form of plays (元杂剧),[42] which khans and aristocrats much enjoyed, developed in the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368). That period was one of the golden eras in the Chinese literary history. As Mongolian aristocrats became wealthy, they affected the development of culture of porcelain, tapestry, weaving, embroidery and carving. Going into battle, Mongol khans wore *deels*[43] made of silk interwoven with golden threads, a technique Mongolians learnt

39   *The Book of Sir Marco Polo: The Venetian Concerning Kingdoms and Marvels of the East* Volume1, Book Second, part 1, chapter XXII. translated and edited by Colonel Sir Henry Yule (London: John Murray, 1903), 2.
     http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/figures/ser_xxii.pdf. Accessed June 29, 2020.

40   Chinggis khan's four great legacies, Key figures in Mongol history, The Mongols in World history. http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/figures/figu_geng_legacy.htm Accessed June 29, 2020.

41   Delgerjargal, Purevsuren. ed., "Urban construction and Technology". In *Ulus of Zochi, History of Mongol Empire*, Vol. III, (Ulaanbaatar: Steppe Publishing, 2019), 277-284.

42   Cyril Birch, *Yuan Zaju*, An Encyclopaedia of Translation. (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1995), 172-182.
     Crump, J.L. *Chinese Theater in the Days of Kublai Khan*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980).

43   An item of traditional clothing worn by Mongols for centuries.

from Persians. A *deel* made of such "cloth of gold"[44]（纳石失 جسن in Farsi) is cleaned by scorching it over a fire to melt dirt and oil, and was a luxury item, more durable than ordinary silk. Not many kings wore golden *deel* clothes. This is one example of the cultural influences of the Silk Road.

Trading activities under the BRI are coordinated by the Chinese Ministry of Commerce. In order to join the World Trade Organization (WTO), for many years China worked to resolve non-compliance issues and finally joined the WTO in 2001 as the 143rd member. From 1980, China started establishing free economic zones, further establishing the Shanghai free-trade zone, and in 2010 Chinese GDP reached $6 trillion, making China the world's second largest economy, a position it still holds.

China now considers the road, transport and logistics issue as the most important factor in the development of the New Silk Road, and in order to implement the trade process sustainably it has set the objective of establishing six economic corridors: (1) the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor, (2) the New Eurasian Land Bridge, (3) the China-Central Asia-Western Asia Corridor, the (4) the China-Indochina Peninsula, (5) the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and (6) the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Corridor.

It has become a foundation to develop cross-border trade, seek closer ties with countries along the New Silk Road and actively develop trade-route policy further. In December 2019, the Ministry of Commerce and other organizations researched over 20 cities near borders. Based on their findings they devised the "Manual and Rules of Conducting Border Trade"[45] to introduce innovation into trade near borders as well as to approve a list of goods which will not be tax-exempt in border trade. This is a step towards supporting urbanization. The rules apply

44 "Cloth of Gold" with Medallions, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/64101. Accessed August 28, 2020.
     Ethnic style: Mongolian knitted gold thread brocade: using gold as clothing reflects what kind of values? https://www.sohu.com/a/142820257_534763. Accessed August 28, 2020.

45 Head of Foreign Trade Department of the Ministry of Commerce delivers a speech on supporting the innovation-driven development of border trade
     http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/ae/sjjd/201912/20191202919140.shtml.
     Accessed August 28, 2020.

to 20 ports in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, Xinjiang Autonomous Region, Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Yunnan and the Guangxizhuan Autonomous Region and include directives on the digitalization of trade, the introduction of financial and payment instruments and as well as the Chinese digital network in neighboring regions.

There are currently a number of international payment instruments. Chinese officials have understood that in order for the BRI to move forward, an enormous amount of financing will be needed for the infrastructure. They planned well in advance, announcing the establishment of the Silk Road Fund at the 2014 APEC forum in Beijing with assets of $40 billion and also established the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank[46] (AIIB) in 2015. The majority of infrastructure projects along the BRI are financed by local Chinese banks and financial institutions such as the China EXIM Bank and the Development Bank of China rather than by the AIIB. The OECD Business and Finance Prospects report 2018[47] noted that the AIIB is handling a minor part of the investment. This shows that the Silk Road Fund and AIIB do not play big roles in financing the BRI, but China's own banks and financial institutions have greater influence and involvement.

Infrastructure projects of the New Silk Road are currently taking place as cooperative projects with Asian, European and African countries. They aim to test and develop transport and logistic structures during and after the completion of infrastructure development. Of the six economic corridors under the BRI, the China-Pakistan corridor is considered the most efficient; currently infrastructure and transport logistics development are taking place across Pakistan to reach Gwadar port. For other corridors China is trying to work on the basis of existing infrastructure, seeking to use ASEAN+1, the Eurasian Economic Union and the International Rail Network. However, China has not yet proposed cooperation for

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46 Members and Prospective Members of the Bank, about AIIB.
    https://www.aiib.org/en/about-aiib/governance/members-of-bank/index.html.
    Accessed June 29, 2020.

47 China's Belt and Road initiative in the Global Trade, Investment and Landscape. OECD Business and Finance Outlook 2018, 18-21.
    https://www.oecd.org/finance/Chinas-Belt-and-Road-Initiative-in-the-global-trade-investment-and-finance-landscape.pdf. Accessed August 28, 2020.

the larger economic circle of East Asia, which could probably mean that China has no interest in competing or sharing profit with developed economies. China has started discussion on BRI by reaching an agreement during state visits and high-level discussions. It offers infrastructure development and investment to less-developed countries with attractive locations. China is aiming to use the existing infrastructure of ASEAN, the EU and Middle East and connect to their integrated network. Robert Skidelsky emphasized: "the Belt and Road Initiative of China is derived from its inevitable need to devise new foreign policy of economy and politics in order for it to open up new markets to sustain the economic growth. The ideal model for this initiative would be reviving the *Pax Mongolica*."[48]

China is seeking to implement its political, economic and geopolitical policies through its cultural soft power by influencing social and humanitarian environment along the New Silk Road. As defined in the BRI policy document, the framework covers the countries of Asia, Europe and Africa. 67 countries in various economic status, comprising vast territories with huge reserves in the middle.[49]

As of April 2018, China had submitted 173 cooperation documents with 125 countries and 29 international organisations regarding the BRI.[50] BRI information has been made available for the people of 125 countries, and for more than 60 countries where it is to take place the initiative would become indispensable to people's daily lives. In other words, it would concern 63% of the world's population.

48 Elena Holodny, "…Beijing is looking for new countries to which it can export its goods as Western demand slows and China transitions into a consumption-based economy. "China's motive for reviving *Pax Mongolica* is clear," writes Robert Skidelsky, professor emeritus of political economy at Warwick University, referring to the Mongol period of prosperity while controlling an expanse from Southeast Asia to Eastern Europe." PAX MONGOLICA: *The underlying reason why China is going after Central Asia*, Business Insider, 21 June 2015.
https://uk.finance.yahoo.com/news/pax-mongolica-real-reason-china-142958080.html
https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-russia-marriage-by-robert-skidelsky-2015-06?barrier=accessreg. Accessed June 29, 2020.

49 Bayarkhuu Dashdorj, *Shanghai Cooperation Organization & «Belt and Road» China & Russia*, 1st ed. (Ulaanbaatar: Udam Soyol Publishing Co. 2018), 122.

50 China has signed 173 "Belt and Road" cooperation documents with 125 countries and 29 international organizations. 2019-04-18
http://www.xinhuanet.com/2019-04/18/c_1124385792.htm

"The people to people bond[51] provides the public support for implementing the Initiative." Chinese former and current presidents like Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping have stressed that in order to win public support for deepening bilateral and multilateral cooperation there is a need to build "a community of shared future (or *a community of common destiny*[52]) for mankind." It is also inherent in the policies initiated by the previous heads of state to achieve their goals of maintaining the pace of economic development inside the country, connecting with the world economy, opening new markets and discovering new economic opportunities.

The BRI policy document clearly stated that the "people to people bond", strengthening "heart to heart connection between the people", is the social foundation of the Belt and Road development. Li Ziguo, a researcher at the China Institute of International Studies, commented[53] that there are at least three phases of the "heart to heart connection": 1) a phase of people getting to know each other; 2) a phase of mutual trust and friendship; and 3) a phase of unity of destiny. If we look at each of these in detail, the first refers to nations communicating diplomatically, the initiation of relationships between ordinary people, understanding each other's lives and getting to understand the culture and customs of other nations. The second phase is of mutual trust and friendship, where the relationship will deepen and expand to cultural, economic and political relations. In this case, countries are assumed to establish diplomatic relations and communicate equally, in line with practice in international relations.

With the implementation of mega projects within the BRI, connecting continents by land and sea, participating countries are to be interrelated in all aspects, which is the complex union of destiny or the third phase of strengthening "heart to heart

51 Egshig Shagdarsuren, "Belt and Road" initiative and The Pillar of Mongolia-China humanitarian cooperation, the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Mongolia and China: Past, Present and the Future International conference paper's collection, (Ulaanbaatar: Udam Soyol Publishing Co., 2019), 349-358.

52 Mardell, Jacob. *The 'Community of Common destiny' in Xi Jinping's New Era*, The Diplomat, October 25, 2017, https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/the-community-of-common-destiny-in-xi-jinpings-new-era/. Accessed June 29, 2020.

53 Li Ziguo, 2016. "Belt and Road" The power of people to people bonds, «Xinjiang Normal University journal» 2016(3)], http://www.ciis.org.cn/chinese/2016-06/12/content_8825507.htm. Accessed June 29, 2020.

connections". From recent BRI developments, countries that have implemented mega projects in cooperation with China have incurred a debt burden and become connected with one another but not in a positive "heart to heart connection". Failure to earn other nations' trust in the process of developing the Belt and Road infrastructure may negatively affect their trust in its mutual benefit and degree of equal coexistence.

Conclusion

The Silk Road is one form of trade route, and many trade roads in history have been named after the main merchandise they carried. The concept of the trade road is not limited only to the route, but many other factors play a role in realizing it. It has been argued if it is accurate to call all trade routes as the Silk Road.

This paper examines the factors that influence sustainable trade along trade routes by taking the Silk Road as a model for all trade routes, and compare the historical Silk Road with the current situation of the New Silk Road, the Belt and Road Initiative initiated by the People's Republic of China. In doing so, I considered the factors in two types, hard and soft. As the historical Silk Road is a classic system that existed sustainably for relatively long period, I tried to identify the features of factors of that road and used them to analyze the New Silk Road. Regarding hard factors, it can be realized only if all the planned infrastructure of the Belt and Road are complete. However, for soft factors, although policy documents have outlined them correctly, the implementation process is likely to face number of challenges.

Although the planning was done by China initially, factors including mistakes made during the implementation process, China prioritizing profit, and differences of culture and tradition of nations along the road will create difficulties in implementing the project. Among the soft factors, monetary and financial ones have been very well satisfied by China. However, it is likely to face number of challenges relating to security, the legal system, and the social and cultural base. The reason the author took the historical Silk Road as a model is because of the abundance of information on it, making it easier to establish the main factors and the availability of research on which to base comparisons.

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The Animalification of Nationalist Sentiments

Horse, Herder and Homeland Relations in the Construction of Nationalism in Mongolia

Dulam Bumochir

Abstract: This paper is about what I call the animalification of nationalist sentiments, based on stories, poems and films about some runaway horses returned to their birthplace, which Mongolians commonly call the *nutag* (homeland). These stories, poems and films deliver a message that even "Mongol horses" have a sense to love, miss, find and return to their *nutag*, and critiques those involved in mining and other businesses with environmental destruction as being worse than horses. The analogy of man and horse in this paper helps us to understand, first, how Mongolians perceive and explain sources of nationalist sentiment as natural and inevitable and, second, how a sense of nutag shared by both man and animal shapes human-animal relations.

Keywords: nationalism, human-animal relations, homeland, animalification and natural resource protection.

Introduction

This paper is an extension of my two recent articles, one on herd-herder relations based on the example of horse herding, co-authored with Byambabaatar Ichinkhorloo and Ariell Ahearn (Bumochir, Ichinkhorloo and Ahearn 2020), and the other on man and homeland relations and the indigenous cultural resources of nationalist sentiments in Mongolia (Bumochir 2019). In the first paper, to better understand human-animal relationships, we introduce three indigenous concepts such as herd (or animal) *zön* (intuition), *taa* (serenity) and *buyan* (fortune), to show how Mongol herders acknowledge not just animal agency (Philo and Wilbert 2000;

Steward 2009; Heikkinen et al 2011; Horstkotte et al 2017; Fijn 2011, 19; Marchina 2016, 103) but also herd agency. We argue that Mongol herders' acknowledgement of herd agency is the key aspect that shapes horse and horse-herder relationships. In the second paper, in order to better understand Mongolians' relationship with their homeland and nationalist mobilizations against mining, I introduce another indigenous concept, nutag, which means birthplace, homeland and country of origin, to show how Mongolians imagine their relationship with their birthplace and homeland. I argue that the discussion about "the ritual to bury the afterbirth and umbilical cord, and the practice of naming the birthplace *khüis* or *khüist* (umbilical cord that connects child and mother) establishes and declares an understanding that the man-birthplace relationship is 'natural' similar [to] the relationship between mother and child. Thus, I suggest that at the heart of the term *nutag* there is a ritually strengthened and naturalized relationship between person and nature" (Bumochir 2019, 169) or the natural homeland. These arguments in those papers, then made me think critically about the importance of *nutag* in human-animal relations, which was not the main focus of either of my articles. Besides our brief remark on tasks to habituate horses and discussions on how horses become accustomed to the herder, routine and places, in neither of those papers did I (or we) discuss the horse and *nutag* relationships and how Mongolians perceive horses and use them to explain why Mongolians should have nationalist sentiments to love and protect one's *nutag* and *ekh oron* (motherland). This paper therefore attempts to focus more on the missing aspect of *nutag* in human-animal relationships by exploring the tripartite relationship between (1) man and homeland, (2) horse and homeland, and (3) horse-herder and horse relations, and to show how portrayals of these relations trigger nationalist sentiments.

I noticed that not only our paper on horse-horse herder relations, but also other literature tends to have a reductionist approach known as symbiosis. Charles Stépanoff et al. state that: "Discarding the description of North Asian herding exclusively in terms of 'domination', many authors prefer today to use the biological notion of 'symbiosis' (Beach and Stammler 2006; Takakura 2015, 7, 8; Vitebsky and Alekseyev 2014); thus, according to Florian Stammler, Arctic herders establish with

their animals an 'intimate partnership' that is the basis of a 'symbiotic domesticity' (Stammler 2010)" (Stépanoff et al. 2017, 58). In this trend, much of the literature neglects the importance of the accustomed place or the animal attachment to the homeland, or *nutag* in Mongolian, in the consideration of animal domestication and human-animal relationships. For example, according to Sandor Bökönyi, "The essence of domestication is the capture of and taming by man of animals of a species with particular behavioral characteristics, their removal from their natural living area and breeding community, and their maintenance under controlled breeding conditions" (Bökönyi 1989, 22; cited by Fijn 2011, 19). But in Inner and North Asia, there is no "removal from their natural habitat and breeding community," instead it is just the opposite. Herd animals in Inner and North Asia are not removed from their natural habitat, instead they are still in it, while being what Natasha Fijn, calls co-domestic,[1] "in contrast to the intensive, consumer-driven animal husbandry techniques used with 'domestic' animals on Western farms (see Bullier 2005; Noske 1989)" (Fijn 2011, 19). Moreover, Fijn points out that: "The domestication of an animal by humans, forming and making animals into a being of human design, is likely to be a Western concept. There are words in Mongolian that can be translated as applicable to the so-called domestic animals, derived from the animals being part of a domestic sphere (*geriin tejeever*), or associated with the home (*ger*). Mongolians refer to the animals that they herd simply as herd animals (*mal*), or the five kinds of animals (*tavan khoshuu mal*), and to themselves as herders (*malchin*) (Fijn 2011, 18). In her interpretation of co-domestication in Mongolia, she underlines that "herders and herd animals live with each other in shared landscape, inhabiting a co-domestic relationship, ecosocial sphere: the herding encampment (*khot ail*)" (Fijn 2011, 19), which is the main point I intend to address in this paper. What Fijn calls the "shared landscape inhabiting a domestic relationship" or the "ecosocial sphere" is the homeland or *nutag* in Mongolian. In other words, herd animals and herders share an accustomed *nutag*, which sometimes bonds and contributes to shaping

1   "My definition of a co-domestic relationship is the social adaptation of animals in association with human being by means of mutual cross-species interaction and social engagement" (Fijn 2011, 19).

the herder and herd animal relations. Also, Charlotte Marchina et al.'s (2017) recent article The Skull on the Hill, based on archaeological findings, provides empirical materials on what I call the tripartite relationship of horse, herder and homeland.

> *This article studies the modalities of these horse skull repositories within an interdisciplinary approach, combining social anthropology and osteology. The study of the choice of place for the skulls and their associated objects highlights the differentiation processes among the horses as individuals, in relation to their lifetime status. This relation between human and horses unfolds into the landscape, which is invested with numerous ovoo cairns and horse skulls; a reminder that these spaces are shared between humans, horses and invisible entities. In the absence of private land ownership on the Mongolian steppe and in the interest of a balanced coexistence with all the inhabitants of this shared land, we show that the horse skull repositories subtly combine honour to individual horses, respect to the master spirits of the land, and discrete appropriation of territory by herders* (Marchina et al 2017, 171).

Here, the shared land, space, territory and *ovoo* cairns is what Mongolians commonly call the *nutag* of both of the horse and the herder. Following above points made by Fijn (2011) and Marchina et al (2017) on the tripartite relationship, in this paper I will present poems, stories and films of how horses run away and return to their *nutag*, and/or to their herders (or owners), when they are sold or donated to a different place or held in unaccustomed places, and show how the shared attachment to the *nutag* binds horse and horse-herder. In those poems, stories and films, the *nutag* is a common ground where the horse and horse-herder meet and the so-called symbiotic human-animal relationship develops. Taking the impact of *nutag* into consideration in human-animal relations, I find that the horse

and horse-herder relationship is not only about the animal and human in question, but is complex and manifold.

   As I mentioned earlier, the other topic I will discuss in this paper is nationalism. In my previous paper on nationalism, I show how a person and *nutag* relationship develops into the concept of *ekh oron* or the "motherland" and "show how the multiplicity, fluidity and multi-scalar character of the term *nutag* become essential resources of nationalist sentiments and powerful political tools to promote and justify resistance against mining" (Bumochir 2019, 163). In the same way, this paper shows how an analogy between man and horse, or what I call animalification, is made in film, which is another example of the multi-scalar character of how the term *nutag* triggers nationalist sentiments. Unlike the previous paper, this paper shows how a horse and *nutag* relationship is used to construct the concept of *ekh oron* and how the tripartite relationship of horse, *nutag* and *ekh oron*, which is considered to be natural, triggers nationalism in contemporary Mongolia.

The Nationalization of the "Mongol Horse"

Former political leaders of Mongolia, namely Kh. Battulga, the president, and U. Khurelsukh, the prime minister, both reveal nationalistic attitudes. In the 2017 presidential election campaign Battulga's slogan was Mongol *yalna*, which literally means "Mongol will win." His slogan was resourceful, because it can have different meanings. "Mongol" commonly indicates Mongolians as a people and/or the independent state of the Mongols. But in view of the political situation of the election and discussions about the ethnic origin of his main opponent, M. Enkhbold, who was the speaker and the chair of People's Party, his slogan questions whether a genuine Mongolian should win the election and rule the country or someone who is not a Mongol but a *Khyatadyn erliiz* (part-Chinese). Many sources were revealed against Enkhbold to prove that he had some *khujaa* (Chinese) ancestors in his maternal lineage. In the context of such a heated debate on the purity (*tsever*) of the Mongol origin, Battulga's slogan appeared as his personal support for the public reaction to the issue of Enkhbold's ancestry. Enkhbold's opponent in his party was U. Khurelsukh, who was the deputy minister and currently the People's Party chair

and the prime minister in October 2017. At the end of June 2017, a few days before the election and the Naadam national festival celebrating the establishment of Mongol statehood and independence (Munkhbayar 2019), he revealed his support for Battulga's campaign, where he drew an analogy between the presidential election and the Naadam horse race. In the meeting with the organizing committee of the Naadam festival the deputy minister stated that "Only Mongol horses should race in the Mongol Naadam" (Tuguldur 2017) and vigorously prohibited all attempts to bring in hybrid and/or foreign horses to race against Mongol horses. Although, he referred to the celebration of Naadam, his statement was actually his appeared as a reaction to the political debate about pure Mongol origins. Apparently, his analogy between man and horse in the presidential election and in the Naadam horse race works well for many Mongolians. Both events have an important place in the building of the Mongol nation state. For nationalists the key is to ensure everything is Mongol, including not just the political ruler but also horses, because the horse is a historically and culturally established national icon in modern Mongolia. Khurelsukh's statement was therefore not coincidental but intentional. I call such incidents of the use of the horse in the national context, namely in national politics, the construction of a national icon or a nationalization of the horse.

Besides my illustration of *nutag*, *ekh oron* and nationalism, as I find in this paper, the horse is also an essential historical and cultural resource, which is often used in shaping the Mongol national identity and nationalism. For instance, the depiction of a horse has been the key image in Mongolia's *töriin süld* (state symbol) throughout the socialist and post-socialist state. This is because "The complex role of the horse is a fascinating aspect of Mongolian herding society, especially because the horse is both a utilitarian resource, as Mongolian herders eat horsemeat in winter [see also Peemont 2017], and a unifying symbol, expressed on Mongolian flags" (Fijn 2011, 151). Its complex role in national identity and nationalism also appears in musical culture. Peter March (2008) illustrates the role of horse in the case of horse-head fiddle (morin khuur) and shows how the horse-head fiddle shapes musical nationalism.

Almost immediately following the 1990 Revolution, the instrument became increasingly visible in political rituals at the highest levels. In 1992, the Mongolian President ordered the creation and installation of a horse-head fiddle called the *Töriin khan khuur* or "State Sovereign Fiddle" in the nation's Parliamentary Building, where it is kept along with other official symbols of state. In the same year, a small "orchestra" of horse-head fiddles called the Horsehead Fiddle Ensemble was established and it has become the most popular state-sponsored musical ensemble in the country. It often plays for formal state events and rituals, such as concerts honoring visiting dignitaries. Since the early 1990s, the Mongolian President's annual address to the nation on the first day of the Lunar New Year festival, called *Tsagaan sar*, has been paired with a formal performance of a horse-head fiddle. And in the same period, the instrument has come to be a permanent part of the opening ceremonies of the State Naadam, an annual festival of traditional sports held each year in Ulaanbaatar and attended by the national political leadership and international dignitaries. Each of these new uses of the horse-head fiddle was rhetorically tied to specific events or stories set in the distant past, making its "revival" in the 1990s clear evidence of a nation and people in touch with its past and once again in charge of its own destiny (Marsh 2008, 2–3).

In the 2000s, later political leaders, N. Bagabandi, the Mongolian president, and N. Enkhbayar, the prime minister, continued such political ritualizations of the instrument and issued a joint decree entitled *Morin khuuraa deedlen, delgerüülekh tukhai* (on honoring and popularizing the horse-head fiddle),[2] which appealed to all governmental and non-governmental organizations, families and individuals to own and learn the instrument. I remember that the public immediately acknowledged the appeal and all families started buying horse-head fiddles or small souvenir versions of it to keep at home for various purposes, for instance, to protect homes from bad fortune, and/or to popularize it as decreed, all of which

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2   https://www.legalinfo.mn/law/details/759?lawid=759&fbclid=
IwAR37yRtNMCMxFnocq98GU9p34iF6gkZHfzYYhbdXY1mOS7TXe1X7yzFGlbg.
Accessed on October 4, 2018.

contribute in nation building. As we see in the above, the horse has an important role in the building of the nation and the construction of nationalism.

For Mongolians, another important aspect of the horse is the sense and feeling attached to its *nutag*, which Mongolians often use as an analogy between the Mongolian man and the horse. This is another reason why Khurelsukh's analogy between man and horse worked well prior to the presidential election and the national Naadam celebration. In line with this, in the following I will show how stories about a return of a horse to its *nutag* constructs a powerful message and an appeal to endorse nationalist sentiments.

The Socialist Establishment of Nationalism on *Nutag, Ekh Oron* and the Horse

As a result of the communist ideology, the meaning of the word *nutag* and its broader form *ekh oron* dramatically expanded to the "Soviet version of nationalist thought" (Bumochir 2019, 173 cited by Sneath 2010, 251). David Sneath writes that "Mongolia itself was described as the 'motherland' (*ekh oron*), and a concept of 'homeland' (*nutag*), in which people have their roots, became a core value in the national political culture" (Sneath 2010, 253). In this section, I will show how ideas in the concept of *nutag*, meaning one's naturally related birthplace, turned from indicating a local territory to the later imported term *ekh oron*, referring to the national territory of the politically independent country of Mongolia. *Ekh oron* is a translation of the Russian term *rodina-mat'*, which literally means "motherland-mother," also known as "Mother Russia," from the twentieth century. The appearance of "Mother Russia" has been understood as manifestation of the Soviet state's wartime renunciation of appeals to Marxism-Leninism and its embrace of nationalism. "The word *rodina*, from the verb *rodit'* to give birth, can mean birthplace both in the narrow sense of hometown and in the broader sense of 'motherland' …" (Kirschenbaum 2000, 825). Although the two terms differed in the past, the same link between the birthplace or hometown and the motherland also appears in the blurred link between *nutag* and *ekh oron* in contemporary Mongolia. The word *nutag* fluidly embodies a much wider range of things and ideas,

such as the environment, nature, resources, history, origin, authenticity, identity, sovereignty and spirituality (see also Bulag 1998; Namsaraeva 2012). Further, in terms of space, "*Nutag* can be located at different levels, from a local to a much larger space, and can vary in scale depending on whether it refers to the group or to the individual" (Namsaraeva 2012, 142) or to the people of an independent state (Bumochir 2019, 163).

The 1930s poem *Minii Nutag* (My Homeland) by D. Natsagdorj, a prominent Mongolian poet known as the father of modern Mongolian literature, made an enormous contribution in expanding the meaning of *nutag* to *ekh oron*. It depicted the landscape of Mongolia and praised its natural beauty and its importance to Mongolians. The chorus is *Ene bol minii törsön nutag, Mongolyn saikhan oron* (This is my birthplace, The beautiful homeland of Mongolia). With this, the connotations of the word *nutag* began embracing the meaning of the territory of the Mongolian People's Republic. The poem was compulsory in the secondary-school curriculum and every student had to learn it by heart. Certainly, most if not all Mongolians, including me, could recite it from memory (Bumochir 2019, 173).

The same link between *nutag* and *ekh oron* also appears in the case of the horse in the poem *Khüren mori* or The *Brown Horse*, about the escape and return of a horse from Russia to Mongolia during the 1921 revolution. The poet Ch. Lkhamsuren (1917-79) wrote it in 1962, based on his childhood biography as a poor orphan and his memory of the horse he owned. In the same year the author received the *Töriin shagnal* (State Honored Award), the highest state award, initiated in 1945 as an "Award named after Marshall Choibalsan" (*Marshall Choibalsangiin neremjit shagnal*), the communist leader and prime minister of Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) (1939–1952). By awarding the author, the communist government politically promoted the importance of the 1921 communist revolution, which ended the so-called feudal tyranny and foreign imperialist invasions (see also Bumochir 2018, 361-63) and popularized the concept of *ekh oron* (Bumochir 2019, 173), which should be protected from the imperialist and capitalist states in World War II, which was key in the Soviet propaganda. As a result of this political promotion, almost every Mongolian not only memorized *Minii nutag* from the

secondary school Mongolian literature textbook, but also the poem *Khüren mori*. For instance, I remember *Khüren mori* because my teacher at secondary school made us all memorize all its 287 lines. Later I discovered from my father, S. Dulam, who is in his early seventies, that it was not only my generation who memorized it. When I asked him, he immediately started reciting the poem with a melody from memory. He thinks that he memorized it at school in the 1960s, but he also clearly remembers that he learned it from the national radio. At the end of 1960s, when he was a child, as he remembers, there was a radio program called *Khüren mori*. In this the producer made horse-head fiddle music for the poem and this is where my father learned the poem with a melody.

I am not sure if it was a coincidence that Lhamsuren wrote his poem in 1962, because according to some eye witnesses some horses given to Vietnam by Mongolia in 1959, began returning to their *nutag* in Mongolia in the early 1960s. Maybe Lhamsuren had heard of this and wrote his poem *Khüren mori*. My father, S. Dulam (2019), and the writer B. Nominchimed (2018) have both written about the Mongol horses donated to Vietnam. In 1959, during the visit to the MPR by the Vietnamese president Ho Chi Minh, Tsedenbal Yumjaa (1916–1991), the general secretary of Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, presented him with five kinds of herd animal (horses, camels, cattle, sheep and goats). In autumn 1961, 300 soldiers were selected to take the horses from Mongolia to Vietnam by train which took about a week. Each train contained about 40 horses and seven to eight soldiers in charge of feeding them. According to S. Khalzan from Erdenetsog, Bayankhongor, and G. Myagmarjav from Telmen, Zalkhan, who were in charge of the horses, on the Vietnamese border, brown and black-brown horses escaped and ran into the forest; they captured the brown one and lost the black-brown stallion (Nominchimed 2018; cf. Dulam 2013, 240-41). Some say the horse reached its *nutag* in Mongolia in 1960, after about a year (Dulam 2013, 240). In 1963 about two years after the horses had been taken to Vietnam, the black-brown stallion returned home to Möngön Morit, Töv *aimag*. One morning the stallion's owner stallion spotted something bulgy and black lying by the side of his herd of horses which looked like a yak calf. According to the owner, it was his black-brown

stallion he had donated to Vietnam and it was thin as a lath, covered in wounds and scratches. Later the Ulaanbaatar city government bought the stallion and declared it sacred (*darkhlakh*) in the herd (Nominchimed 2018).

In 2001, Nominchimed (2018) had a chance to meet and interview the ambassador of Vietnam and asked him about the horses. The ambassador told him that the Vietnamese called those horses fugitive (*orgodol*), because many of them escaped and were lost. Nominchimed acknowledges that many of the Mongol horses sent to Vietnam escaped, and he presented a story about a brown horse from his sum Khaliun in Govi-Altai *aimag*, which was one of the other horses returned from Vietnam. According to him, it was his uncle Z. Bekhjav's brown horse called *Böön süült* (clotty tail) which he had donated to Vietnam. In the next year spring after the donation, in Khyaryn nuur (Khyar Lake) his uncle broke down in tears when he saw *Böön süült* standing among his herd of horses. But he was also scared to see the returned horse because he did not know how to explain it to the local communist leaders and he decided not to tell them. Bekhjav told Nominchimeg that he took his horses for donation to Zamyn-Uud and saw them taken onto the train, and he could not tell how the horse escaped and found its way back to its *nutag*, possibly from Vietnam. In addition to these stories of *güideg mori* (running horse) from Vietnam, Nominchimeg (2018) collected material about other guideg moris that returned from Russia and Europe, those donated to Russia during the war. Nominchimeg collected and presented these stories about Mongol horses to say that "not to believe in the wonderful character of Mongol horses is a tragedy of our youngsters" (Nominchimeg 2018).

During socialism the sense of nationalism was different, and historic and ethnic nationalistic tendencies based on Chinggis Khan and the Greater Mongolia were absent due to the Soviet oppression (Munkh-Erdene 2012). Instead, the idea *ekh oron* mirroring Russian *Rodina-mat'* and its Soviet nationalism appealed against so-called imperialism and capitalism, which was the focal point during socialism. But after the collapse of socialism, in the absence of the Soviet oppression, besides the socialist sense of *ekh oron* the recently produced film based on the poem Brown Horse has triggered other nationalistic tendencies in response to problems of the

global capitalist economy such as environmental destruction and land use and ownership by different businesses, as I will discuss in the following.

Post-socialist Re-presentation of the Socialist Nationalist Resources

In 2019, a film based on *Khüren mori* called *Khiimori* (or *The Steed*) which means the "Wind Horse" or "fortune" (Humphrey and Ujeed 2012),[3] directed by G. Erdenebileg, won the Spirit of Cinema Award at the 26th Oldenburg Film Festival, Best Feature Film Awards at the 23rd San Diego International Film Festival, the Golden Peacock Award at the 50th International Film Festival of India and was submitted to the 92nd Academy Awards and the 77th Annual Golden Globes. The film is a re-production of the socialist-era poem in the form of a film in post-socialist Mongolia and is a post-socialist re-presentation of the socialist nationalist discourse based on *nutag*, *ekh oron* and the horse.

In my recent paper on *nutag* and nationalism, I discuss naturalization (consideration of the relationship as natural or *baigaliin* in Mongolian) and ritualization (performance of rituals emphasizing the relationship) of the man and *nutag* connection in the example of umbilical cord, which is reified in the ritual by burying the afterbirth and the umbilical cord in the birthplace (Bumochir 2019). In the film Khiimori, I find a different example of the naturalization of horse and *nutag* connection. At the top of the film promotion flyer it says *Atgakhan shoroonoos ekh oron ekheldeg*, which means "a motherland starts from a handful of earth." As we find it in the film, the brown horse was born with a hand-sized piece of something

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3   "However, there is no inner sense that tells a person whether his *sülde/hiimori* is flying high or 'lying down' (*hevten*). This is a form of subjectivity where one's state of being, fortunate or not, can be known only from external signs. Possessing the regular good things of life, such as healthy children, wealth, and so on, indicates a generally fortunate or *hiimoritoi* (with *hiimori*) person, but this is not enough to tell if one's fortune is sufficient for some particular enterprise. Divination may be necessary, but better still is success in a chancy matter such as gambling, wrestling, or hunting, which boosts fortune and projects it forward for future victories. A burst of fortune is thus future-oriented, but it also spreads laterally to the social surroundings. This is the case with hunting the wolf, which, of all wild animals, is renowned as being the wildest and the most *hiimoritoi* – the worthiest prey – as it is dangerous, intelligent, and elusive" (Humphrey and Ujeed 2012, 155).

dark brown like a liver in its mouth,[4] which is called an *unagany zuult* (foal bite) in Mongolian. According to the film, *unagany zuult* is *shoroo* (earth) gathered and preserved in the fetus's mouth from food passed from the mother to the fetus through the umbilical cord (Erdenebileg 2019). Although *unagany zuult* is not earth per se, in the film it is called *shoroo*, which is earth. Using the analogy of earth and *unagany zuult*, the director strongly emphasizes the point that sometimes foals are born biting earth from their birthplace, which is a reification of the horse and *nutag* natural connection. This reification of the physiologically developed connection of the horse and its birthplace in the womb is the film's key to explain why a horse can be deeply attached to its birthplace, and hence has a desire to return to the *nutag*. In brief, according to the director of Khiimori, the natural connection starts developing in the womb when the minerals from grass and water that the mother consumes passes to the fetus through the umbilical cord, which suggests that the bonding develops as a physiological process from birth. The message in the film is that because it is physiological it is biological and therefore natural and inevitable.

Apparently, there is another internationally known Mongolian film called *Sharga daaga*, the Yellow Colt, from 2013, directed by Ch. Khoroldorj. As promoted in the flyer the film is "inspired by the true stories of Mongol horses that run back to their mother land."[5] The film depicts a return of a yellow colt to its mother's *nutag* after she was sold into a different one when the colt was in the womb. In similar vein, the director of *Sharga Daaga*, also shows the same of idea of the natural bonding of animal and place developing since the fetus was in the womb (Khoroldorj 2013). Addressing the idea of the natural bonding of animal and place in these films potentially engages two different discussions, one on how and why animals are accustomed to certain places, while the other is on the use of earth, land and territory in the nationalist discourses, which I turn to in the following.

4   "Meconium is the first feces produced by the foal. It may be released prepartum into the amniotic fluid in times of fetal distress such as in dystocia. The normal foal's lungs are bathed in amniotic fluid before birth. If meconium is released into the fetal fluid, the foal, as it gasps, will inhale the particles. Meconium is a sterile substance (prepartum)" (Paradis 2006, 149).

5   For more information see also https://asianmoviepulse.com/2019/01/film-review-yellow-colt-2013-by-khoroldorj-choijoovanchig/. Accessed on November 26, 2018.

Both Dulam (2013, 240-41) and Nominchimed (2018), who write about horses returned from Vietnam, explain that herd animals have *zön* to return to their *nutag*. For Mongol herders, herd animals have a *zön* – an intuition to stay, find and return to the *nutag* or other accustomed places (Bumochir et al. 2020). As we demonstrate in our paper on human-animal relations, herders in Mongolia use these intuitions in herding horses. Relying on horse's *zön* to stay around, find and/or return to certain accustomed places and on the herder's ability to anticipate herd locations, herders in Mongolia leave horses to graze unattended (Bumochir et al. 2020). As such, animals, like man, develop certain feelings or perform certain practices triggered by naturally following their *zön*, and nothing helps or hinders such practices. In other words, *zön* triggers and leads animals to have certain feelings and to do something, for instance, horses to return to their *nutag*, as we find in these films. In this paper, I am not in a position to prove or disprove whether horses have a "natural" or "birth" connection to their birthplaces. Instead, my intention is to show how Mongolians consider the horse and *nutag* bonding as inevitable and a horse's desire to return to its *nutag* as unstoppable, claiming that the bonding is biological and natural from birth, which I argue helps to justify and appeal nationalist sentiments to protect one's *nutag*.

Shoroo is an important aspect in the nationalist discourses in Mongolia, which often embrace concepts of the human and birthplace connection, land, territory and political independence. In my paper on nationalism and *nutag*, I wrote about of my father's, his elder brother's and his cousin's journey to their birthplaces. The most important reason to visit their *nutag* was to visit their birthplace and to roll in the earth at the very place they were born in order to strengthen their natural ties to their birthplaces. According to them, the strengthening of the relationship between a person and their birthplace helps to avoid hardship and acquire good fortune (Bumochir 2019, 169). But when people are not in their *nutag* or unable to visit to their *nutag* then many keep and worship stones from their birthplace for protection and good fortune. Such stones are commonly known as *nutgiin chuluu*, which means a "stone of the *nutag*." People believe that *nutgiin chuluu* is a small piece of one's *nutag* (similar to the *unagany zuult*) that helps to keep them connected to

their *nutag* wherever they live. Both of the above examples remind Mongolians of the importance of *nutag* or the importance of having a *nutag* and protecting it from all sorts of threats such as mining. For this reason, in the above paper I argue that nationalist sentiments in the popular mobilizations against mining in Mongolia reveal indigenous cultural sources that trigger nationalism (see also Bumochir 2019). This paper presents another indigenous cultural source in the relationship between the horse and the birthplace that trigger nationalism.

The aspect of *shoroo* or *gazar shoroo*, which means soil, land and territory, is not only cultural, but as many Mongolians intend to highlight, it is also a historical source that triggers nationalism. There are two well-known statements that people often reference from the history of Mongolia. In a myth about the Xiongnu emperor Modu Chanyu (234 BC–174 BC): "depicted by the ancient Chinese historian Sima Qian (135 or 145 BC–86 BC), his enemy the Chinese emperor first asked for his famous fast horse and then his favorite consort, which he agreed to give. Finally, the enemy asked for his land, and Modu flew into rage and said, 'Land is the basis of the nation' and 'he executed all the ministers who had advised him to do so' (Qian 1993, 135). In Mongolian, this is often translated as *gazar bol ulsyn ündes* (land is the basis of the people, nation or country; see also Kradin 2012, 54)" (Bumochir 2020, 49). Also, "Mongolian historians claim that the Oirat ruler Galdan Khan (1644–97), who fought against the rule of the Qing Empire, is the one who said *Minii nutgiin gazar shoroonoos burkhan guisan ch bitgii ög* (do not give away my land even if God asks for it) (Dashnyam 2014, 228)" (Bumochir 2020, 49). The political use of both of these statements in contemporary Mongolia have had a massive influence in shaping nationalism with reference to history, which is apparent in the message "Motherland starts from a handful of earth." With this message, the film appeals to its audience to love and protect the environment and fight for the motherland, which trigger nationalist sentiments based on *nutag* and *ekh oron*.

Both of the films and those who write about runaway horses, namely Dulam and Nominchimed, draw an analogy between man and horse to suggest that the feelings attached to one's *nutag* is natural, so the nationalist sentiments that grow

from such resources are inevitable. I can also find similar indications in the taboo against all attempts to stop runaway horses. Maybe it is a coincidence that my father and Ch. Lkhamsuren, the author of *Khüren mori*, are both from Bayankhongor aimag (province), and from the neighboring *sums* (sub-provinces), Bayanbulag and Baatsagaan. When I asked my father about *güideg mori*, he said elderly people in his *nutag* used to warn youngsters never try to catch or stop unidentified horses running back home. They used to count such incidences as a great sin, which is a strong expression of the acknowledgement of and deference to the horse and its *nutag* connection. According to him, some elders even used to make a milk libation wishing the runaway horse to return safely to its *nutag*. I also find exactly same custom in the film *Yellow Colt*. When the unknown yellow colt joins Badam's herd he severely prohibits his children from keeping and riding it and he warns them that this would be a sin (Khoroldorj 2013). Also, in the poem *Khüren mori* and its film version, *Khiimori*, the author and director condemn the monk who seizes the horse from the poor orphan boy, the greedy merchant who captures the horse and rides it for his travel for trading purposes and the foreign military invader who captures the merchant and gets the horse. During socialism, all of these figures including the monk, wealthy merchant and the foreign invader were considered enemies in communist propaganda, and all are depicted as those who intend to stop the horse returning to *nutag*, which is a sin. Or according to the logic of the human-animal analogy, they are all enemies preventing Mongolians from expressing their horse-like 'naturally' developed nationalistic sense to love and protect their *nutag* or *ekh oron*. Using the same analogy, in his forties the film's director, G. Erdenebileg, also said people of his and earlier generations used to know and understand the poem while the younger generation stopped learning it and the importance of *nutag* (Badamtseteg 2018). This is similar to the writer Nominchimed's regret that younger generation fail to believe in a horse's sense and ability to find and return to *nutag* from afar.

Conclusion

The Animalification of Nationalist Sentiments

Mongolians often consider the relationship between man and *nutag* to be 'natural,' which means that for Mongolians nationalist sentiments have 'natural' or 'biological' triggers or feelings that can be psychological (Bumochir 2019). In this paper, I find an alternative form of naturalization (considerations as natural) of nationalist sentiments in the man and *nutag* relationship by drawing an analogy between man and horse in the poems, stories and films about runaway horses. In the interview, G. Erdenebileg, the director of *Khiimori*, states that he tried to deliver different messages, but the key message was the analogy between animal and man in regard to the animal and homeland, and man and homeland relations.

In brief, [the film] clearly delivers the message that human beings became worse than animals. Many people will be ashamed of themselves after watching and feeling the story about how a Mongol horse yearns for their mother *nutag* and soil, and runs back home from abroad. Today we are rootling and digging the soil of our motherland. Also, we are selling. Many betrayed their motherland and withdrawing. Some taking stones [of our motherland] and selling in the foreign countries. All of such loathsome can only come from human being (Badamtsetseg 2018).

The director of the film explains that in Mongolia not only people but also horses have deep natural attachments to their *nutag* and have a desire to love, miss and return to the *nutag*, which is an artistic interpretation of nationalistic sentiments to protect local and national territories and the environment from mining and other cases of the sale of natural resources to foreign bodies.

The above analogy drawn between man and horse in the film in regard to *nutag* is what I call the animalification. To be more precise, according to the director, not only man but also animals such as the horse have a sense of attachment to the *nutag* from birth, hence this sense is natural. Animalification is therefore an alternative form to consider nationalist sentiments to protect land and territory as physiologically developed in the womb from birth, which is what I call the naturalization of nationalism through drawing an analogy between man and horse. Such an explanation helps the director and his audience to understand the sources

of nationalist sentiment and explains that it is natural and therefore inevitable. While his critique targets those involved in mining, trade and other businesses that destroy the environment, he considers that those who have lost their natural attachments to their *nutag* and nationalist sentiments to love and protect it have a weaker sense to love and protect than some animals such as horses.

To show how the animalification of nationalist sentiments is constructed and publicized in Mongolia, the first section of the paper shows how the horse become the national symbol and a politically significant "Mongol horse" where some politicians even compare the presidential election to the national Naadam festival horse race. This is an example of animalification by drawing an analogy between man and horse. The second section is about the socialist establishment of nationalism based on the concept of *nutag* or birthplace and how the concept transformed into the broader Soviet nationalist concept of *ekh oron*, which is a Mongolian equivalent of the Russian term r*odina-mat'*, literally meaning "motherland-mother." This section also presents two poems, the first, *Minii nutag* (My *nutag*), by D. Natsagdorj, known as the father of mother Mongolian literature, which made a great contribution to transforming the content of the word *nutag* from birthplace to a politically independent country or the *ekh oron* mother country. The second poem depicts a runaway horse from Russia to Mongolia fighting against the so-called enemies of the communist revolution and the state, namely a White Russian military officer, a monk and a greedy merchant on its way to its *nutag* or *ekh oron*. The third section of this paper explores the re-presentation the nationalistic concepts established during socialism and the re-production of the poem about the runaway horse in the form of a film. This section also shows how the socialist context of nationalism targeted imperialism, capitalism and class turned into ethnic nationalism, targeting the consequences of the global capitalist economy and mining, such as environmental destruction and the exploitation of land. Finally, this last section explains how the presentation and re-presentation of stories, poems and films on runaway horses returning to the *nutag* analogically constructs animalification of nationalism and appeals to Mongolians' nationalism,

to love and protect the national *nutag* or the territory of *ekh oron* from the destructive consequences of global capitalism and contemporary consumerism.

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The Gobi Khulan

A Flagship Species for Mobility

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Abstract: *Khulan*, the Asiatic wild ass, have been eradicated from most of their former range. The Mongolian Gobi currently holds more than 80% of the global population and constitutes more than 70% of the global breeding range and therefore is the most important stronghold of the species. In the Mongolian Gobi, individual khulan roam over thousands of square kilometers annually and their movements are among the largest reported for terrestrial mammals globally. The high mobility of khulan plays a critical role for the ecosystem functioning of the Mongolian Gobi, including large-scale seed dispersal and provision of water holes for other wildlife. Khulan also have non-consumptive aesthetic and naturalistic values for local residents and harbor the potential for wildlife tourism and subsistence hunting.

The species is currently listed as *Near Threatened* in the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List, but remains under close scrutiny because multiple developments which negatively impact the size, quality and functional connectivity of the Gobi–Eastern Steppe ecosystem are happening simultaneously and at an unprecedented speed in an ecosystem which so far has remained at a near natural stage. These developments are the: 1) dramatic increase in livestock numbers and a change in the traditional herding practice, 2) rapid development of the resource extraction sector, and 3) expansion and upgrading of the transport infrastructure to meet the needs of the mining sector and allow Mongolia to connect to international markets.

The paper explores how these threats may affect khulan in the future and why khulan are an ideal flagship species for mobility and landscape connectivity.

Introduction

Large herds of ungulates moving huge distances across the vast open steppes and desert plains of Mongolia rank among the wildlife wonders of the world and represent a defining part of the country's wild heritage. Long-distance movement has always been a necessity for wild ungulates (Rosen Michel and Röttger 2014) such as the Asiatic wild ass (*khulan*, *Equus hemionus*) Mongolian gazelles (*Procapra gutturosa*), goitered gazelles (*Gazelle subgutturosa*), saiga (*Saiga tatarica mongolica*), and wild camels (*Camelus ferus*), as well as for people (Wright 2016) and their livestock as a way of coping with a harsh (Rao et al. 2015) and unpredictable environment (Vandandorj et al. 2015). So far Mongolia has offered seemingly unlimited and unconstrained space for both wildlife and people to move in, but change is coming. Although Mongolia has one of the lowest human population densities in the world, recent years have seen a surge in socio-economic and infrastructure developments. While many of these changes have been central to raising the standard of living of Mongolians, they also hold the potential to severely impact the future of wildlife (Batsaikhan et al. 2014) and nomadic pastoralists (Byambaa and de Vries 2019) if they are not carefully planned and mitigated. In this article we argue that the exceptional mobility of khulan makes it an ideal umbrella species for largely intact and functionally connected dryland ecosystems, and that khulan conservation will benefit many other threatened dryland species as well as local people.

The Global Importance of the Mongolian Gobi for Khulan Conservation

Khulan are one of seven species of the wild horse family (*Equidae*). They once roamed the Eurasian steppes and deserts, but nowadays have become confined to less than 3% of their former range. The Mongolian Gobi now constitutes the most important refuge of the species, holding more than 80% of the global population and constituting more than 70% of the global breeding range (Kaczensky et al. 2015) (Fɪɢ. 1). The most recent population estimates suggest that around 64,000

khulan live in the Mongolian Gobi, with a core of 9,000 khulan in the Dzungarian Gobi (Kaczensky et al, unpublished data from 2015) in the southwest and 52,000 khulan in the South Gobi Region (Buuveibaatar et al., unpublished data from 2019) in the southeast of the country and the remainder in between.[1]

Khulan are listed in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List as *Near Threatened* because "the rapid infrastructure development and the associated influx of people in large parts of the species' range could quickly result in the re-emergence of former threats (e.g. increased competition with livestock for water and pasture, high poaching levels). Furthermore, linear infrastructure (e.g. roads, railways) – if not carefully designed and mitigated – are likely to result in high mortalities if wild asses are impeded in their long-distance movements and become cut-off from important resources or refuge areas" (Kaczensky et al. 2015).

Because Mongolia is the last stronghold of the species, the ongoing and planned anthropogenic development in the Gobi will determine the species' global status, which gives the country a global responsibility for the species' conservation (Fig. 1).

Ecosystem Services Provided by Khulan

The high mobility of khulan has important ecosystem-level effects and can connect communities of less mobile species. Khulan help maintain a diverse plant community composition through regional and supra-regional seed dispersal. They are particularly important because, unlike other wide-ranging wild ruminant like gazelles or wild Bactrian camels their digestive system is less effective and seeds tend to remain more intact and find a good germination environment provided by the khulan dung (Peled 2010). In this way khulan can help maintain biodiversity and speed up regeneration.

Moreover, khulan provide water sources for other wildlife. Like domestic horses, khulan need to drink daily, at least during periods when the vegetation is dry or the ambient temperatures are high (Payne et al. 2020). But khulan not only visit surface

1 Population estimates from the Transaltai Gobi and Gobi Gurvan Saikhan National Park are rather outdated and these areas need to be re-evaluated to correctly assess the national status.

water such as springs, rivers, and ponds to drink, but they also dig for water in dry riverbeds where there is subsurface flow. These diggings can be up to half a meter deep and provide other wildlife with access to water which would be otherwise unavailable for them (Kaczensky et al. 2006).

Due to their long crowned (hypsodont) teeth and their digestive system, khulan can feed on coarse or senescent vegetation, thereby stimulating regrowth particularly in steppe regions. In under-grazed steppe systems, their large-scale movements can be expected to create a mosaic of grazed and ungrazed patches, which provide different habitats for a greater variety of steppe species. During winter when deep snow is present, their trampling and feeding craters in the snow create corridors for smaller wildlife and provide easier access to the plant cover for shorter legged-herbivores like gazelles.

Khulan also play an important role in natural food webs, providing prey for large predators like wolves and carcasses for mammalian and avian scavengers such as foxes and vultures. Importantly, the presence of khulan also has aesthetic and naturalistic values (Kellert 1984) for local people. Khulan are beautiful, fast, social and persevering animals which fill people encountering them with awe. During interviews, local herders in the Gobi have often pointed out the beauty of khulan and the general spiritual importance of wildlife or, as a herder stated, "Nature can be beautiful in itself, but it's the wildlife that makes it more beautiful and lively and people can see it and feel happy" (Kaczensky 2007). Furthermore, khulan are a charismatic faunal element that could enhance the tourist value of the Gobi region through carefully designed community-based wildlife tourism.

Hunting khulan is an activity that has been practiced by the nobility and local people alike for centuries throughout the species range (Goldberg 2018). Nowadays, the species is fully protected throughout its global range, but poaching remains a global threat (Wingard and Zahler 2006). Khulan can make use of marginal pastures distant from water and legalizing subsistence hunting could act as an incentive for local herders to share their pasture, leave marginal areas ungrazed, refrain from poaching and even report on poachers. However, legal use
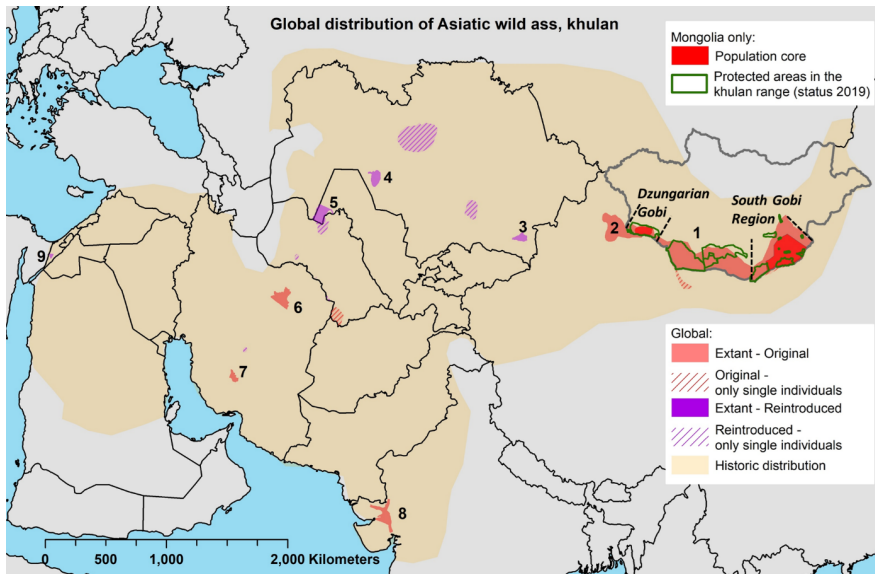
Fig. 1 Historic and present range of the Asiatic wild ass (Equus hemionus), khulan. Populations: 1= Mongolian Gobi; 2=Kalamaili, Xinjiang, China; 3=Altyn Emel, Kazakhstan, 4=Barsa Kelmes, Kazakhstan; 6=Touran, Iran; 7= Bahram-e-Goor, Iran; 8=Little Rann of Kutch, India; 9=Negev, Israel.

would necessitate a sound monitoring system, a change in legislation and a fair and sustainable quota system.

Conflicts between People and Khulan

With space becoming increasingly limited in the Anthropocene, conflicts between khulan and people are inevitable, especially during periods of resource limitations. Throughout their range, khulan are regarded as pasture competitors when perceived "too numerous"; in the Dzungarian Gobi there is special concern over khulan herds depleting winter pastures (Kaczensky et al. 2006) P. Enkhsaihan, N. O. Ganbaatar, Chris Walzer, Identification of herder-wild equid conflicts in the Great Gobi B Strictly Protected Area in SW Mongolia, Exploration into the Biological Resources of Mongolia, Exploration into the Biological Resources of Mongolia, 99-116, 10, 2006 and in the South Gobi Region over khulan competing with livestock during periods of poor pasture conditions (e.g. droughts) (Buuveibataar, personal

communication 2019). Furthermore, khulan are believed to damage the pasture with their hooves by digging out plants and their roots, thereby causing erosion.

Where steppe or deserts are converted to agricultural by ploughing or irrigation, khulan are no longer tolerated. Once khulan enter cereal fields, melon plantations, or orchards they can cause damage through trampling and crop consumption (Esmaeili et al. 2019). To gain access to agricultural plots, khulan can knock down fence posts which are weak or poorly anchored in the ground. In Mongolia, this behavior is only observed along the old and largely derelict fence line along the international border with China on the Mongolian side.

Unprecedented Mobility of the Gobi Khulan

In the Mongolian Gobi, individual khulan roam over of thousands of square kilometers annually (Fig. 2) and their movements are among the largest reported for any terrestrial mammal globally (Tucker et al. 2018; Joly et al. 2019). Khulan in the Mongolian Gobi do not show classical migrations, where they move between distinct seasonal summer and winter ranges, but rather move in a nomadic way[2] – without a predictable pattern – in their search for forage and water (Nandintsetseg et al. 2019). Unlike nomadic herders, khulan do not need to return to a ger (yurt) to rest and they are not bound by grazing rights, but rather follow the dynamics of the pasture at the landscape scale. In the South Gobi Region this results in average annual or bi-annual ranges of 30,000 square kilometers (Kaczensky et al. 2006; Payne et al. 2020).

Mobility as an Adaptive Strategy to Cope with Unpredictable Dryland Dynamics

Khulan need to feed on sufficient amounts of grass, and grassland plants such as forbs, and shrubs to provide them with the necessary nutrients to thrive and reproduce. They also need daily access to drinking water when the vegetation is

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2   We use the term "migratory" as the general term for long-distance movements to access resources and "nomadic" as a special which is characterized by long-distance movements which are not regular or follow a repetitive pattern.

dry or the weather is hot (Payne et al. 2020). Furthermore, khulan avoid people and their livestock (Buuveibaatar et al. 2016), need to be wary of natural predators like wolves, and will react to other khulan – mostly traveling in groups of two to five animals, but at times forming large groups which can number hundreds or thousands (Buuveibaatar et al. 2017; Kaczensky et al. 2015).

Pasture productivity and water availability in the Gobi are driven by the amount and distribution of precipitation. Different parts of the Gobi receive on average between 50mm and 200mm of precipitation, primarily in summer during the growing season. In reality, the amount, timing and distribution of rain and snow can vary dramatically within and between years (von Wehrden and Wesche 2007). This unpredictability in the resource base is best coped with by being highly mobile and moving to wherever the best pasture happens to be in a given season or year.

Being mobile makes it possible to buffer the effects of local droughts and distributes grazing away from depleted pastures, thereby reducing the risk of overgrazing. These same drivers have also resulted in the nomadic herding culture throughout the steppe and desert regions of Central Asia and Mongolia. Traditional knowledge has been backed up by a modern "rediscovery" that mobility is key to sustainable range management in arid ecosystems (Kakinuma et al. 2019) as the dire consequences of switching to a "modern" sedentary system have become all too obvious (Li and Huntsinger 2011). The ability to track resources over large areas allows ungulate populations to maintain much higher densities than would be possible if they were to be divided into distinct subpopulations with access only to part of the total range (Fryxell et al. 1988). Migratory wild ungulates around the globe tend to crash when their migration routes are blocked by barriers (Bolger et al. 2008).

The arid environments of Central Asia and Mongolia are also prone to extreme events like droughts, floods, and extreme winters with very cold temperatures, icing events or deep snow (referred to as *dzud* in Mongolia), which result in mass-die offs of wild (Kaczensky et al. 2011) and domestic ungulates (Rao et al. 2015). Climate change scenarios predict that these extreme events will increase in the future and one way to cope with regional extreme events is movement away from

the affected areas. During the *dzud* winter of 2009/2010 temperatures were very low and the eastern part of the Dzungarian Gobi received huge amounts of snow. In the most affected area over 80-100% of all livestock died and so did 73% of the resident Przewalski's horses. The highly mobile khulan on the other hand, seem to have avoided a major die off, by moving to less affected areas in the western part of the Dzungarian Gobi (Kaczensky et al. 2011). The prior knowledge of the wider landscape likely facilitates evasive movements by highly mobile, nomadic ungulates like khulan, whereas sedentary ungulates may be more reluctant to leave their familiar range as they have no knowledge of where to possibly find better conditions.

Recent Challenges for Khulan Conservation

The Mongolian Gobi is the last refuge of khulan, but the region is no longer isolated from global economic forces and multiple developments which negatively impact the size, quality and functional connectivity of the Gobi–Eastern Steppe ecosystem are happening simultaneously and at an unprecedented speed in an ecosystem which has so far remained at a near natural stage (Fig. 3):

1) The dramatic and unrestrained increase in livestock and a change in the traditional herding system, resulting in competition with and displacement of khulan from pastures.

2) The rapid development of the resource extraction sector and the associated influx of people and technical infrastructure, resulting in habitat degradation, destruction, and new sources of disturbance.

3) The rapid expansion and upgrading of the transport infrastructure to meet the needs of mining development and to connect Mongolia to the international markets, resulting in habitat fragmentation.

4) Climate change with increasing temperatures and an expected higher frequency of extreme events like droughts and winter storms, resulting in local or regional die-offs and longer-term changes in water and pasture availability.

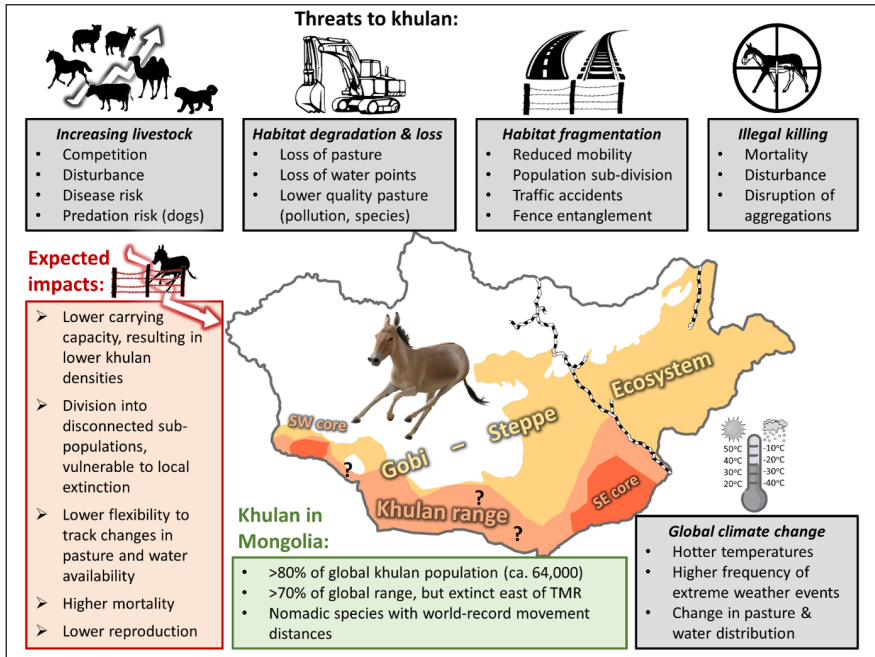5) At the same time, old threats like illegal killing persist.

Fig. 2 Challenges for the conservation of khulan in Mongolia. SW core = Dzungarian Gobi; SE core = South Gobi Region; ? = status information needs updates.

Increase in Livestock

The increase in livestock numbers is unprecedented, in 2019 reaching almost 71 million head in Mongolia[3] of which about 10% are found in the Gobi soums in the khulan range. If this trend continues, wildlife will be outcompeted by livestock in all but the most marginal habitats. Species like khulan, which need regular access to water, will be particularly vulnerable as they cannot use pastures more than 15-20 kilometers from water in the Dzungarian Gobi (Nandinsetseg et al 2016) or the South Gobi Region (Payne et al. 2020). In many parts of the former Soviet Union, the rapid decline of khulan was likely driven by no longer having access to water sources due to agricultural conversion, fencing, and the presence of humans and their livestock (Bannikov 1981).

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3   See: https://www.en.nso.mn/

Rapid Development of the Resource Extraction Sector

The rapid development of the resource extraction industry – metals, minerals, coal, oil, and gas – results in local habitat destruction by converting pastures into built-up areas, fencing off access, and potentially polluting pastures with chemicals or dust from active operations and tailings storage facilities. Mining also impacts the water regime by tapping into deep aquifers, drilling hundreds of boreholes, and diverting rivers. The potential impacts clash with traditional values and beliefs (Jackson 2018), are highly disputed and are difficult to assess due to the lack of pre-development monitoring and the high natural variability of the ecosystem (JSL Consulting 2017). Since water is the lifeline for wildlife, livestock and people in the Gobi, any change in the water regime will have far-reaching consequences for biodiversity and the local economy.

Linear Infrastructure Development

Resource extraction necessitates transport corridors, many of which are orientated north to south for export to China. New transportation plans also aim for a better connection along the east-west axis aiming to link Mongolia into China's Belt and Road initiative. Several of these corridors cut through the khulan's core range. The structural presence of roads and railways per se does not seem to constitute a major obstacle to khulan movements. Khulan have been observed to cross paved roads and GPS tracking data has confirmed crossings of unfenced paved roads and unfenced railway tracks in Mongolia (Fig. 3, Fig. 4).

However, there is strong evidence that traffic volume determines how likely it is that khulan will cross roads. Monitoring of GPS-collared khulan suggests that crossings of the paved mining road connecting the Oyu Tolgoi copper and gold mine to the Gashuun Sukhait border crossing (with a current traffic volume of 500 vehicles/day) is 53% lower than expected based on GPS track density and shows that those khulan that cross do so primarily at night, when traffic is low (Payne, unpublished data 2016). The OT road is currently not an absolute barrier, but the barrier effect is further enhanced by a parallel mining road from the Tavan Tolgoi coal mine and a railway line under construction, both of which also connect
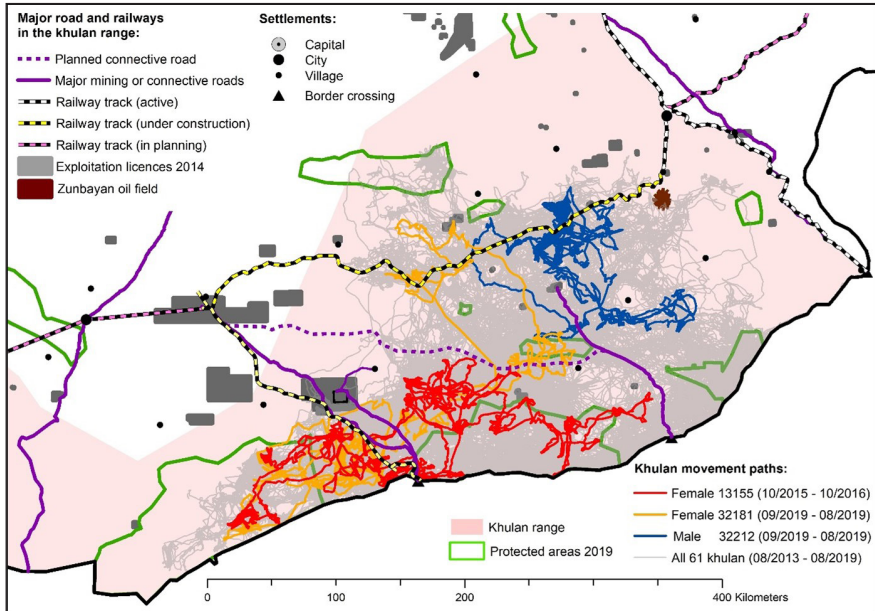
Fig. 3   Movement paths of 61 GPS-collared khulan monitored in the South Gobi Region between 2013 and 2018. Colored movement paths exemplarily show the one-year movements of two female (red & orange lines) and one male khulan (blue lines), covering areas of 14,000 to 32,100 square kilometers (calculated as minimum convex polygons around all GPS locations, but clipped by the international border). Female 13155 was wearing a camera collar and a selection of her pictures can be viewed at: https://arcg.is/1jP4L1.

to the Gashuun Sukhait border crossing (Fig. 3). None of the three transport corridors have crossing structures specifically placed and designed for wildlife. Without proper mitigation structures this infrastructure corridor poses a high risk of fragmenting the once continuous khulan population (Kaczensky et al. 2011b). This is particularly true when traffic volume increases and the railway becomes operational.

Fragmentation of the khulan range has already happened in the past. The construction of the fenced Trans-Mongolian railway resulted in the fragmentation of the Gobi–Eastern Steppe ecosystem into the Gobi and the Eastern Steppe for ungulates (Batsaikhan et al. 2014). Khulan cannot crawl under fences and seem unwilling to jump a fence even as low as 1.5m, hence fences constitute absolute barriers to their movements. About ten years after completion of the railway in

the 1950s, khulan had disappeared from the Eastern Steppe. In the south, the fenced international border with China eventually also became an absolute barrier, especially after upgrading of the fence line on the Chinese side (Linnell et al. 2016) (see also Fig. 3).

How to Maintain Mobility?

Past experience from Mongolia and other parts of the species range shows that, if not carefully planned and mitigated, land-use changes and development can easily lead to habitat loss, degradation, or fragmentation, squeezing khulan into ever smaller and marginal areas, thereby reducing population size and resilience to environmental stochasticity and making them more vulnerable to illegal killing, novel diseases, and climate change (Fig. 3).

Mongolia has hugely committed to conservation by setting aside more than 20% of its land surface as nationally protected areas and is aiming for a coverage of more than 30%. In 2019, The Mongolian parliament designated an additional 22 areas to the national protected area network. Among these approvals was the extension of Great Gobi B Strictly Protected Area in the Dzungarian Gobi. The size of the protected area was increased from 9,000 to 18,000 km^2 and now covers almost the entire khulan range in the south-western Gobi; a huge success for khulan conservation.

However, the majority of khulan live outside Great Gobi Strictly Protected Area (Fig. 1). In the large South Gobi Region, khulan cannot be conserved within protected areas alone, especially because none of the protected areas are even close to the size of the average annual range of 30,000 square kilometers a single khulan covers in this region (Kaczensky et al. 2006; Payne et al. 2020). To maintain khulan and other wide-ranging ungulates at current population levels throughout the Gobi–Steppe Ecosystem, they will need access to the multi-use landscape between protected areas and a high degree of landscape connectivity (Fig. 3), both of which needs to be explicitly taken into account in land-use planning and development following a mitigation hierarchy approach (in short the hierarchy follows
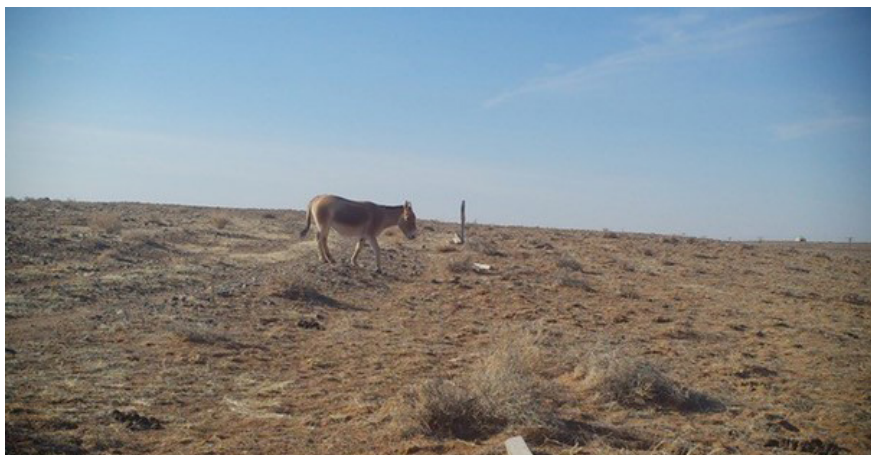
Fig. 4 A khulan making use of one of the first three pilot openings in the fence along the Trans-Mongolian railway. Photo: WCS Mongolia

avoidance, minimization, restoration and offsets in order to reduce development impacts (Arlidge et al 2018)).

Where development is unavoidable, minimizing the impact of linear infrastructure needs to be the default. Wildlife crossings, such as "green bridges" or wildlife underpasses, have been successfully implemented globally to maintain or restore landscape connectivity also in open landscapes (Seidler et al 2018). Experiences from Central Asia species are rare, but there is no reason to assume that these measures will not work in Mongolia, if the dimensions, the frequency (i.e. the number of required crossing structures per length of the linear infrastructure), the type (over versus under passes) and the location of crossings structures are tailored to the needs of the species. The development of the first standards for wildlife crossings along roads and railways in Mongolia in 2015 was an important first step (Mongolian Agency for Standardization and Metrology 2015). For new railways, a no-fencing policy outside of population centers and railway stations needs to be enforced to maintain khulan movements (Fig. 3).

How fence removal can help to re-establish landscape connectivity was recently demonstrated by a pilot project which removed the barbed wire fence along the Tran-Mongolian railway in two locations to create gaps for khulan to cross. The gaps have been monitored with camera traps since May 2019 and in March 2020, one

camera trap documented the first khulan crossing since 1955 (Fig. 4). Hopefully, this success will trigger the re-design of the entire fence and more openings to allow khulan and gazelles to functionally re-connect the Gobi– Steppe Ecosystem.

Conclusion

Mongolia is one of the few countries, where pastoral nomadism is still the default, rather than the exception and where a nomadic lifestyle or at least the idea of a nomadic lifestyle is still deeply ingrained in the nation's identity. But by now the majority of Mongolians live in urban environments and there is a risk of losing the awareness of the importance of mobility for biodiversity conservation and sustainable land-use.

Khulan in the Mongolian Gobi show unprecedented wide-ranging movements and can be used as a flagship species for mobility. An environment that allows khulan to roam requires a high degree of landscape connectivity, which also makes it less prone to local extinctions of plants and animals and more resilient to environmental stochasticity and climate change. Khulan thus also make a good umbrella species for largely intact and connected dryland ecosystems which will benefit many other wide-ranging species and traditional nomadic herding cultures.

Acknowledgements

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