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Depend on Each Other and Don't Just Sit: The Socialist Legacy, Responsibility, and Winter Risk among Mongolian Herders

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Discourses of Mongolian herders as "lazy" and "irresponsible" often emerge in the context of severe winters. Since Mongolia's transition from socialism to capitalism, a neoliberal emphasis on individual agency has contributed to a blame-the-victim phenomenon when herders lose livestock to severe winters. Many foreign development professionals and Mongolians alike believe that socialism produced a population of "lazy" herders who continue to rely on aid during severe winters rather than working hard to safeguard their own livelihoods. This paper argues that the legacy of socialism is more complicated, building off of pre-socialist institutions and, in the present era of Western-sponsored development, complementing neoliberal emphases to a degree that has gone unrecognized. Socialism did not produce universal apathy toward work among Mongolia's herders. It did, however, contribute to current discourses of work, risk, and responsibility, including "lazy herder" discourses. The paper concludes by arguing that in an era of economic uncertainty and climatic and environmental change, discourses of herders as lazy and irresponsible threaten to obfuscate the problem of rural vulnerability to natural hazards.

Key words: Mongolia, post-socialism, responsibility, risk, neoliberalism

Make individual work assignments to members of the family based on their capabilities, and make sure that they are working responsibly. Depend on each other and don't just sit (Sambuu 1987:9).

Introduction

This paper explores what I refer to as "lazy herder discourses" as they operate in the context of winter risk management in post-socialist Mongolia. Fieldwork in the Gobi Desert in southern Bayankhongor Province and a review of socialist-era literature, including 1970s-1990s Ministry of Agriculture documents at the National Central Archives of Mongolia, suggest that discourses of "lazy" and "irresponsible" herders arise from multiple ideological contexts, including the Western agenda of promoting individual agency and responsibility and the socialist legacy with its emphasis on discipline. While neoliberal development initiatives and the legacy of Soviet-style socialism are often conceived of as contradictory influences, in the Mongolian context, they promote surprisingly similar discourses of responsibility. These discourses, which have tangible implications for programs and policies affecting Mongolians, merit analysis.

I examine "lazy herder" discourses and related narratives using the case of winter disasters called *zud*, in which severe conditions—combinations of heavy snow, iced-over or sparse pasture, and extreme cold—lead to high livestock mortality. Major zud have occurred once or twice per decade throughout living memory. When herders, who make up a large portion of Mongolia's population outside of the capital city, lose their livestock to zud, insinuations of their supposedly poor work ethic and irresponsibility populate the Mongolian media, international development dialogue, and government reports. Many people—both Mongolians and foreigners—have told me that herders have been allowed to become lazy, and that now they need to learn to take responsibility for managing winter risk on their own.

A commonly accepted historical narrative explains that herders were spoiled by state support during socialism—they received a regular salary and special assistance when zud struck. The narrative suggests that the problem continues today, with herders neglecting to prepare sufficiently for a potentially harsh winter each summer-through-fall, preferring

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to hope that the government and nongovernmental organizations will step in to assist them if there is a zud. Herders are portrayed as idle, irresponsible, and sometimes irrational.

The idea that socialism made herders lazy does not sit well with what I find to be a more profound legacy of socialism: the value that Mongolians place on productivity and responsibility for carrying out duties, as evident in discourses and practices in herding and other occupations. State support during socialism, while providing herders with some security against extreme weather conditions, did not produce universal gross apathy in the face of zud risk. It did, however, influence the ways that Mongolians talk about risk, hard work, and responsibility, as my research demonstrates.

While this paper gives particular attention to the socialist legacy, if we are to understand why Mongolians discuss their work ethic the way that they do and why "lazy herder" discourses predominate in the aftermath of zud, we must also consider pre-socialist and post-socialist modes of managing risk. In certain ways, the socialist revolution in the 1920s and widespread collectivization of livestock in the 1950s transformed Mongolian herding, for example, by elevating the status of animal science and honoring the labor of rural producers. In other ways, however, traditional knowledge and customs continued. While pre-socialist traditions are not the focus of this research, their impact on modern herding practices is undeniable. The specific ways that leaders of the socialist collectives oversaw winter preparations to manage the risk of zud—by organizing group labor, assigning tasks to herders, and making rounds through the countryside to assess herders' accomplishments—were certainly shaped in part by both the legacy of the preceding feudal mode of production and by older nomadic customs (Fernández-Giménez 1999, 2000; Mearns 1993). Now, in the post-socialist period, "new" discourses of responsibility in the face of winter risk intermingle with pre-existing attitudes. Neoliberal development schemes explicitly and implicitly encourage herders to work hard to increase their resilience to zud.

There are some obvious and important distinctions between the socialist and post-socialist/neoliberal governance of herders and zud risk. Neoliberal reformers see state and other support to herders during and after zud as being at odds with the objective of promoting hard work and responsibility. On the other hand, Mongolians whose attitudes have been shaped significantly by their experience working for socialist collectives do not perceive the provision of a safety net during zud as conflicting with the mandate to work hard. The socialist collectives simultaneously supplied emergency support to herders during zud and incentivized hard work to protect livestock from severe conditions. Some members of the collectives worked harder and were more reliable than others, as is the case in all societies, but Mongolian socialism's emphases on discipline and responsibility, as evidenced in archival literature *and* in Mongolians' present discourses related to responsibility in herding and other areas, could not be more clear.

Figure 1. *Zoodoi* Plant Patties Dried and Stored for Winter

Despite their points of ideological opposition, neoliberal development programs in Mongolia and the socialist legacy also complement each other. Both valorize hard work and emphasize individual agency. Therefore, both contribute to discourses of herders who lose livestock to zud as "lazy" and "irresponsible," by exaggerating their ability to protect their livestock against extreme events. Rural Mongolians' faith in the effectiveness of their traditional knowledge for protecting livestock from extreme winters, though not necessarily misplaced, also contributes to the tarnished reputation of those who lose livestock to zud. While hard work, knowledge, and experience can all help herders to bring their livestock safely through harsh winters, it seems likely that without a safety net and with a changing climate, which may harm pasture quality and exacerbate zud, herders who lose their livestock to severe winters should not be presumed to merit the blame for their misfortune.

Zud from the Outside: The Neoliberal Perspective

Discussions of zud risk and responsibility are partially framed by neoliberal principles, particularly the principle of self-sufficiency. The question of whether herders deserve support during zud, and whether those who lose their livestock deserve financial or material assistance, is one of the main issues shaping development efforts in Mongolia since the 1990 transition to capitalism. Western organizations have quite explicitly sought to propagate democratic, capitalist, and neoliberal sensibilities. The "new" ideas conflict with Mongolians' pre-existing attitudes to some degree, but in other ways they complement them. This paper argues that discourses and practices that are encouraged by Western organizations working with Mongolians combine with

existing attitudes about work and responsibility, resulting in exaggerated expectations of herders to manage zud risk on their own, which in turn lead to blaming of those who lose their livestock to zud.

Neoliberalism encompasses a broad set of economic practices and ideological values, but my focus is specifically on neoliberalism's emphasis on individual agency and responsibility, embedded in development programs worldwide since the Reagan era (Harvey 2005). The association between neoliberalism and victim blaming is clear in the Western context, as exemplified by Reagan's criticism of "lazy" welfare recipients, the Clinton-era passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, privatization of financial risk (Hacker 2006), and "responsibilization" in the workplace and numerous other spheres (Gray 2009; Miller and Rose 2008). According to neoliberal discourse, given an open economy and free individuals, those who fail to thrive and to protect their interests simply need to learn how to take care of themselves. International development as practiced today is one means by which a style of governance that emphasizes individual responsibility is promoted around the world. The problem with focusing on individual agency is that it draws attention away from structural inequalities, the possibility that some circumstances (such as zud and other natural disasters) may be insurmountable at the household level, and the chance that some misfortunes derive from random bad luck (Janes 2010).

Of course, the phenomenon of victim blaming did not originate in the West, nor does an emphasis on individual responsibility pertain exclusively to neoliberalism. Similar tendencies are indigenous to diverse cultural traditions and situated in a variety of political contexts (Broch-Due 1999; Kipnis 2008). Yet, I argue that neoliberal principles are among the drivers of the victim blaming that arises in the aftermath of zud in post-socialist Mongolia. The principle of self-reliance has been promoted by Western NGOs and government agencies along with economic reforms. While it conflicts with the socialist tenet of cooperation, it nevertheless resonates with pre-existing Mongolian attitudes toward responsibility, compounding the implications for those who lose livestock to zud and are deemed "irresponsible."

Mongolia abandoned socialism following the fall of the Soviet Union and undertook a "shock therapy" transition, involving privatization of state assets and market liberalization, partly in response to outside pressures. A letter from the Asian Development Bank to the Bank of Mongolia indicates how international institutions shaped this transition, in this case, demanding privatization of collective farms and factories in exchange for loans:

> …We are aware that Mongolia has made good progress under the [agricultural development] program, and the Bank is preparing the release of the second installment of the loan amounting to $16 million…. The major outstanding condition relates to the transfer to the private sector of 9 enterprises…previously controlled by the Ministry of Food and Agriculture. (Espiritu 1997:3)

Mongolia's economy, which was dominated by the Chinese during the 18th through 19th centuries and the Soviet Union through the 20th century, thus continued to be shaped by (neo-) colonial pressures. Capitalism yielded some unfortunate yet predictable consequences, such as a growing gap between rich and poor (Rossabi 2005). Herders, in particular, have mourned the loss of their safety net upon the dismantling of the collectives as livestock losses to zud increased (Templer, Swift, and Payne 1993). One of my research participants explained:

> The state used to demand that we prepare fodder for the winter, but it also provided a lot of things, everything we needed. If the grass didn't grow, the government would give enough hay and other things…. There was zud, but the government gave hay. Now with privatization, what can we do? We do what we can. (female herder in her 50s, personal communication)

Periodic zud in the two decades since socialism have destroyed livelihoods, sending numerous families to the city to seek other employment, which is not readily available. The 2010 zud was particularly severe, wiping out a quarter of Mongolia's livestock, suggesting that the vulnerability resulting from the economic transition remains unabated. Most alarmingly, climate change threatens to cause more summer droughts and heavier winter snowfall, which, combined with the increased grazing pressure on rangelands under capitalism, compound the risk from zud (Batima et al. 2008; Marin 2010; Sternberg 2010).

In this environment, international development organizations are challenged to produce individuals who are resilient to zud. Relief agencies have responded to disasters by sending fodder, food, and money to the victims, despite the post-socialist stigma associated with aid. Many organizations are now explicitly seeking to reduce the need for emergency relief and aim instead to help herders build their capacity to manage risk on their own (e.g., SDC 2007). Strategies include offering business education to herders and providing grants and loans to those who can present plans for improving their operations, with the idea that greater financial security will promote resilience (e.g., Mercy Corps 2004).

Mongolian government officials echo this concern with herder self-sufficiency in disaster. Presenting at a 2011 meeting of international development professionals,[1] the director of the Strategic Planning and Policy Department of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture stated:

> Herders have a mentality to wait for someone to come help them. We need to change this mentality and support them to take initiative. We want them to start thinking in terms of what they can do for themselves. The government has helped create this mentality of herders to wait for handouts, but now we…want to only support *their* initiatives. (Choi-Ish Lkhaasuren, personal communication)

A government worker at the provincial level expressed this same sentiment to me: "It shouldn't always be 'What is the government doing?' Herders don't prepare things

themselves…, and they need to" (male in his 50s, personal communication).

In addition to government officials, many urban Mongolians feel that herders need to "learn to help themselves." One business owner in the capital city explained what he sees as a need to diminish support to herders during zud:

> The government always gives hay to herders during zud and also sends supplies like matches and warm clothes. Why do they do this? Herders are not that poor! You [Americans] don't help farmers in the United States. Since our herders are used to receiving this assistance, they don't plan, calculate, or build businesses for themselves. (male in his 50s, personal communication)

Of course, Americans *do* assist farmers a great deal, via government subsidies. Considering the delusions of self-sufficiency that many Americans entertain, it is not surprising that some educated Mongolians assume that we live by the neoliberal ideals that we profess.

Responsibility and Discipline during Socialism

From a neoliberal standpoint, it would make sense that a socialist system, which paid herders a salary even when zud wiped out the state-owned livestock that they herded, would produce lazy herders. From the neoliberal perspective, private property and privatized risk make individuals more responsible, not less so. However, in Mongolia, a contradictory argument also exists:

> Herders were responsible during socialism because they herded the state's animals and got a salary. The director [of a collective] would come around to check on their work and would scold them if they weren't working well. But now herders are *ir*responsible because the livestock are their own. So now, even if the local government administrators tell them to prepare extra fodder for winter, they don't obey. (male agricultural professional in his 50s, personal communication)

This viewpoint illustrates how external pressures, as well as intrinsic motivation, can promote "hard work" and "responsibility" among herders and other professionals. At the same time, it suggests that integration into a market economy does not necessarily produce a strong work ethic in all individuals. Manipulation of economic incentives does not predict behavior in a one-to-one cause-and-effect relationship.

While foreigners may assume that the socialist system allowed herders to become lazy and irresponsible, Mongolians offer conflicting accounts, with some suggesting that high labor demands prohibited herders from slacking off, and others suggesting that there were plenty of "free riders" who failed to do their share. Ts. Namkhainyambuu (2000: 70), a decorated herder who published his autobiography at the end of the socialist period in 1989 (translated into English in 2000), was taken aback by the attitudes of herders who did not share his commitment to the collective herds:

> When I meet a poor family whose whole farm is covered in ox dung, wasted wool, and hair, I wonder "How can they live this way?" … Some herdsmen want to know how to arrange their herding schedules so as to get more sleep instead of concentrating on the herding skills. How, then, could the herds survive?

However, Namkhainyambuu's (2000:44, 56) autobiography also illustrates how the collectives could inspire productivity:

> We all worked together shearing the sheep, castrating the livestock, making the felt, and cutting the grass in the meadow. In all of these activities, we proudly participated and woke early in the morning…. Nationwide, there were plans offered to increase production, and I personally made a serious promise to strive to do this. This movement gave me strength, determination, and encouragement.

Interestingly, other herders, such as Sodnomjav, who is cited by Humphrey and Sneath (1999:39-40), argue that these same collaborative activities allowed herders to slack off, illustrating that experiences and perspectives varied widely.

Some accounts describe the collectives as requiring hard work but cast such demands in a negative light. A herder named Osor, interviewed for the University of Cambridge's Oral History of Twentieth Century Mongolia project, compared working for a collective to working for a prison, explaining that herders truly feared being scolded by their leaders if they failed in their duties (Khishigsüren 2013). He noted that young herders in Mongolia today can scarcely imagine the rigors of the collectivized mode of rural production. Osor also mentioned, however, that some herders tricked their leaders into believing that they worked harder than they did.

Socialist-era governance promoted discipline and responsibility with rewards as well as punishments. Salary bonuses rewarded those who exceeded production quotas (Rosenberg 1977). Perhaps more significantly, workers who were perceived to be particularly productive were greatly admired (Pedersen and Højer 2008), and artifacts to this effect are ubiquitous. For example, an old slab of wood that has been recycled for the construction of an outhouse in my research area features a quote from Lenin: "*Khödölmör* (hard work) is necessary for your *aldar* (reputation) and your *gaviat* (honor/distinctions)" (Figure 2). Hardworking herders were (and still are) awarded with medals and titles while those who slacked off were berated. Namkhainyambuu's (2000:58-59) accounts of receiving awards throughout his herding career indicate that he found such recognition to be meaningful and motivating:

> In the course of 1973, I was twice awarded certificates by the government. I was happy and beside myself with delight…. I was thankful that I had been *sum* Champion three times and *aimag* Champion twice. This title is not easy to obtain and demands a lot of effort.

Figure 2. A Quote from Lenin Now Featured in an Outhouse

Arguments that socialism made herders lazy, or even the opposite—that socialism made herders hardworking—cannot be well substantiated. The truth is more complicated. What we can state for certain, however, is that socialism influenced the ways in which Mongolians refer to and recognize work ethic today. Government documents and herding handbooks from the socialist period emphasize discipline and responsibility, and these artifacts reproduced corresponding attitudes among Mongolians, which are still apparent.

A handbook for herders written by communist statesman Jamsrangiin Sambuu, originally published in 1944, typifies the period's obsession for discipline as it touches on everything from winter risk management to child rearing. The book was reprinted at later dates, most recently in 2000, indicating that its messages continue to find a receptive audience. The following excerpt from one of Sambuu's lists of injunctions for managing a herding household epitomizes the tone that pervades the book. It also shows, in the last line, that individual responsibility and interdependence do not need to be treated as paradoxical concepts, as they sometimes are from a neoliberal perspective:

> #1: Get up early in the morning! Collect dung and sticks for the fire, and then gather up all the horses and animals at pasture and take them to a new grazing area with fresh grass, and waste no time milking the animals that spent the night in the corral, and get them out to pasture while the morning is still cool.…
> #3: While it is still cool, clean your big pot and dipper, cups and plates, pot rag, and basin very well!...
> #5: When you are doing any task, really engage in it from the beginning and do not slack off until it is finished.
> #6: Preparations for tomorrow's most pressing tasks should be made today.
> #7: Make individual work assignments to members of the family based on their capabilities and make sure that they are working responsibly. Depend on each other and don't just sit.… (Sambuu 1987:9)

Archived Ministry of Agriculture meeting notes and protocol from the 1970s-1980s further illustrate the emphasis on individual responsibility within socialist-era governance. A review of several folders full of such documents reveals frequent reference to the "*sakhilga khariutslaga*" (discipline-responsibility) of both herders and leaders within governmental discourse.[2] The notes suggest that when losses of livestock occurred, leaders attempted to distinguish between justified/natural causes and human error, and in the case of the latter, proceeded to pinpoint the cause of the problem and mobilize resources to reach a solution. An analysis of poor production in Rashaant collective in Khövsgöl Province in 1986-1987 illustrates this process:

> D.S.: In Rashaant District, there is plenty of fodder. It is a good place for herding. So it is clearly evident that the poor condition of the livestock is directly connected to people's "*ajil*" (work). Therefore, it is necessary to implement corrective measures immediately. Last year,…there were lots of deaths of newborn livestock, so there is an urgent need to evaluate all sides of the problem…. It is essential that all the preparations for winter be carried out sufficiently.
> J.U.: …[T]he local governing agency must improve human relations. The "work" in this area is lacking, is it not? … Because this collective is not moving the livestock enough, the animals' muscles are wasting away, and there are lots of outbreaks of tapeworms. So the collective needs to work closely with a scientific agency to address such problems….
> T.D.: This collective's "work" has really been getting worse and has now reached the lowest level. The collective leader needs to oversee the work he can, and when there are things that he cannot do, he needs to say so. And the animal husbandry authority and the veterinary authority need to work together to monitor this collective and give it assignments that will help it move forward. The provincial agricultural authority and the livestock studies institute need to help, too. They should put together a plan, communicate the steps clearly to the collective leadership, and evaluate the results very strictly at the end of the year. (MPR Ministry of Agriculture 1987:135-137)

This conversation shows that individuals *were* held accountable for their work, and yet they were not left to fend for themselves; note the allocation of tasks to various agencies in addressing and monitoring the problem situation. When herders failed, leaders, in particular, were urged to reevaluate their leadership (Rosenberg 1977). Leaders were expected to be highly engaged in monitoring the work of those under their command, providing guidance and training, encouragement, and, when needed, reprimands.

Work Ethic and Discipline Today

Mongolians continue to emphasize responsibility in all areas of work and governance. Herders welcome government oversight of their work to a degree that may be surprising

from a Western perspective, wishing to have their efforts monitored and recognized. They also tend to conceive of winter risk management as a collective endeavor, with the most responsibility for managing the risk of zud pertaining to individual households, but with supportive roles for government agencies. Although the term "discipline-responsibility" has been replaced by "responsibility" in government literature and the vernacular, both discipline and responsibility remain intertwined with morality in Mongolia. These values are so pronounced that it is likely that they arise from pre-socialist as well as socialist attitudes and forms of governance.

In Mongolia, a person's work ethic often figures into how that person is described, and laziness is one of the most frequently criticized character flaws. When I was a Peace Corps trainee in Mongolia in 2004, my host mother scolded me for quickly running an iron over a shirt rather than taking the time to iron it properly. In addition to forcing me to endure a lesson on collars and cuffs, she warned me that as a lazy person—which my cursory ironing was taken as reflecting—I would be unsuccessful in my personal life as well as in my career. It is common for older people to critique younger ones in terms of work ethic. Older herders often berate younger people for spending too much time watching television at home (which is possible with solar panels and satellite dishes) or for taking shortcuts in their work, such as herding livestock by motorcycle instead of by horse or foot—motorcycles may prevent animals from grazing peacefully and fattening well. Such critiques are unidirectional for two reasons. Elders have been highly respected throughout Mongolian history, and younger people do not readily criticize them. In addition, older herders, who worked for collectives, seem to have higher specific standards for discipline in herding than younger ones, though all respect hard work.

Herders can express profound contempt for those of their peers whom they presume to be lazy. With the names changed, the following story, shared by a retired herder, illustrates how misfortune can be attributed to a lack of discipline and the relationship of perceived work ethic to reputation:

> Tuul is a bad person. She was initially married to Dorj, but they didn't do well [as herders] because she was lazy and wasteful. They got divorced, and she married Tuvshin. He had lots of animals, but because of her, they lost animals year by year. She sold them for money, and she didn't work hard. She's really bad. (female in her 60s, personal communication)

Rural Mongolians see hard work as directly related to herding success. Other qualities that they consider highly predictive of herding outcomes include knowledge—especially traditional knowledge—and experience. Mongolians typically maintain that herders who work hard and possess the requisite knowledge and experience can cope with shocks such as zud. Sometimes herders who lose their livestock to zud are new to the profession. This was particularly true following the transition to capitalism, when an unemployment surge led many households to take up herding for the first time. When such households lose their livestock, people say that they lacked the knowledge and experience to mitigate risk in herding. When more experienced herders lose their livestock, they are presumed to be lazy. In the aftermath of the 2010 zud, I asked herders in my research area to discuss why some people lost all of their animals while others got their herds through the crisis unscathed. The most common response was that "it has to do with their work." As one herder explained, "Some families don't prepare as well as others. They don't insulate their barns or the ground on which their animals will sleep, and they don't gather fodder" (male in his 40s, personal communication).

Like a good proportion of foreign development professionals working in Mongolia, some Mongolians attribute the purported problem of poor work ethic among herders to the influence of government aid. More than one herder has told me that "lazy" herders should not receive cash, livestock, or food aid following zud, or else they will just continue to be lazy. A research team carrying out herder focus groups on resilience to zud found similar attitudes. Participants explained that "when help comes, it has always been distributed among the poor herders" and lamented that "if we continue to have a policy that 'since he is poor we need to help him,' then we will never reduce poverty" (Fernández-Giménez, Batkhishig, and Batbuyan 2012:845).

Manifestations of such attitudes are observable in local-level decision making. After the 2010 zud, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation gave relief funds to groups of herders, letting the groups decide how to distribute the funds among their members. Although the households within the groups had suffered differently, many of the groups divided the funds equally, explaining that they did not want the "laziest" herders to receive special compensation (Matthias Meier, personal communication).

Such discourses of work ethic and responsibility are not limited to the herding livelihood but rather pervade social interactions, and promoting discipline is a key task in the bureaucracy of most Mongolian organizations. In rural schools, for example, administrators push teachers to be industrious and punish those who fail to complete assigned tasks on time or in a comprehensive manner. Teachers, in turn, foster discipline in their students. The fact that teachers and students are responsible for much of the janitorial and maintenance work in rural schools provides a venue, in addition to classwork, to teach students the value of hard work, reinforcing lessons received at home.

Activeness

Discipline is sometimes seen as conflicting with inspiration or enterprise, but Mongolians value both. In addition to a strong work ethic, Mongolians admire a quality they call "activeness," which suggests the ability to initiate projects. To say that someone is "*idevkhtei*" (active) is one of the highest compliments. The term "*khödölmörch*" (industrious) can also describe someone who exceeds the basic responsibilities of their position.

Similarly, one can say that someone "*zugeer suuj chadakhgüi*" (can't merely sit), a compliment that implies that they are working on something all of the time. Højer (2012) explains that in relation to occupation, "just sitting" to make money is a characteristic of morally suspicious livelihoods, such as pawnbrokering, as opposed to worthier ones, which entail producing something through labor. A friend at my research site, helping set up my participant observation with a herder (a widow living alone), recommended me to her by saying that I was a person who "cannot merely sit," but rather likes tasks such as gathering dung for the fire, herding goats, and sweeping the floor. My friend then told me that I would enjoy living with this herder, explaining, "She cannot sit; when she isn't taking care of the livestock, she knits wool socks and does all kinds of things" (female in her 40s, personal communication).

Productivity Awards

Mongolians continue to formally recognize achievements in herding, even though herding productivity now translates into private wealth and could therefore be considered its own reward.[3] Russian President Vladimir Putin made international news in 2013 for reinstating the "Stalin-era" Hero of Labor medal. Putin commented that although Stalinism has many legitimate negative associations, order and discipline are worth preserving (Anishchuk 2013). In Mongolia, the Hero of Labor award and other socialist-era honors, like Champion Herder and Champion Milker, never went away. Such distinctions continue to bear social significance. Many awardees pin their medals to their *deels* (traditional dress) or jackets before posing for photographs. Local government officials brag about decorated local herders in annual reports and to visitors of their districts.

"Checking"

The basis for formal recognition of productivity is "inspecting" or "*shalgakh*" (checking) or what Kipnis (2008) refers to in the Chinese socialist context as "auditing." Discussing the auditing of Chinese schools, Kipnis describes the school administrators' efforts to impress auditors with the appearance that their school has met or exceeded expectations. Though the tone of the article is analytical rather than judgmental, Kipnis portrays the audits as counterproductive, since they lead schools to direct valuable resources toward preparing for audits rather than toward substantive work to improve education. In Mongolia, inspections are central to the management of virtually all organizations and, to the extent that Mongolians see the institution as a means of achieving recognition for their work, the practice is perhaps not without value. In Mongolian schools, students are "checked" by administrators, and schools are "checked" by the provincial ministry of education. During socialism, herders were "checked" by collective leaders, and collectives were "checked" by government ministries.

Today, many herders and government officials still see some form of inspection as proper. At my research site, 85 percent of 83 herders whom I surveyed agreed that the local government has a duty to visit households in the fall to check their preparedness for winter. Since herds are privatized, herders have little to gain by exaggerating their accomplishments or concealing their losses. Rather, herders seem to welcome visits from government delegations as affirmations that the officials are concerned with their welfare and impressed with their accomplishments (if their work is deemed adequate) or aware of their struggles (if their work is inadequate).

Because of the distances between herding households in the Gobi, an official car going to check on herders may fill up with government officials and social workers, each with different agendas, making the visits particularly eventful. I traveled with delegations from my research district's center as they visited herding households in the winter. The trips lasted three to four days each; we traveled from campsite to campsite from early morning till around midnight, spending the night at the last stop.

Each stop featured an exchange of news, public outreach, and data collection. First, the governor asked herders about the well-being of their family, the condition of their livestock and any losses, and the fodder they had prepared. The social workers talked to families about sending their children to preschool, urged men to stop smoking, and explained a new rule that requires families to build latrines at their winter campsites. The hospital social worker collected data about people's diets and their exercise habits, confirming that rural Mongolians in this area rarely eat fruits and vegetables and even more rarely engage in any exercise apart from household and herding labor. (The fact that the survey was created in the capital and carried out nation-wide explains why it made little sense in the rural context.) Another official told the herders that they must wear helmets when riding motorcycles. The delegates also reported news from the district center and invited the herders to come to the next *zövlöliin khural* (advising meeting), where citizens may voice their concerns to the local government. The government rounds that I witnessed resemble those recorded by another anthropologist in the 1970s (Rosenberg 1977).

While ubiquitous inspections of herders'—and other workers'—work is part of the socialist legacy, longer-standing customs also influence the interactions between herders and their local leaders, as illustrated by a scenario that occurred when I was accompanying a local government delegation on its rounds. One evening, we visited an intoxicated elderly herder and spent hours showing our respect by taking shots of vodka and singing, though we planned to make several more stops before resting. Some of the delegates got restless and wondered if the governor was enjoying himself too much at our expense, but when we were once again in the car, he scolded us, saying, "It is important that we show people, and especially older people, that we want to visit them and talk with them. This is Mongolian custom" (male in his 40s, personal communication). The singing, the particular manner

of drinking, and the paying of respect to the elderly herder all had roots in pre-socialist Mongolian traditions as well as being shaped by socialist-era practices. This research is complicated by the ways neoliberal, socialist, and pre-socialist influences are intertwined; it is unsurprising that "lazy herder discourses" appear to relate to all three influences.

Herders' expectations about government's role in managing zud risk, however, are most clearly a facet of the socialist legacy. As mentioned above, most respondents in my survey of herders agreed that the government should "check" herders' work before and during winter, but they differed in their opinions about what actions the government might take to follow up on problems that they might find. Of my 83 respondents, 55 percent agreed with the statement that the government should give assignments related to winter preparation (for example, telling people how much hay to stock). Thirty-three percent of herders surveyed agreed with the statement that government officials should scold those herders who do not make satisfactory winter preparations. Many others told me that while scolding was not necessary, "*sharduulakh*" (requiring) that appropriate preparations be made was. The following conversation I had with a herder illustrates a popular understanding of the role of government in relation to herders' winter preparations as a blend of supervision, enforcement, and facilitation:

> A: Do you think the government should oversee herders' winter preparations and give them advice?
> H: Yes, but if they just say, "You have to prepare this much of this, and this much of that," and don't enforce it, then it's worthless.
> A: Would you like the government to require a certain degree of preparation?
> H: That would be good. It would be good if they regulated it from the state level. And they also need to create more facilities where we can buy hay cheaply. (female in her 60s, personal communication)

While herders in my survey expected the government to be involved in risk management, there was no indication that they expected the government to make up for a lack of effort on their own part. One herder, who had just lost her entire herd to zud, nevertheless subscribed to the reigning opinion: "Whether the government does or does not demand that work gets done, it is [ultimately] herders' responsibility to do the winter preparations" (female in her 60s, personal communication). While they may not *need* the government to tell them how to prepare for winter or to make sure that the necessary work gets done, many rural Mongolians draw meaning and motivation from the government's assessment and recognition of their efforts.

For their part, local officials at my research site defied the stereotype of the insensitive, corrupt post-socialist bureaucrat. Locals themselves, many were frustrated that a lack of resources prevented them from supporting herders as much as they would have liked. They aimed to check on all households in the fall and winter but lamented that the distances between camps exceeded their limited fuel budget. All levels of government continue to issue announcements regarding the amounts of fodder that herders should prepare for winter for the purposes of risk management, but herders may not have the means to comply, and the instructions are not enforced. One subdistrict governor in my research area, when I visited families with him, volunteered to deliver hay to anyone who needed it but lacked the means of transportation to acquire it; he provided this service at his own expense. Rosenberg (1977) describes similar actions by rural leaders during the socialist period. Not all local politicians are so "active" and attentive to the needs of their constituent households, but demonstrating these qualities is the surest means of gaining popular support.

Even if the actions of well-intentioned bureaucrats offer herders few tangible benefits due to a lack of resources, these individuals can meet many longstanding cultural expectations by the manner in which they carry out their roles. A school director who does not monitor, praise, and occasionally scold her teachers might be seen to be slacking off in her job. A government official who does not check up on his constituents is thought to be uncaring. In interviews, herders who expressed dissatisfaction with their district or subdistrict governor most often noted that the official never came by to check on them.

"Collective Works"

While one of the legacies of Mongolian socialism is that people's work ethic is always under scrutiny, another is that people are accustomed to mobilizing in particular ways to help those suffering misfortune, such as herders who lose livestock to zud. The socialist era "collective works" were overlaid on earlier traditions of collaboration among herders and—to some extent—top-down management of herding. Prior to socialist collectivization, herding households typically camped in small groups, called *khotons* or *khot ails,* with informal and non-permanent membership (Sneath 1999). When camping together, households cooperated on herding tasks, often assigned by a patriarch. The state's initial efforts to collectivize livestock met with resistance from herders, but once sufficient incentives were in place, most herders took part, giving up all but a small number of their private animals to enjoy job security and benefits. The ways that herders in collectives gave and followed orders and organized themselves to achieve production goals must have drawn in part from governance during the pre-socialist feudal period as well as from the Soviet model.

Today, as during socialism, private as well as government-mandated collective endeavors take a bureaucratized form. In the Soviet *subbotnik*[4] tradition, citizens may be asked to join together to pick up trash or repaint a school. As another example, if an employee of an organization suffers an illness, faces a particular challenge, or has a chance to travel internationally, the other employees will raise money. The protocol is to make a list of all employees and record the amounts that each gives, thus formalizing pressure to take part and recognizing those who contribute.

A similar form of collective organization can be directed to winter risk management. Sambuu (1987), the communist statesman who compiled advice for herders, also dictated in his book that able-bodied community members should offer their labor to collectives during zud. Community efforts to assist herders are still common. At my research site, in the fall of 2010, all the organizations in the district—the government, the banks, the school, etc.—agreed to the governor's idea of having their members produce *zoodoi* (feed patties for livestock) for poor herders. School children were assigned smaller quotas than adult employees, but everyone was compelled to participate. A local school teacher told me that "*olon niitiin khamtarsan ajil*" (tasks carried out by many people joined together) are enjoyable; in this case, many people went for walks with their friends to pick wild plants to make the zoodoi, she explained.

Urbanites also mobilize to help herders, though not universally. Many living in Mongolia's cities grew up in the countryside or have rural relatives. Some city dwellers form associations with others with connections to the same rural districts. The associations carry out projects for their home districts, including raising money to assist them during zud. In addition, members of urban organizations (offices, schools, etc.), regardless of their background, sometimes choose to donate a certain number of days' pay to zud relief efforts. For example, in 2010, members of 40 workplaces in Bayankhongor's provincial capital gave up one day's earnings each to help fund deliveries of hay and other necessities to herders during zud.

Of course, not all Mongolians approve of this model. The urban businessman quoted earlier told me, "In the winter, school children are asked to do things like sew blankets for herders to put on their animals to keep them warm, but some of us wonder why herders don't do these things themselves." Nevertheless, many people participate in public works not just to avoid the embarrassment of declining but also because of the excitement of producing tangible results together. Outcomes of collective efforts are numerated, publicized, and rewarded. The socialist legacy of directing aid where it is needed has little to do with the work ethic of the recipients, that is, it does not imply that those in need are lazy. If anything, the practice shows that particularly when engaged in collective endeavors, Mongolians tend to embrace the responsibility of fulfilling assigned duties.

Conclusions

In Mongolia, attitudes about work ethic and responsibility have roots in neoliberal ideology, the socialist past, and older traditions. I argue that in many ways, these influences complement each other, contributing to criticism of those herders who fail to cope with winter disasters, whether because of real or presumed laziness. My research reaffirms the importance of the neoliberal influence and the socialist legacy at a time when other anthropological scholarship has minimized their importance, suggesting that in many situations, neoliberalism and the socialist legacy are at best minor and superficial drivers of culture and governance.

For example, Kipnis (2008), in his study of auditing practices in Chinese schools, critiques Western scholars who, he explains, have a misguided penchant for seeing neoliberal influences everywhere. He concludes that Chinese auditing practices that *appear* to be shaped by neoliberalism may be more connected to socialism, since socialist and neoliberal ideologies share the goal of producing responsible individuals (Kipnis 2008). As in China, "Western" or "neoliberal" influences in Mongolia may sometimes be figments of academic imagination. But Mongolia differs from China in crucial ways. Most notably, Mongolia has been subjected to a neoliberal development agenda to an extent that China has not, due to the bombardment of Western influences that the transition to capitalism ushered in. Western development advisors have specifically sought to create conditions for the production of more "enterprising" citizens. Although lazy herder discourses are ubiquitous and arise from multiple ideological contexts, Western development professionals voice some of the most ardent critiques of herders' continuing vulnerability to zud and "dependence" on aid. It seems certain that neoliberal values help to shape these critiques.

Similarly, emphasis on "the socialist legacy" is considered by some scholars to be a facile and misleading explanation for certain social phenomenon in post-socialist states. They point out that the demonization of Soviet-style communism in the West (Yurchak 2006) has led to a warped and exaggerated assessment of the "legacy." It is true that the socialist legacy has most often been portrayed, in a partisan fashion, as an impediment to a country's progress toward achieving "true democracy" (Illner 1996). Recently in anthropology, the "socialist legacy" and the "socialist mentality" are rejected as explanations for problems such as corruption in politics, and critical focus has been shifted away from the "socialist legacy" and toward the ill effects of abrupt "shock therapy" transitions (Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Buyandelgeriyn 2008).

However, Mongolian culture *has been* highly affected by many decades of socialist governance. As Sneath (2003) also points out, the "imprints" of the Soviet reorganization of Mongolian society, particularly rural society, are ubiquitous and significant. When the government gives herders awards for their achievements, when school children are assigned fodder-stocking quotas to aid poor herding households, and when government workers go from home to home to check on rural families' winter preparations, the continuity of socialist institutions help maintain a sense of community and provide a safety net in the post-socialist era. I do not believe that the socialist legacy in Mongolia has been exaggerated, but I do feel that it is poorly understood. The idea that socialism produced lazy herders who fail to take responsibility for managing the risk of zud is a simplistic interpretation of the socialist legacy. Such a narrative fails to take into account the fact that Mongolians themselves critique each other's work

performance according to high standards or that many recall working very hard for the collectives.

While neoliberal and socialist approaches to responsibility complement each other in their emphases on work and responsibility, there remain distinctions in the context and meaning of lazy herder discourses arising from these two analytical approaches. While all parties, including herders, appear unified in the belief that winter preparation needs to be pursued responsibly, the socialist legacy leads to larger roles for government and the community in supporting herders' efforts. Some of the ways that local governments and communities support herders facing zud truly defy neoliberal sensibilities, for example, the practice of obliging community members to contribute labor or money to collective projects. Mongolians' affinity for the inspection of individual households as they prepare for winter is also contrary to neoliberal ideas about self-sufficiency. A socialist perspective makes it possible for Mongolians to emphasize roles for government and communities in supporting herders during disasters while simultaneously maintaining that herders should take responsibility for their own well-being. This would appear paradoxical from a neoliberal perspective.

While development professionals, government officials, and herders themselves continue to emphasize responsibility, all are beginning to acknowledge that the Western model of self-sufficiency at the household level is insufficient given today's environmental and economic uncertainties. The government and development organizations are currently encouraging herders to form groups to manage natural resources and engage in projects for profit or risk mitigation collaboratively. This format offers some continuity with both socialist collectivization and the informal institution of *khot ails* (groups of households camping and working together) in the pre-socialist period. Today, as an extra incentive, herders who form groups become eligible for certain types of project support. In my research area, groups of herders are using such funds to fence pasture reserves that can be opened up to livestock in the event of zud. In steppe areas, project-enrolled groups of herders have been given hay mowing machines, which can greatly increase their winter fodder stores.

Collaboration in groups is, of course, not the same as working for collectives. Collectives had the guaranteed support of the state, whereas the creation of herder groups supports decentralization, allowing more responsibility for zud risk management to be shifted to herders themselves. Whether group formation provides increased resilience to zud depends on a number of factors and is discussed elsewhere (Fernández-Giménez, Batkhishig, and Batbuyan 2012; Upton 2008). Meanwhile, the socialist-style strategies for governing risk, such as local officials' visitations to herders to check on their winter preparations, still serve a purpose in the eyes of many rural Mongolians but are endangered by lack of funds.

After zud (and exacerbating zud), one of herders' biggest concerns is climate change. Many herders in the Gobi say that current "natural conditions," such as summer drought and pasture degradation, are the worst in recent history. Many of the changes that they are grappling with, such as decreasing reliability of rainfall (Marin 2010), are likely a direct result of global warming. Unfavorable conditions in summer make it difficult for herders to fatten livestock and stock up on winter fodder. Herders still put a great deal of faith in hard work, but some of my research participants explained to me that sometimes hard work is not enough to manage zud risk:

> Getting through zud without losing livestock depends on how much hay is gathered and how much migration and fattening are done in the summer. But last year, the weather was so bad that there wasn't any hay, so last year, it depended on the weather. (male in his 50s, personal communication)

Protecting livestock from zud is becoming harder, but expectations on individuals to manage risk are high. When herders fail to mitigate harsh conditions through hard work, they may face criticism from both a neoliberal perspective, for appearing to be complacent when they should be striving to become self-sufficient, and from a socialist one, for appearing to lack discipline when they should be fulfilling their responsibilities.

Efforts to build herders' and other rural producers' resilience to natural disasters take place within a politically complex historical context. The socialist legacy is not a popular resource for risk management, given its association with herders' supposed dependence on assistance, but the actual functions of the legacy in rural Mongolia are worthy of attention. The legacy is active when government officials go out of their way to show an interest in herders' winter preparations, offering herders psychological if not tangible support. The legacy is also seen when community organizations lend their labor and financial resources to bureaucratized collective efforts to mitigate the effects of zud. Policymakers and development professionals must recognize that providing herders with a safety net will not automatically make herders lazy. A careful examination of the socialist legacy proves as much. Greater support during zud is particularly important given unabated rural vulnerability and the uncertainty presented by climate change.

Notes

[1]Mongolian International Non-Governmental Organizations meeting at the World Vision office in Ulaanbaatar, January 20, 2011.

[2]"Discipline-responsibility" is reminiscent of Lenin's idea of "labor discipline." In the Soviet Union, labor discipline was reified through disciplinary codes to enhance productivity and instill a proper work ethic (Graves 1921; Prokhorov 1986).

[3]Whether wealth itself is admired depends on its form and how it is acquired, with wealth in livestock being the most virtuous form, as it is associated with both hard work and good "fortune" (Empson 2011; Højer 2012).

[4]The term *subbotnik* comes from the Russian word for "Saturday" and refers to a day devoted to collective volunteer work.

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