Mongolia, moral culture and the mythology of nomadism

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ABSTRACT: The figure of The Nomad has long held a special place in the moral mythologies of classical Euroamerican history, typically appearing as exotic members of the supporting cast in the grand story of civilization. In social evolutionist thought Nomadic Society was presented as one of the major divisions of humankind, to be theorised and contrasted with sedentary agriculture and urbanism. Soviet-era Mongolian scholarship, concerned with recognition and respect for a national culture under active construction, appropriated and valorised nomadism as a distinctive national heritage. The notion of 'nomadic civilization' (nüüdliin soyol irgenshil) encapsulated the view that, far from being incompatible with civilization, nomadism was a particular type of civilization, of which Mongolia was the most splendid example. By the time of the postsocialist-era revival of 'national culture' the concept was already deeply intertwined with notions of the nomadic, and imbued with a virtuous ethical content. 'Traditional nomadic culture' (ulamjlalt nüüdliin soyol) and 'nomadic civilization' are central subjects in the Ethical Citizen Education (irgenii yos züin bolovsrol) taught in Mongolian schools. However, since the late twentieth century, trends in history,

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archaeology and postcolonial scholarship have led to a questioning and rethinking of the notions of nomadism, culture and morality inherited from older schools of scholarship. I argue that 'the nomadic' can no longer be seen as a defining feature of a fundamentally different social type, but rather as a label applied to livestock-based political economies with many correspondences with agricultural and urban ones. Similarly, rather than approaching culture as an enduring, abstract collective form, we can better conceive of it as an unstable, changing accretion of particular normative projects for the ordering of the social world.

WHAT MIGHT WE MEAN BY 'NOMADIC ETHICS'?

If we were to begin with the first term – nomadic – what would an archaeology of this concept look like? The figure of The Nomad has long held a special place in Euroamerican historical writing and public culture. Since the 18th century, nomads appear as exotic members of the supporting cast in the grand story of civilization. Their most prominent roles were as warriors, like the indominable Scythians of Herodotus, and as bloody-handed warlords. Attila the Hun, Chinggis Khan and Tamerlane appeared as the great 'nomadic' conquerors, testing the metal of the civilisations they confronted or overwhelmed. For some, such as Montesquieu (1750), these steppe warlords were despots, leading armies of slaves to enslave others. For others, like Gibbon (1776-89), the nomads were, like Tacitus's Germans, archetypal martial races - tough, self-reliant, fierce and free.

But despised or admired, the nomads were barbarians, too warlike, restless or indolent to cultivate the soil; one of the major divisions of humankind, placed by history on the other side of the Great Divide between the desert and the sown, the savage and the civilised. Eurasian 'nomads' were lumped together into one enormous category, usually referred to as 'Scythians' or 'Tartars' (Gibbon used the terms interchangeably) so that Mongols, Tartars, Turks, Huns, Sarmatians and Scythians could all be made to stand for one another, since the outlandishness of their 'wandering' pastoral lifestyle tended to blot out the differences between them. The study of this essentialised Eurasian Nomad

became a topic in its own right, with a body of literature that resembled a sort of sub-genre of Orientalism.

In this tradition, which we might call 'nomadist' or 'Tartarological' (so as not to confused it with Deleuze and Guattari's [1986] curious philosophical project they called 'nomadology'), the 4th century Roman descriptions of Huns and the 13th century Medieval European accounts of Mongols could be used to embellish insights found in Herodotus's original depiction of the Scythians in the 5th century BCE, since all these sources revealed fundamental characteristics of something conceived of as 'nomadic society'.

The social evolutionism of the 19th century placed 'nomads' squarely in the middle of the three stages of human development. More advanced than Savages, but more backward than Civilised peoples, the nomads occupied the intermediate stage of Barbarism. Having discovered how to live from domesticated livestock, evolutionist thinkers reasoned, nomadic pastoralists must have got 'stuck' in evolutionary terms, and never developed the agricultural systems needed for settled life, urban centres and civilisation. Being conceptually located in the Barbaric category brought a set of familiar narratives and labels with it. Barbarians lacked the civilised state so they would be bound to be organised by 'kinship' rather than territory, blood rather than soil. They would form themselves into 'clans' and 'tribes'. Their leaders would be patriarchs and tribal 'chiefs', elevated by timeproof mechanisms of kinship and tradition.

By the 20th century more broad-minded historians had dropped the term 'barbarism' as evidently Eurocentric and derogatory. But the wider evolutionary scheme and the 'stuckness' of the nomad was still taken for granted. So, in his monumental study of world history, for example, Toynbee (1946) classified nomadism as an 'arrested civilisation', along with others such as 'the Eskimos' who had ended up in a sort of evolutionary cul-de-sac. Although the labels might be switched around, and 'nomadism' might be allowed to be a type of civilisation, the organising narrative remained the same. Nomads occupied a sort of epoch of their own, connected to, but separate from, the 'outside world'. Although classical evolutionist theory had fallen from favour by the mid-20th century, many of its key assumptions lived on in environmental and technological determinist social science treatments.

Pastoral nomadic society was proposed as general category of human society that shared features as a result of a characteristic productive system. The apparently exotic

lifestyle prompted speculative reasoning, more abstract than concrete, about how wandering from pasture to pasture, without fixed abode, must place a set of constraints upon society. Whether 'the state' was seen as good or a bad, there was general agreement that 'nomads' would not ordinarily have such a thing. Their 'simple' economy could not support the complex division of labour needed, and anyway, how could such fierce and free people be induced to obey a ruler if they didn't want to? If they found a leader to be overbearing, nomads could simply move away, wander off and govern themselves, the reasoning went. In this mythology, if nomads were left to their own devices they would be bound to form small autonomous kinship groups without hierarchical political institutions.

That the historical record is crammed with examples of hierarchy and political centralisation in steppe polities made little difference to this narrative, since all exceptions could be presumed to be the result of interaction with 'sedentary society' – agricultural and urban-based 'civilisation', conceived of as good or bad. In retrospect, however, this argument is not very convincing, even in theory. Armies are generally more mobile than general populations (as Moses found before the timely miracle of the Parting of the Red Sea), and for those studying steppe empires it is clear that the rulers can be just as mobile as the ruled. Trying to reason 'from first principles' in this way seems no real substitute for studying the historical particularities of any given case, be they agricultural or pastoral. Historical reconstruction inevitably requires supposition to fill-in the gaps left in the available historical and archaeological evidence. In the case of steppe polities this was generally done by looking to the models devised by the 'nomadists' who attempted to divine the essential characteristics of nomadic society as a general type. This received wisdom was packed with the old evolutionist assumptions about kinship and social simplicity. The legacy of this scholarship is still evident in contemporary treatments of 'steppe empires' which continue to be pictured as gigantic 'tribal' structures, based on kinship, ruled by warlord dynasties with rudimentary bureaucracies borrowed the sedentary states they conquered.

The model that emerged, and which proved remarkably resilient despite mounting evidence that contradicted it, represents nomadic society in terms of economic limitation, kinship society, and political simplicity. Pastoralism limits the complexity of social organization and hierarchy, the story goes, so nomads form kinship units (tribes and clans)

quite unlike the administrative divisions of the state. And since nomads don't require complex political institutions, those who manage to establish conquest dynasties must acquire the necessary statecraft from sedentary civilizations. But these suppositions have become increasingly unconvincing in recent decades. Historical work has revealed more and more political complexity in Inner Asia's past, and archaeological evidence of agriculture and urbanism continues to be found in steppe regions. Rulers here have, as elsewhere, frequently governed diverse political economies and operated within established bodies of political ideology.

In any case, we can reject the idea that a 'nomadic' economy is bound to be simple on theoretical grounds. Mobile pastoralism is framed and transformed by political power just as sedentary agriculture is, and, while clearly different, it allows as much scope for the accumulation of wealth and the construction of large-scale systems as agricultural techniques do. In both pastoral or agricultural production, it is clear that the economic possibilities depend upon the nature of the property regimes that exist for resources and products, and the wider political systems that frame them.

Mongolia has long been seen as, if not the original birthplace of nomadism, one of its ancient homelands. In the Soviet era 'nomads' were fitted, with some debate, into a version of Marx's five stage theory of human historical development, as either 'feudal' or 'semi-feudal'. Pre-revolutionary Mongolia, with its well-established aristocracy, seemed to fit the feudal bill and the young Mongolian People's Republic was portrayed as in the process of leaping from Feudalism, cleanly over Capitalism, to arrive at Socialism as the first stage of Communist society. In the Soviet era the evolutionist, environmentally-determinist notions that Marx shared with his 19th century contemporaries, were informed by forms of nationalist thought that pictured humans as divided into distinctive 'peoples', each with their own particular characteristics and psychologies. Stalin, after all, considered 'the nation' to be a historically constituted, stable community sharing language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.

In this worldview people from 'nomadic cultures' would be bound to bear the psychological imprint of this ancient lifestyle. In the wider world of Soviet internationalism, Mongolia's new socialist elite found their national identity inextricably bound-up with narratives of nomadism. Despite Soviet internationalist rhetoric, state-sponsored nation-

building projects were enormously powerful and comprehensive processes. After the furious first decades of state-building, in which a national history and culture was rapidly constructed, the MPR came to enjoy 'mature socialism' and an increasingly self-confident and cosmopolitan national elite set about making a place for Mongolia alongside the national cultures of other socialist nations, particularly Russia.

Gaining respect and recognition for Mongolian cultural forms was official policy, so nomadism was appropriated and valorised as a distinctive national heritage. In the 1970s the notion of 'nomadic civilization' (*nüüdliin soyol irgenshil*) gained popularity as a sort of encapsulation of the official understanding of the past – far from being incompatible with civilization, nomadism was a particular type of civilization, with Mongolia counted as one of its most splendid examples. Since the material and ideological collapse of the Soviet system in the 1990s, the celebration of the national became the central theme of the new political culture that emerged in democratic, free-market Mongolia. The glorification of Mongolian cultural heritage was, for a while, a unifying theme for the new political elite, split as it was into rival political parties for the first time. But the selection of which historical persons and processes were worthy of veneration quickly became another field of political contest, pitting those appreciative of state socialism against nationalist devotees of the Chinggisid Empire. The image of the *ger*-dwelling mobile pastoralist remained, however, deeply embedded in all the visions of historical, cultural and national identity. As the domestic and international marketing of 'Mongolia as brand' continues to be central to the political, economic and personal projects of so many Mongolians, nomadism plays a central part in narratives of national distinctiveness as the names of numerous restaurants, hotels and tourist companies testifies.

NOMADIC ETHICS AND MORAL CODES

Ethics is generally taken to mean the branch of philosophy concerned with right and wrong, often used interchangeably with the term *morality*. Some anthropologists have tried to introduce a distinction between the two terms. Webb Keane (2014:443), following Bernard Williams (1985) takes ethics to be the field concerned with the question "how shall I live?" - which is a broader field than morality, which is about systems of rules and obligations. Charles Stafford (2010:188) goes so far as to describe

morality as 'structure' and ethics as 'agency', so that acts of individual reflection might be considered 'ethical' and social norms and standards of behaviour would describe 'morality'. But in practice, all agree, in any given social setting ethics and morality are thoroughly entangled with each other, since individual ethical choices are almost always made in the light of existing values. Here I am concerned with 'moral culture', as the structural side then, of ethical evaluation.

Can we identify any distinctive moral codes or logics of 'nomads' or 'nomadic society'? There are a number of candidates we might consider:

Religious tolerance, for example, has been much remarked upon as a distinctive feature of the 13th century Mongol Empire. Jack Weatherford (2016) suggests "we owe our doctrine of religious freedom in part to a distant nomad who forged the world's greatest empire in a trail of blood." (Jacket). But whatever we think of Weatherford's claims, it is hard to think of religious tolerance as a distinctively nomadic product. As a technique of statecraft, religious policy has been used in various ways by ruling dynasties across the globe; and well-known urban-based empires (the Achaemenid Persian and early Roman, for example) tolerated diverse religions, and empires founded by dynasties that ruled pastoralists could be intolerant (the Umayyad Caliphate, for example). And, of course, since the 16th century 'Second Conversion' to Buddhism, ruling dynasties in Mongolia were far from tolerant of religious difference.

A more promising subject might be found in *environmental ethics*. Chinggis Khan is credited with edicts to prevent people from washing in water sources, references to local deities of the 'land and water' (*gajar usun-u ejed (lords of the earth and water) or qan gajar usun (earth and water kings*) date from Chinggisid times (Cleaves 1982: 212). The rites held at sacred mountains have a long history on the steppe, from the 10th century Khitan Muye Mountain, to the 13th century Burkhan Khaldun and the contemporary Bogd Khan Uul (and the other *Töriin Takhilgatai Uul*).[1] But the extent to which this could be said to be peculiarly 'nomadic' is debateable. Sacred mountains are found in many religious traditions, including Hinduism, Jainism Zoroastrianism, and Ancient Greece and Rome. Notions of sacred landscape have been found throughout the globe - sacred trees, groves,

[1] Now one of the ten mountains that have the 'state mountain sky ceremony' (*uulyn tengeriin taikh töriin takhilga*).

forests, rivers and lakes and so on – since ancient times. Indeed the *savdag*[2] and *lus*[3] - the 'Lords of Land and Water' – of Mongolia, exist within a Buddhist cosmology that is not exclusively 'nomadic; rites to propitiate them are carried out in diverse localities in Eastern Eurasia by agriculturalists as well as pastoralists.

Perhaps, then, we might look to ***human-animal relations*** for distinctive 'nomadic' ethics? After all, mobile pastoralists depend upon sophisticated and affective relationships with their livestock for their livelihood. Horses, dogs, camels, sometimes even cats, are particularly close partners in pastoral life, not mention the other species of the *tavan khoshuu mal* that have been so central to production on the steppe. But, again, such close relationships with animals are widely found – horses and dogs have been valued, and adored, by sedentary elites for millennia; farmers and ranchers routinely depend upon complex and close relationships with animals too. So, although the ethical dimension of human-animal relations (like environmental relations) will clearly take on fascinating distinctive forms in different social settings, such as Mongolia, the idea that they will be of a special 'nomadic' variety (shared with other 'nomadic cultures') is appealing only if one considers 'nomadism' to be an integral, meta-social category. At best we could see it as a matter of speculation – something to be demonstrated with evidence, rather than assumed.

But there is a better candidate – I think – for distinctive moral codes among mobile pastoralists. For although humans everywhere live as part of environments, and live with companion-species, almost everywhere, they do not live in the same way. Mobile pastoralists in grassland environments typically have low occupation densities. Travel would be difficult and dangerous unless one could count on water, food and shelter from the encampments dotted across the landscape. Hospitality, then, might seem like a good bet in our hunt for something distinctively 'nomadic' in the realm of morality. Like Mongolians, the Bedouin, for example, are famous for their hospitality.

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[2] The Mongolian form of the Tibetan term *sa bdag,* meaning 'land lord/master.'
[3] The *luus* were the water spirits or *naga* of Buddhist cosmology. However, the term is sometimes used inclusively to refer to local deities and spirits (Mönkhsaikhan 2004: 52).

MONGOLIAN EVERYDAY HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is an everyday part of life on the Mongolian steppe. Visitors to any rural *ail* (encampment) expect to be offered drink, food and, if need be, a place for the night.[4] Guests can be friends, acquaintances, complete strangers or foreigners; neighbours or travellers passing through for one reason or another. In many cases visitors are from sufficiently far away that all parties understand that there can be no reciprocal visit; the householders will not make a visit in return. But this is not important. Old friend or complete stranger, any visitor to a pastoral household can expect hospitality.

Classical anthropology tended to approach hospitality practices in terms of exchange and reciprocity, a flow of gifts and counter-gifts. Rather than presuming exchange, however, we can see these transfers of goods and assistance as materialisations of the social roles and relations engaged by the visit. Rather than *trans*actions, I argue, these routine material transfers to others can be better seen as enactions of certain aspects of persons and roles. Hospitality behaviour (*zochlomtgoi zan*) enacts the role of host or hostess as an aspect of the householder's social persona. Similarly, the guest enacts his or her role as an appreciative recipient by accepting at least a token of what is offered. This does not resemble Marcel Mauss's theory of the gift, that has been so influential in anthropology; the obligations to give and receive emerge from the social settings of host and guest, not the reattachments of the objects involved, and the transfer itself carries no obligation to reciprocate.

The social setting allows for improvisation and personal expression. Someone wanting to impress with his generosity might choose to act as a superlative host and provide much more than the usual level of hospitality – offering luxuries. Conversely, no offence is taken if there are evident reasons why the hosts are unable to provide proper hospitality but offer some token like cold tea instead. The main point is that those concerned were willing to enact their roles, not the value of the transferred materials.

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[4] The 'unit of hospitality' is usually, but not necessarily, the encampment as such, but is often a form of stem family – a parental couple and one or more children with their spouses and children, if any (see Sneath 1999:139-147). In most cases the encampment is comprised of one such stem family living in several *ger*s, but may (particularly in summer) include other such families, friends or dependents. Generally each stem family is counted as an *örkh* (household) and could be a unit of hospitality.

So – it might see that we have found an example – a distinctive moral code, developed by mobile pastoralists, part of an ancient culture adapted to its environment. A closer examination, however, suggests a rather different understanding. In her 1987 paper 'The Host and the Guest: one hundred rules of good behaviour in rural Mongolia' Caroline Humphrey describes a list of hospitality rules given to her by a Mongolian teacher friend. They include such things as the customary exchanges of greetings as a visitor arrives at an encampment and announces their presence by calling for the inhabitants to control the dogs that frequently guard them; how the host should look after the guest's horse and take responsibility for replacing it if attacked by wolves; what the visitor can take into the dwelling and what items should be left outside the home; where and how the parties should sit depending on status; how to offer and place snuff bottles and pipes; what the host should provide by way of drink, snacks and food; when to make gifts if there are any; the positions for sleeping overnight; how to see the guest off when the time comes for them to leave, and so on. The rules include the proper bodily postures and gestures of the parties depending upon their rank; in the case of adult children visiting their parents this includes the bowing and other signs of respect they should make.

Most, but my no means all, of the rules listed resemble practices carried out, or at least recognized, in contemporary Mongolia to some extent. Some of the rules were clearly anachronistic, even when Humphrey received them. Rule 96 is that members of the host's household should turn prayer-wheels when the guest departs, but these merit-making Buddhist devices almost entirely disappeared from the Mongolian landscape in the State Socialist era.

Indeed, the rules have a pre-revolutionary tone to them, referring to senior lamas, Buddhist holy objects and other items of material culture that had become uncommon by the mid-to-late 20th century. Some, such as Rule 3 – a host should raise the felt door-flap for the host, are never practiced, since wooden doors replaced felt flaps in *ger*s many years ago. Many of the rules are recognized, but only practiced in the most formal of circumstances, or to make a point about how knowledgeable a host or guest might be regarding Mongolian custom. Most of the instructions regarding the postures of respect that juniors should adopt in the presence of seniors have largely dropped out of everyday practice.

Clearly, then, practices of hospitality have changed considerably in the twentieth century. To treat this as a case of 'the erosion of culture' would imply a notion of culture as continuity, a distinctive system of meanings and practices that is somehow outside historical time. But, as Humphrey (1987:43) notes: "These symbolic acts cannot be seen as ahistorical, even if many of the categories they are built from seem to have been present in Mongol culture for centuries… If we look at their social functions it is clear that they should be seen as obligations… In these rules we see an important indication of how rural Mongol society is meant to be."

The rules, then, are an historical artefact, put together from a range of past sources and describing memories, sayings and probably the writings of particular people at particular times, that were recalled by Humphrey's teacher friend. Some of the rules must have been invented in the seventeenth, eighteenth or nineteenth century. The Rules mention the proper placement of pipes, for example, and tobacco was not introduced until the seventeenth century. The ceremonial presentation of polished snuff bottles, often made of semi-precious stone, their handling, appreciation and return, are common greeting rituals for hosts and visitors, particularly older men. Such bottles were introduced into the Qing court in the reigns of the Kangxi and Yongzheng emperors and met with imperial approval. They spread among aristocrats and commoners in the eighteenth century (Olivova 2005:229). These practices, then, have biographies and authors; particular persons gave rise to popular forms of action and expectation that were taken up by others in historical time.

Secondly, these rules are about obligation, rather than reciprocity. As Humphrey (1987:44) pointed out, in Mongolia this sort of hospitality is *required* of householders; it is a duty rather than an act of charity. It was an expression of the status of the householders and their ability to fulfil a public norm. Just as one or more members of a household will take pride in a clean and tidy home or well-appointed interior décor, so the snacks and hospitality for visitors are demonstrative of family propriety. Returning to Humphrey's point that in the obligations placed on host and guest we can see an "indication of how rural Mongol society is meant to be".[5] Much classical social analysis was loosely

[5] As such it can be seen as an attempt to answer Williams's (1985) ethical litmus test question "how shall I live?" – or at least "how should we live?"

Durkheimian in that it pictured objects of study that it termed 'societies' or 'cultures' and described the distinctiveness and congruence found 'within' these entities as products of faintly mystical processes of socio-cultural integration, reproduction and equilibrium. In this perspective, cultures and societies frequently appeared as collective, bottom-up creations, reflecting the needs and interests of ordinary 'members of society'; adapted to their environment and unique life-worlds as a relatively homogenous group. Since the late twentieth century, however, anthropologists have largely followed a broader movement in social sciences (led by Feminist, Marxian and Foucauldian thought) that recognised the central importance of power-relations in the shaping systems of knowledge and social forms.

In light of this - we can pose further questions: *who* meant Mongol society to be this way, and *who* placed these obligations on householders and visitors? Tt seems that the answer to that question is that "various rulers and power-holders did." And, fortunately, we are able to learn something of this because the historical materials they left us uinclude legal codes.

LAWS OF HOSPITALITY

The early eighteenth century Qing-era Mongol law code the *Khalkha Jirum* describes a wide range of duties of subjects and the penalties for not meeting them.[6] These include the legal requirements of householders to provide transport for the travel of aristocrats and the senior Buddhist reincarnate lama and their envoy/messengers (*elch*). Patriarchy was enshrined in law; children were obliged to honour and obey their parents and could be punished for insulting them. This legislation makes the household an explicit site of political regulation by the dynastic state. The refusal of hospitality for the night was punishable by a fine of one three-year old stallion (Riasanovsky 1965 [1937]:114). That such refusals nevertheless took place, however, is clear from the list of compensation fines that should be levied on a householder depending upon the frostbite injuries or death of a stranger refused overnight hospitality.

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[6] Commoners were subject to quite tight control; they required permission, for example, to be allowed to live in an encampment other than the one they were allocated to (Riasanovsky 1965 [1937]:113).

These laws were not 'extraneous' innovations introduced by the Qing. The *Khalkha Jirum* closely resembles the pre-Qing Mongol law codes that have survived the intervening centuries. The 1640 code, the *Monggol-Oirad tsaaji*, lists the laws agreed between two sets of steppe rulers, the Mongols on the one hand, and the Oirats on the other - a Mongolic-speaking aristocracy ruling western Mongolia and part of what is now Xinjiang. It describes, if anything, even greater powers of the aristocracy than the *Khalkha Jirum*. This was at a time when both the Mongol and Oirat nobles houses did not recognize a clear overlord or emperor. Aristocratic power, however, is unmistakable: the code makes clear *whose* rule the code represents - the distributed sovereignty exercised by the Mongol and Oirat steppe aristocracies. Section 18, reads: "If nobles holding offices and … [other nobles and officials]… beat a person for the sake of the lords' (*ejed*) administration, law and order, they are not guilty, even if they beat someone to death."[7] Here the plural form of *ejen* (lord) is used for the "the lords' administration"; the laws refer to the nobility's joint government of subjects.[8] Aristocratic power in Mongolia is much older than this, however, it dates from the 3rd century BCE at the least, and the thirteenth century dynastic empire founded by Chinggis Khan shared many of the same features with later polities. We have only fragmentary and indirect evidence for the Chinggisid law codes, but the Mamluk source al-Maqrizi (1364–1442) notes that one Mongol law decreed that any traveller could join those who were eating without permission (Riasanovsky 1965 [1937]:84).

Although the origin of aristocracy as an institution may be lost in the mists of time, the emergence of particular aristocracies is certainly not. The Borjigin nobility that ruled most of Mongolia from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries were the descendants of the royal house of the conquest dynasty founded by Chinggis Khan. It was this nobility that chose to swear fealty to the Qing in the seventeenth century and intermarried extensively with the royal Manchu house of Aisin Gioro.

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[7] The full passage reads: "If nobles holding offices and *tabunangs* (son-in-law of a noble), junior nobles and *tabunangs*, *demchi* (head of forty households), *shigülengge* (head of twenty households) beat a person for the sake of the lords' (*ejed*) administration, law and order, they are not guilty, even if they beat someone to death."

[8] This distributed aristocracy and what I term 'the headless state' is explored in Sneath 2007(a).

If we can speak of hospitality practices as embodying micro-hierarchies of power, or as part of the *habitus* of rural Mongolian households, these are forms that have been powerfully shaped by historical power relations. To explain their presence we need not look to the hidden logics of cultures as symbolic systems. The rulers of Mongolia found it useful to have their subjects offer a certain level of support to those travelling in their dominions, just as they found it necessary to have taxes, corvée labour requirements and orderly relations between their subjects. Of course, this is an account of only a part of the historical process by which these particular practices took particular forms; relations of power, or power-knowledge (*pouvoir-savoir*) following Foucault, must work with, and through, the affordances of human psychology. But the heuristic study of power-relations offers the chance of identifying something resembling structuring structures, since projects of governance generate explicit normative schemas and techniques for orchestrating compliance if not consent.

Since the destruction of aristocracy in Mongolia, hospitality has been reframed as 'tradition' and 'national culture' (*ulamjlal, ündestnii soyol*) within the modernist nation state. The Mongolian People's Republic received the Leninist version of modernism and all the trappings of the Soviet version of the European nation-state – secular education system, health service, urbanization, industrialization; together with the ramifying intellectual apparatus to go with it. This included the modernist conception of 'national tradition', and a state-sponsored intelligentsia set about editing together elements drawn from pre-revolutionary Mongolian society to form an official national heritage, including music, art, literature, and material culture. The one hundred rules that Humphrey was given fits well with the logic of this project of national construction – the establishment of definitive Mongolian customs, pictured as inherent features of a sort of essential national culture.

But are we perhaps dismissing the notion of traditional culture too readily? Might there not be a longstanding core to hospitality in Mongolia that was enshrined in law but reflected deeper longstanding cultural forms?

Interestingly, it seems that Mongolian everyday hospitality was in some respects very different in the Qing period than in the contemporary era, in ways that directly reflect the legal codes of the time. The *Khalkha Jirum* made the offer of overnight hospitality compulsory, but it did not stipulate that hosts must provide their guests with food.

James Gilmour was a Scottish missionary who spent many years in Mongolia in the 1870s and 1880s. Gilmour described the hospitality provided by pastoral households when he travelled with his local guide.[9] They were given space in the *ger* overnight but not food (and sometimes not even tea), which they were expected to bring with them. The householders, many of whom were very poor, would cook the food and make the tea for their guests, and would then consume whatever was left over themselves. But rich households would expect guests to not only cook their own food but prepare it and present it to them as hosts.[10] Gilmour found that his party was:

better treated, and received with a much warmer welcome, in the tents of the poor than in the abodes of the rich. A rich man would make us wait upon his convenience, and expect us to make extra good tea or a meal which, both as regards quantity and quality, would be in keeping with his dignity and status, and even then we left feeling that our visit had been something of an intrusion. In the tents of the poor, on the other hand, we were warmly welcomed, our tea or food was prepared at once and in all haste, our animals were looked to as they grazed, the share of food which we left in the pot was considered a rich reward, and when all was over we were conducted forth and sent on our way again with many expressions of friendship and good wishes for the prosperity of our journey (Gilmour 1883:81).

For Gilmour the most hospitable hosts were the subjects that ranked lowest in the social order, those most liable to comply with the requirements of social seniors, and most in need of leftover food and tea. Although clearly complying with legal requirement and

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[9] In many ways the hospitality practices Gilmour describes resembled those described in the one hundred rules and later practices. He mentions the customary calls of visitors approaching an encampment for residents to control the guard dogs, the seating of persons depending on status within the *ger*, the exchange of snuff bottles, the routine serving of tea, and the hosts offering a plate of diary products as snacks in ways that closely resemble later practice (Gilmour 1883:126-128).

[10] Gilmour's writings also give a sense of the range of people likely to be 'on the road' at the time and as such the potential recipients of everyday hospitality. Caravans of both camels and ox-carts were common (1883: 125; 1893: 77, 78, 88, 91, 93, 94); so were lamas and pilgrims, the poor often on foot (1883: 121; 1893:142, 130). He writes, for example, (1883:121) "a vast amount of foot travelling is done. A large proportion of the travelling on foot is that of poor men who go on religious pilgrimages. Foot-travellers, for the most part, trust to the hospitality of the inhabitants of the districts through which they pass for lodgings…" As is the case today, some visitors were looking for straying livestock (Gilmour 1893:218).

public expectation, the 'hospitality' of the rich appeared grudging and ungenerous in comparison.[11] The particular requirements of historical hospitality codes appear to have been products of projects of governance, but there is little doubt that in Gilmour's time being hospitable was also highly valued and could be seen as a source of pride.

He notes both the obligatory nature of everyday hospitality and the strong normativity that surrounded it. "Any traveller is at perfect liberty to alight at any village [encampment] he may wish and demand admittance; and any Mongol who refuses admittance, or gives a cold welcome even, is at once stigmatised as *not a man but a dog*." (Gilmour 1883:128). He also notes the awareness that this form of hospitality may not be reciprocated; "Mongols sometimes complain of Chinamen, who come to Mongolia, enter their tents, and receive their hospitality, but who, when their Mongol friends go to China, will not let them enter their dwelling-houses." (Ibid:129).

But this is not something we can assume was true of other eras. The oldest accounts we have of Mongol hospitality are the Latin texts written in the thirteenth century by William of Rubruck and Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, friars who made independent diplomatic missions to the Mongol Imperial court. Both of these travellers complained about the meanness of their hosts (Beazley 1903:121, 200),[12] finding them not more, but less hospitable than other hosts.

Historical hospitality behaviour, we can see, was clearly rather different from contemporary practices. The relative wealth and status of those involved seems to have been of central concern. As Lattimore (1941:185-6) notes "a great many travel writers and travellers go too far in assuming that the nomad air of assurance and freedom means a level of equality. Far from it. One reason why the average man behaves with certainty and poise is because he knows exactly his status and your own." High status guests were

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[11] Gilmour's comments seem to match the remarks of Sechen Jagchid, who grew up in Inner Mongolia in the 1920s and 1930s. "Good treatment of travelers seem to be a Mongol custom from ancient times, at least from the period of Chinggis Khan. Still, a stranger who approaches a yurt on the steppe often gets the impression that a Mongol host is quite cool or reserved compared with people in other parts of the world." (Jagchid and Hyer 1979:131).

[12] Although the keenly observant Rubruck describes the organisation of interior space in the ger in terms that match that of the present day. The core continuity that we see here is one of order; the placement and ranking within social space, that is not unique to Mongolia but was found historically in many parts of Inner Asia (Sneath 2007(b)).

expected to present the host with a gift, commonly a *khadag* – a ceremonial silk scarf. So it is interesting to note that in the 1920s Forbath, the Hungarian traveller, was told that "when you call on a man you must bring him a *chadak* [*khadag*] without fail. That's the custom in this country." (Forbath 1936:20). But this does not seem to have been a rule for everyone. Jagchid and Symon (1979: 132) make clear that this was an expectation for people of high status who might be expected to have access to valuables.

Overall, we can say that pre-revolutionary everyday hospitality behaviour matched the stipulations of the historical law codes and seem to have been, if anything, less generous than contemporary standards. How is it, then, that hospitality expectations and practices have come to resemble their current form? The new practices seem to have emerged alongside the wider transformation ushered in by the state socialist regime of the Mongolian People's Republic. The second half of the twentieth century saw increasing levels of material prosperity in the Mongolian countryside and the disappearance of the extreme poverty that prevented some households from offering guests almost anything other than shelter. By the 1960s pastoralists were almost all salaried members of collective (*negdel*) or state farms (*sangiin aj akhui*) and, by any standards, much more wealthy than all but the richest pre-revolutionary commoners. The large state-sponsored enterprises that dominated rural life were explicitly communitarian organisations that promoted collectivist behaviour among the workforce. They created new roles and relationships, and a new rural leadership (see Rosenberg 1982) concerned with the management and display of wealth.[13]

In particular, from the 1950s until the 1970s, households were subject to a series of vigorous *soyolyn dovtolgoon* 'cultural campaigns' to remake practices in the home in line with modernist of hygiene and cleanliness (Stolpe 2008). The possession and use of items such as soap, towels, toothbrushes, toothpaste, washbasins and white cotton sheets were installed in Mongolian homes and subject to an inspection regime of spot-checks and penalties.[14] The households judged to be 'best' by the new criteria received

[13] For an account of the Buryat variant of the collective farm and the role of leadership in managing wealth see Humphrey 1983:300-372.

[14] Stolpe (2008:72) notes "the 1969-71 cultural campaign… proclaimed the 'cultured family' (*soyolch ail*, sometimes *soyolch suur*) as its motto. Families could earn this title plus a red pennant by scoring eighteen points for being in possession of items such as a washstand, tooth brushes,

awards and the 'worst' marks of shame and humiliation. As Stolpe notes (2008:77) socialist competition (*sotsialist uraldaan*) was a key principle in these projects of normative engineering, and, surprisingly perhaps, this competitive aspect came to popular amongst most rural people. The most successful families "greeted the state inspectors by building social ties with them and creating a festive atmosphere. Family members displayed their newest pastoral products and dressed in their finest clothes…" (Marzluf 2017:151). Households became accustomed to the visits of collective officials of all sorts, senior and junior, as part of the operation of the *negdel*, as well as other co-workers and friends. The Mongolian home was reshaped in this era, then, with novel items installed within and alongside old forms, and householders held to new standards of modernist respectability, including cleanliness and generous everyday hospitality. The hospitality etiquette of the old elite may have been the source for the documentation of 'tradition', but the everyday practices hospitality reflected the values and conditions of life of the new culture of the rural collectives.

And it was this newer set of hospitality practices (*zochlomtgoi zan*) that continues to be a matter of concern in the state's ordering of its subjects. It is now taught in schools as part of the 2019 Ethical Citizen Education (*Irgenii Yos Züin Bolovsrol*) curriculum taught in primary and secondary schools as 'Mongolian Cultural Heritage' (*Mongol Öv Soyol*).

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Children are taught about Mongolian 'Traditional cultural heritage' (*ulamjlalt öv soyol*) clothing, dwellings, festivals, rituals, religious beliefs, etiquette, kinship terminology, genealogy and even political traditions – including the supremacy of the state. Chinggis Khan (Genghis Khan) as the founder of the Mongol state, holds a particularly important place, and pupils are expected to respect his wisdom and study his teachings.

The curriculum includes *Zochnyg Khündlekh Yos* - Customs/Rules of Respect for Guests.[15] Pupils not only need to know about the cultural heritage passed down from

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towels, a radio, a home library and newspaper subscriptions. Organized as a competition, this part of the campaign became very popular."

[15] Children are taught to recognize and learn the proper way of welcoming, greeting, feasting, and saying farewell to guests; including respect for anyone who comes to the family as a guest and how to seat them in status-appropriate seats.

their ancestors, they need to respect and embody it. This culture is explicitly normative, then– it is valued and valuable. It is about distinctiveness and difference. It is worthy of respect. It is *moral culture*, in both senses of the phrase. As such, of course, it resembles closely a series of interpretations of the 'culture' concept in international circulation, that is well adapted to the needs of nation-state. Indeed, Anthropologists may have spilled gallons of ink on the relationship between Culture and Nature, but it is the relationship of Culture to Nation that seems more revealing to me.

HISTORY OF THE CONCEPT(S) OF CULTURE

This dominant concept emerged from the German notion of 'culture' (*kultur*) that can be traced back to Hegel and particularly Herder and their romantic writings on the distinctive worldviews of different peoples. In this 'contrary' perspective "favoured by nationalist and also by socialist writers" as Kuper notes "authentic culture was not cosmopolitan, nor an elite monopoly, but rather the achievement of the people…" (Kuper 1994: 539). This notion of culture as the 'genius of the people' (as Franz Boas put it), became dominant in early American anthropology. Boas's students came to see culture primarily through difference. Theirs was a vison of a world made up of 'lots of cultures.' But by the late 20th century, this concept had been widely critiqued for its essentialism – treating a set of characteristics as definitional of a notional group and devising stereotypical descriptions of its members.

By this time the notion of bounded cultures as systemic wholes had been abandoned by most social and many cultural anthropologists.[16] In practice, many if not most anthropologists now use a looser, non-holistic concept of 'culture' as a sort of field or schema; as a repertoire of shared representations, practices and meanings, and no longer assume any overall coherence or uniformity among the contents of 'culture' (Hervik 2011:94). But the older notion – the culture-as-difference concept – shows no signs of going away, indeed, its spirit seems enshrined in nation-state discourse and institutions such as UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural

[16] As E.P. Thompson (1991:6) notes: "indeed, the very term "culture", with its cosy invocation of consensus, may serve to distract attention from social and cultural contradictions, from the fractures and oppositions within the whole."

Heritage. And even within anthropology, these critiques of culture provoked determined defence by those such as Marshall Sahlins,[17] who were still wedded to something like the Boasian notion[18] as the central object of anthropological enquiry. For Sahlins (1999:403) distinctive cultures must exist, since sharing a culture constitutes what he calls "a historical people" with a "common memory" and "collective destiny." But the problem with the idea of 'a historical people' is, as Wolfram (1988, 5) put it, "we have no way of devising a terminology that is not derived from the concept of nation created during the French Revolution."[19]

Nationalist thought requires a "people" and as Laclau (2005:154) puts it, "the construction of the 'people' is the political act *par excellence*". The French Revolution ushered in a new era in which the object of history became the French 'people' (*le peuple*) conceived of as the descendants of Gauls, rather than, as it had been up to that time, an account of dynasties founded by the Germanic Franks. Since then, popular history has typically projected the essentially nationalist notion of 'peoples' back in time, in Europe, for example, describing the origin of nations in terms of a volkeswundering (the wandering of the peoples). While talk of 'national peoples' before the age of nationalism is clearly anachronistic, the idea of 'peoples' as naturally occurring proto-national groups survived by picturing them as 'ethnic groups' or (in Anthony Smith's case) *ethnie*. Increasingly, however, such primordialist notions of ethnicity are seen to be transparent products of racial and national taxonomies (Banks 1996:155-159; Allen and Eade 1997: 240-2411), unconvincing in the light of the social constructivist critique (e.g., Barth 1969; Cohen 1978; Gellner 1983; Brubaker 2009). Indeed, recent scholarship on the original Greek

[17] Sahlins's 1978 work '*Culture and Practical Reason*' can be seen as ab extended defence of notions of 'cultural differences' from reduction to sociological causes.

[18] The debate is far from dead, as De Munck and Bennardo (2019:174) remark "Yet it is safe to say there exists no agreement among anthropologists about what culture is, except probably that it is shared and learned."

[19] The concept of the nation is historically very young, emerging during the Age of Revolution, in which new political elites, particularly in France and America, began to articulate a new political vocabulary to express the common interest of members of the state in opposition to monarchical identification of the state with the monarch of the *ancien regime* Hobsbawm (1991, 18–19)

term *ethnos* shows that it bears very little resemblance to contemporary concepts of the ethnic group (Morgan 2003).[20]

So, rather than finding a natural 'container' for culture – a self-formed ethno-linguistic 'people' – we find a notion far too entangled with the historical project of nation-building to be relied upon for universal application. In the pre-national world, human aggregation and political unities were described in very different terms. Nation - State construction required the installation of new conceptual scaffolding.

In the Mongolian case, there had not been a word for 'nation', so a word had to be found for it.[21] *Ündesten* originally meant something like 'origin' and was used to indicate legitimate aristocratic and royal ancestry. In the early 20th century it started to be used in a new way – to stand for the new concept of a nation (Atwood 1994). One of the principal architects of the Mongolian nationalist lexicon was Tsyben Zhamtsarano, a Buryat nationalist and ethnographer trained in St. Petersburg University. In the early 20th century Soviet intellectuals set about creating a new vocabulary for national and ethnic groups. Zhamtsarano's work can be seen as part of this wider project, which in effect translated European notions of nationhood into a Mongolian context. He considered the existing aristocratic Mongolian realms to be at the 'pre-national' stage, and set about advancing them to nationhood. New states (*ulus tör*) were formed by a people sharing a common language (*khel*), ancestry (*yazguur*), religion (*shashin*), rules (*yos*), teachings (*surtal*) and territory (*oron*) (Atwood 1994: 45).

This fitted reasonably well with the dominant notion of nationality, expressed by Stalin (1970: 60) thus "A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture'. But the term 'culture' (*soyol*) was missing in

[20] As Catherine Morgan points out, in its original usage the word *ethnos* was used to "refer to almost any form of group of beings, human or animal… peoples in general… specific named peoples… people of a certain condition (such as the dead, Odyssey 10.526) or gender (women…) animals or birds…" (Morgan 2003: 9-10). Clearly, such a broad category is entirely unlike the recent conception of a sort of proto-national 'people' with a distinctive self-consciousness and solidarity.

[21] In the case of Mongolia, as Kaplonski (1998: 35) notes "Although its origins can be traced to the end of the 19th century, national identity on a broader scale became important only with the establishment of the socialist regime in the 1920s"

Zhamtsarano's original formular, instead he used a set of other existing concepts – *shash-in* (religious teachings), *yos* (rules) and *surtal* (code or teachings) to try and create an equivalent meaning. All of them were normative, doctrinal concepts. Later, the term *soyol* was developed to better translate the culture concept. It was derived from an old word (*soyorqal*) soyorkhol' meaning the granting of a favour to a subordinate by a ruler. To 'graciously grant' or some such, thus carrying sufficiently elevated honorific connotations for what was to become a key concept in the New Mongolia, promoting the educated lifestyles and dispositions considered refined in the wider Soviet world.

A whole host of terms that became central concepts in the new public life of Mongolians, were coined, adapted and popularised by Zhamtsarano and his colleagues. They quite literally authored large parts of contemporary Mongolian culture, just had the rulers in the past - be they introducing Monastic Buddhism or laws on hospitality. Moral codes, then, becomes historical products, promulgated, promoted and reproduced by particular persons in real time. Their legacies may be long-lasting, but there is no need to suppose some abstract entity, a collective conscience, as a timeless cultural entity…?

CONCLUSION – NOMAD ETHICS RECONSIDERED.

Since the late twentieth century, trends in history, archaeology and postcolonial scholarship have led to a questioning and rethinking of the notions of nomadism, culture and morality inherited from older schools of scholarship. I argue that 'the nomadic' can no longer be seen as a defining feature of a fundamentally different social type, but rather as a label applied to livestock-based political economies with many correspondences with agricultural and urban ones. Similarly, rather than approaching culture as an enduring, abstract collective form, we can better conceive of it as an unstable, changing accretion of particular normative projects for the ordering of the social world.

Moral codes, such as those of Hospitality, then, can be seen not as a timeless feature of a holistic culture but as a product and producer of socio-political order, and an artefact of historical projects of governance. This could be thought of, as generative of integration, but not the integration of a reified 'culture' or 'society' conceived of in autono-

mous or systemic terms.[22] Rather it is the product of historical projects of rulership and governance that ordered social lives in line with the interests of power holders. The integration generated by everyday hospitality was shaped by ruling elites and reflected the wider cosmopolitical orders that supported them. Good subjects should conduct themselves properly; and should offer the appropriate amenities to travellers, just as they should honour their parents and respect their seniors.[23]

The contemporary codes of hospitality taught as part of the *Irgenii Yos Züin Bolovsrol* curriculum is a transformed legacy of the country's pre-revolutionary aristocratic order, rooted in the historical transformation of obligations placed upon householders within a system of power relations. Such ethical or moral cultures, then, can be approached as normative, historical projects that elites and power-holders may seek to initiate, propagate and regulate. Their exploration offers us the prospect of further insights into the nature of such projects of ordering persons and things

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[22] For Ortner the setting for hospitality is very explicitly "the community" (1978:63). However for her this is "a community of relatively self-contained units, each protective of its property and its social boundaries…" (1978:68) which therefore *requires* integration. Hospitality, then, is a means of achieving this.

[23] This is not to say, of course, that the practices and norms of everyday hospitality have not created and maintained social networks in countless ways, or that obligations have not been appropriated as sources of value and satisfaction by those concerned.

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