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## The Transformation of the Community of Tsaatan Reindeer Herders in Mongolia and Their Relationships with the Outside World

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## The Transformation of the Community of *Tsaatan* Reindeer Herders in Mongolia and Their Relationships with the Outside World

Tetsuya Inamura  
*Aichi Prefectural University, Japan*

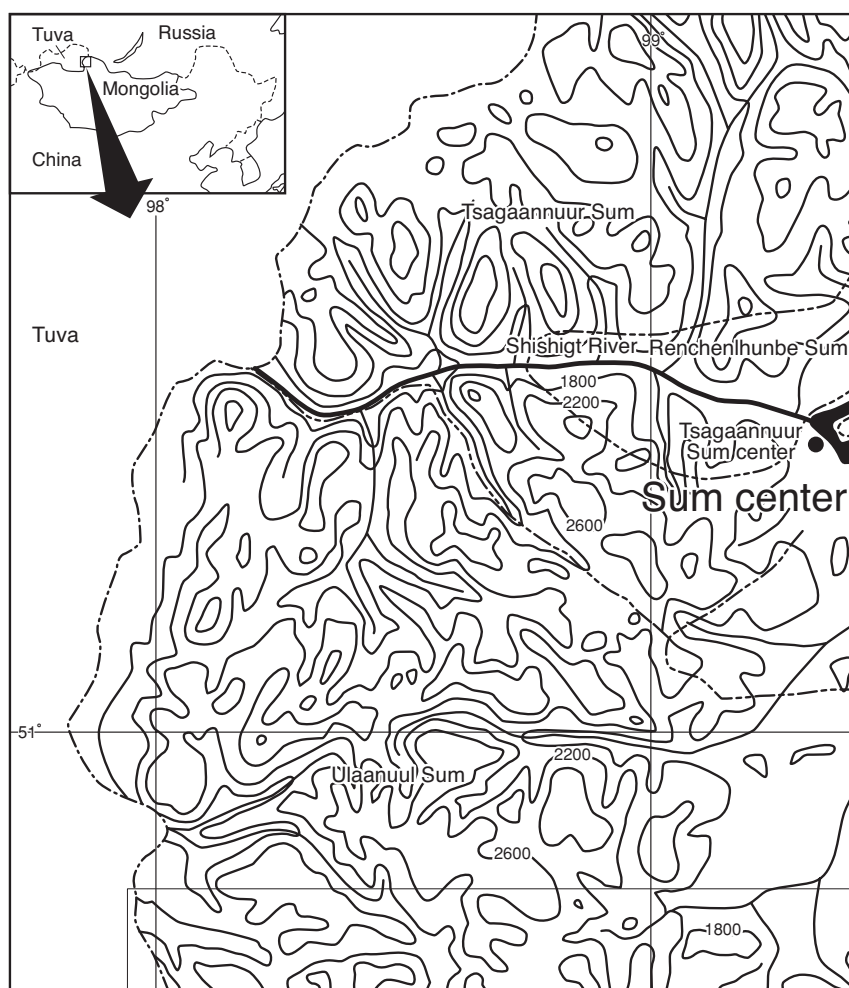
### INTRODUCTION

The *Tsaatan*, which means ‘those who have reindeer’ in the Mongolian language, were originally Tuvinian reindeer herders. Tuvinians are the major ethnic group of the Republic of Tuva (in Russia), which shares a national border with Mongolia (Figure 1). Some Tuvinians have resided in Mongolia since 1944, when Tuva was annexed to the Soviet Union and the border between Tuva and Mongolia was closed, although they used to regularly traverse the border in former times. They are now called *Tsaatan*.

Thus, the *Tsaatan* are nomadic people who herd reindeer in the mountain taiga areas of northern Mongolia, living in tents, moving from one place to another throughout the year<sup>1</sup>). They mainly belong to *Tsagaannuur* (White Lake) *sum* (an administrative district) of *Hövsögöl Aimag* (a prefecture), located in the extreme north of Mongolia. The *Tsaatan* actually herding reindeer in the taiga area constitute only 30 households, which include less than 200 people. Some Tuvinians are now living in the steppe area and have somehow assimilated with the *Darkhad* Mongols, the Mongolian-speaking ethnic majority of that region<sup>2</sup>). The *Tsaatan* originally spoke only the Tuvinian language, but many of them today are bilingual. Members of the younger generation who received their education in Mongolia are especially fluent in Mongolian.

Mongolia gained independence in 1921 and adopted socialism after 1924. In the late 1950s, *negdel* (pastoral collectives) were implemented. Since 1990, however, Mongolia has changed its political-economic regime to democracy and a market-based economy. Mongolian people have had no choice but to adapt to this rapid transformation of regime. *Tsaatan*, the ethnic minority who live on the frontier of Mongolia, were certainly not an exception in this case. Indeed, they have been exposed to the global economic-political changes that have taken place in the 20th century.

I conducted fieldwork intermittently from 1993 to 2002, totaling 11 trips to the field, though all trips were of short duration. Not only was I able to learn about the *Tsaatan* way of life, but also the drastic changes that took place in the community during the introduction of a market economy. At first my main focus was centered on the ‘tradition’ of reindeer herding in taiga. Later, the transformation of the *Tsaatan*



**Figure 1** Area of reindeer herding in Mongolia

community came to be my major interest.

The *Tsaatan* community is very small in comparison with other reindeer herding communities that range from Scandinavia to East Siberia. Nevertheless, the livelihood of the *Tsaatan* exhibits typical characteristics of reindeer herders in the taiga. Furthermore, their community has experienced the processes of pastoral collectivization under the Socialist regime and of adaptation to a market economy in the post-collectivization period, in marked contrast to communities from the Soviet Union area. For those reasons, the case of the *Tsaatan* community is significant in comparative studies.

In Section 1 of this paper, I describe my fieldwork to show my position in the *Tsaatan* community and the image of changes in the *Tsaatan* community in the recent decade, sketching mainly the case of one family. In Section 2, I show the basic forms of reindeer herding and social organization, which seem to have been long maintained,

from a synchronic perspective. In Section 3, I describe the livelihood of the *Tsaatan* in Tuva prior to the closing of the national border, how they fled to Mongolia, as well as their life in Mongolia since that time. In Section 4, I discuss pastoral collectivization and the changes that the *Tsaatan* community experienced. In Section 5, I elucidate the current situation of the *Tsaatan* community, facing the critical moment brought about by the effects of the market economy, and the way they have adapted to these situations. In Section 6, I discuss how the *Tsaatan*, as a small scale community, have managed to maintain their community and how they have changed through interaction with the outside world.

## FIELDWORK

My first contact with the *Tsaatan* community was in mid-September 1993<sup>3)</sup>. With Mongolian friends I traveled for two days by Russian jeep from Ulaanbaatar to *Mörön* (the capital of *Hövsögöl*), and for two days more to *Tsagaannuur sum*. The way was long and the lack of gasoline along the way was a constant problem.

In the *sum* center (the central settlement of the district), we asked how we could meet the *Tsaatan* people. We met Mr. *Morhooji*, the chief commander of the border security guards based in the *sum*, which control the border area where the *Tsaatan* live. He offered us lodging, horses, and a guard as a guide. We left the *sum* center on September 16, when it began snowing for the first time that year, and arrived at a *Tsaatan* tent after 13 hours. Mrs. *Tsewel* and her family lived by themselves in their autumn pasture place. They were very (exceedingly) kind to us strangers arriving late at night and offered us reindeer milk tea and some supper. The tea not only eased my thirst but was so delicious that I had to try several cups. *Handaa*, the daughter, prepared our bed made of reindeer fur. When I lay down, filled with fatigue after the long journey, the candlelight showed snowflakes entering from the opening at the top of the tent. The next morning, while leaving the tent, I saw a herd of reindeer approaching me on the snow field. These were unforgettable scenes.

The second period of research took place in February 1994. Because the terrain is completely covered with ice during the winter and a jeep can be driven on a river as if it were on a highway, it was easier to reach the *Tsaatan* residential area. We nevertheless lost our way temporarily on our way over the mountain. The sun had already set down when we saw *Tsewel*'s tent in the pine forest. Through this research, I became familiar with the life ways of the *Tsaatan* during the extreme cold season and with how reindeer herding is actually conducted. Also I came to know *Gostya*, *Tsewel*'s younger brother, who lives in his own tent adjacent to *Tsewel*'s. Since that time, *Tsewel* and *Gostya* have remained my trusted partners in my research project. *Gostya* is one of the leading figures in the *Tsaatan* community and also practices traditional shamanism passed on from his father; moreover, he knows a great deal about the wider outside world. He used to engage in a certain 'business' whereby he stole horses and sold them in Tuva, across the border. He was once arrested by security guards and confined to a prison near Ulaanbaatar for three years. He now has a good relationship with the security

guards.

When I first met him, he said to me, “What do you really want to know? We lead such a simple life but that is not because we are poor. We could change our life if we wanted to. But we are surrounded by an environment with a vast forest and we want to preserve this world for our children’s future. A journalist from abroad once came to interview us and wrote that he discovered a primitive tribal people in the woods who lead a centuries-old lifestyle. I do not admire these kinds of people because they write as they want without doing proper research.”

I told him that I completely agreed with him and gave him a copy of a newspaper article that I wrote after my first research, telling him my frank opinion. After that, *Gostya* said to me, “Thank you. You’ve returned here again and have certainly developed a way of observing things. Please ask anything that interests you and write both good as well as bad aspects of our life, as long as it is true.” We talked about various issues related to Mongolia and Japan, drinking till late. *Gostya* had his two-year-old son by his side saying that the child was born when he (*Gostya*) had already gotten old and that he was adorable.

My third field research was conducted in the summer of 1994. There were heavy rains that year and we had difficulty crossing the flooded rivers. We spent two days from *Ulaan-uul Sum* center on horseback and were able to visit the *Mengebolag* (the summer pasture). It lies in the highlands at an altitude of 2300 m. More than 10 *Tsaatan* households have their summer residence in the *Mengebolag* and the distance between the residences is only a few kilometers, much nearer than in other seasons, so they can visit each other frequently. Summer is also the time when schools are on holiday, and children who study at school in the *sum* center return to their homes. The families of *Tsewel* and *Gostya*, like other families, gathered together in this season and enjoyed these precious times. This was my third visit to their home and they welcomed me as a close friend, with a feast of reindeer meat.

When I visited the taiga in the summer of 1995, I was saddened to learn that *Gostya*’s little boy had passed away from sickness. To make matters worse, *Tsewel*’s son had disappeared after going into the deep woods to search for the antlers of wild deer, which are sold for their high value in making herbal medicine<sup>4)</sup>.

In late 1995, *Gostya*’s wife, a *Darkhad* Mongol from the steppes, left her husband because of her suffering over the loss of her son. The following year, *Gostya* gave his tent to his adopted son, *Tartag*, who had gotten married. So *Gostya* started to live in *Tsewel*’s tent together. Then *Tartag* left the taiga to go down to the steppe with his wife who is a *Darkhad* and originally from an adjacent steppe. In the summer of 1996, *Gostya* was often away from home and *Tsewel* and her daughter *Handaa* were spending a lonely summer in *Mengebolag*.

During my first fieldwork in 1993 and 1994, most of the reindeer were still the property of the national enterprise and the *Tsaatan* were receiving a salary. However, the reindeer were privately owned when I returned in 1995; that is, the privatization of reindeer had been carried out a few years after the privatization of the livestock in the steppe. During the first few years of my fieldwork, I could not help but be impressed

by how the tradition had been preserved and passed down through the generations, despite the 30 years under the socialist regime. I simply supposed that it was because the *Tsaatan* community was located in the most peripheral part of Mongolia, whose harsh natural environment had made access to and from the outside world difficult. My main interest was still their lifestyle and the system of reindeer herding.

Nevertheless, my impression changed radically during my field research in late July of 1998. Following the other areas in Mongolia, the wave of change to a market economy had begun to sweep through the *Tsaatan* community. The total number of reindeer had decreased to 600, almost half, in a few years. The number of livestock owned by *Tsewel* and *Gostya* was also obviously decreasing year by year. As the market-based economy infiltrated the community, life in the peripheral areas, unfavorable to the distribution of goods, rapidly became much more difficult. The people were saying that, after privatization, there were no veterinarians and no medical services, and that *Tsaatan* had no income, so they were compelled sell the reindeer or consume them at home. *Gostya* was concerned about the future of the younger generation of *Tsaatan*.

On the other hand, *Tsaatan* communities were then confronting a new change. Eager tourists in horseback tours or even helicopter tours started visiting their residences. From this point on, my research interests shifted from a synchronic viewpoint to a more diachronic perspective. Historically, although the *Tsaatan* community had maintained a traditional nomadic lifestyle in the forest, they were firmly established within the Mongolian social system, and were always subject to the influence of the outer society. Indeed, the peripheral location of the *Tsaatan* made the effect of the market economy even more devastating to their social life.

When I visited the *Tsagaannuur sum* center in March 1999, *Tsewel* was in a hospital suffering from tuberculosis. Because she was accustomed to the life in the forest, she was reluctant to move to the hospital. Yet, her condition worsened such that her daughter *Handaa* had to carry her on a reindeer, a trip that took a full day. When the doctor at the hospital told me that he was short of antibiotics, I offered mine and asked him to use it to treat *Tsewel*.

By the summer of 1999, *Tsewel* had recovered and was staying at the summer pasture. In that year I was able to observe a wedding ceremony between a *Tsaatan* young boy and a *Darkhad* girl from the steppe area. I mainly had visited the southern part of the taiga, where *Tsewel* and her family lived. In that year I also went to the northern part of the taiga of *Tsagaannuur sum* to visit the northern group of *Tsaatan* people. Some of them were trying to adapt to tourism, receiving tourist groups, and had begun to carve reindeer antlers to sell them.

In the summer of 2000, a change took place in the family of *Tsewel* and *Gostya*. *Gostya*'s son *Tartag* had returned from the steppe with his wife and son and were living together, setting up their tent next to *Tsewel*'s. At that time I saw *Tsewel* and *Gostya* smiling happily and holding their grandson in the tent.

I also saw reindeer as well as cows brought by *Tartag* seasonally from the steppe, and pastured in the same *Mengebolag*. Both animals were being milked by *Handaa*



and *Tartag*'s wife. Combining reindeer herding and steppe livestock herding was a clear case of adaptation to a new situation that the market economy had brought about. *Tartag* would herd cattle, horses, and reindeer in the *Tsaatan*'s pasture land in the summer, and hand the reindeer over to *Gostya*'s care from the end of summer, thereafter traveling down to the steppe to lead the cattle.

I continued my research through the summers of 2001 and 2002. Both the northern and southern groups were beginning to see a glimpse of hope for the future. They were finding various ways of adapting to the new situation, which is one of the main themes of this paper.

I visited Mongolia in the summer of 2003, but was unable to visit the *Tsaatan* residential district. I received the bad news that *Tsewel* had passed away and the good news that her daughter *Handaa* had gotten married and had a baby.

## REINDEER HERDING AND THE TSAATAN COMMUNITY

### 1) General background of *Tsaatan* community

*Tsagaannuur sum* is a relatively new district. The western part of *Renchenlhunbe sum* was given independent status as *Tsagaannuur sum* where the national enterprise of reindeer herding was founded in 1985, when the *negdel* (a collective cooperative for animal husbandry) was reorganized to a national enterprise. The settlement is located at the northwest end of *Hövsögöl aimag* (a prefecture) (Figure 1). The *sum* stretches 120 km from north to south and 100 km from east to west. The *sum* center, which is the only settlement of the *sum*, lies on the western shore of a lake known as *Tsagaannuur* (White Lake) at an altitude of approximately 1650 m.

The national enterprise specialized in reindeer herding, hunting, and livestock farming on the steppe (the section in which the *Darkhad* Mongols mainly worked), sawmills and fishery on the lake, but most of these are no longer in operation today. The *sum* center has public institutions such as a *sum* office, an operational camp for national border security guards, a hospital, a school that provides eight years of education, a kindergarten, a post office, and privately owned stores and hotels. The electric power station is not working because the *sum* lacks the funds to provide fuel expenses, as do many other *sum* centers throughout Mongolia.

The steppe spreads around the *sum* center where mainly *Darkhad* Mongols support themselves by herding cattle, horses, sheep, and goats. Nonetheless, a large part of the *sum* consists of forests that are typically found in the taiga highlands. The highland, located at an altitude of over 1800 m, is covered by forests, while the forest disappears and becomes a grass-covered plain above the 2200 m level. The highland taiga of *Hövsögöl* has some of the lowest temperatures in Mongolia, rising to only 15°C on average in July, and dropping to -20°C in January. The precipitation is the highest in Mongolia, with an annual rainfall of 300–400 mm (Academy of Sciences MPR 1990: 22–26).

According to the census taken in 1994 by the *sum* office, the total population of *Tsagaannuur sum* was 1225 persons in 271 households. The major ethnic group of this

area, the *Darkhad* Mongols, numbered 850 people, in 150 households. The Halkha, who are the majority of the entire Mongol population, comprised only 10 families in *Tsagaannuur sum*. The Tuvinians had a population of 500 people, in 100 households, including those of mixed blood. The *Tsaatan* in the taiga who engage in reindeer herding make up only 30 households: about 200 people.

The *Tsaatan* began to live in Mongolia after 1944 when the border between Tuva and Mongolia was blockaded. They are divided into two large groups according to their homelands: those from the northeast of Tuva are called the 'Tsaatan of the eastern taiga'; and those from the southeast area are known as the 'Tsaatan of the western taiga.' They live separately to the north and south of the Shishigt River that runs from *Tsagaannuur* (White Lake) to the west and the Republic of Tuva. In this paper, former group will be referred to as the 'Northern Group' and the latter as the 'Southern Group'.

The people of *Tsaatan* have exogamous patrilineal clans called *jono*. Each *jono* has a name like *Bargash*, *Soyan*, or *Orat*, each consisting of some sub-clans. Because the population of Tuvinians in Mongolia is small, marriages with other ethnic groups such as *Darkhad* are not uncommon. Today clans serve no other special purpose aside from the rule of exogamy.

The *Tsaatan* usually live in a group comprising several families who live in tents next to each other in the forest. These residential groups are normally close relatives such as parents and their children or siblings, but the relationship can sometimes be affinal or even friendship. The former type resembles an extended family. The membership of a residential group often change seasonally. In the winter of 1994, there were four residential groups in the Northern Group and five in the Southern Group.

A census taken at the end of 1993 showed that the total number of livestock such as cattle, horses, sheep and goats herded in the steppe of *Tsagaannuur sum* was 7576; of them, 5377 (approximately 71%) were owned privately. In the same year, the number of reindeer in *Tsagaannuur sum*, practically the only area in Mongolia that practices reindeer herding, was 1386; of them, 1061 were under the ownership of the national enterprise, while only 325 (approximately 31%) were privately owned.

The numbers of *Tsaatan* families and their reindeer in 1999 are shown in Table 1<sup>5</sup>). As indicated, the number of reindeer has decreased to less than 600, which is less than half of what it was in 1993. Nevertheless, their number appears to have risen slightly after 1999.

## 2) Seasonal migration and the residential groups

The *Tsaatan* today continue their nomadic life, moving from one place to another without establishing any settlements throughout the year. A residential group consisting of several families is called *olal-lal* (meaning 'them' in the Tuva language). They usually refer to a specific group by the name of a representative member. Families of the same *olal-lal* set up tents close to one another and collaborate in livestock herding.

Each person owns his or her livestock. A family (generally a nuclear family) living



**Table 1** List of *Tsaatan* families and their livestock (Summer 1998)

## ● South Group

| Residential group | Family number | Number of family members | Reindeer | Horses | Cattle | Sheep | Goats | Total of steppe livestock | Remarks   |
|-------------------|---------------|--------------------------|----------|--------|--------|-------|-------|---------------------------|---|
| A                 | 1             | 2                        | 22       | 3      | 0      | 0     | 0     | 3                         |   |
| A                 | 2             | 1                        | 14       | 7      | 0      | 0     | 0     | 7                         |   |
| A                 | 3             | 8                        | 6        | 4      | 0      | 0     | 0     | 4                         |   |
| B                 | 4             | 10                       | 10       | 6      | 0      | 0     | 10    | 16                        | The household rears goats on its own.                 |
| B                 | 5             | 5                        | 4        | 1      | 0      | 0     | 0     | 1                         |   |
| B                 | 6             | 6                        | 5        | 6      | 0      | 0     | 0     | 6                         |   |
| C                 | 7             | 1                        | 6        | 3      | 0      | 0     | 0     | 3                         |   |
| C                 | 8             | 9                        | 76       | 10     | 0      | 0     | 0     | 10                        |   |
| D                 | 9             | 7                        | 74       | 5      | 16     | 48    | 0     | 69                        | Sheep rearing is assigned to relatives.               |
| D                 | 10            | 6                        | 25       | 2      | 0      | 0     | 0     | 2                         |   |
| D                 | 11            | 4                        | 0        | 1      | 0      | 0     | 0     | 1                         |   |
| E                 | 12            | 5                        | 11       | 1      | 1      | 0     | 0     | 2                         |   |
| F                 | 13            | 7                        | 4        | 1      | 0      | 0     | 0     | 1                         |   |
| G                 | 14            | 1                        | 4        | 0      | 0      | 0     | 0     | 0                         | His house is located at the <i>sum</i> center.        |
| H                 | 15            | 1                        | 5        | 5      | 5      | 0     | 0     | 10                        | His house is located at the <i>sum</i> center.        |
| I                 | 16            | 8                        | 30       | 2      | 0      | 0     | 0     | 2                         | Their residence is at the lakeshore of Lake Huvusgul. |
| Total             | 16            | 81                       | 296      | 57     | 22     | 48    | 10    | 137                       |   |

## ● North Group

| Family number | Number of family members | Number of reindeer |
|---------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| 1             | 6                        | 13                 |
| 2             | 5                        | 10                 |
| 3             | 5                        | 35                 |
| 4             | 2                        | 12                 |
| 5             | 8                        | 4                  |
| 6             | 13                       | 5                  |
| 7             | 6                        | 6                  |
| 8             | 4                        | 76                 |
| 9             | 10                       | 74                 |
| 10            | 6                        | 0                  |
| 11            | 12                       | 4                  |
| 12            | 3                        | 0                  |
| 13            | 12                       | 4                  |
| 14            | 11                       | 5                  |
| 15            | 7                        | 7                  |
| Total         | 110                      | 255                |

## ● Total of both groups

| Number of families | Number of family members | Number of reindeer |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Total              | 191                      | 551                |

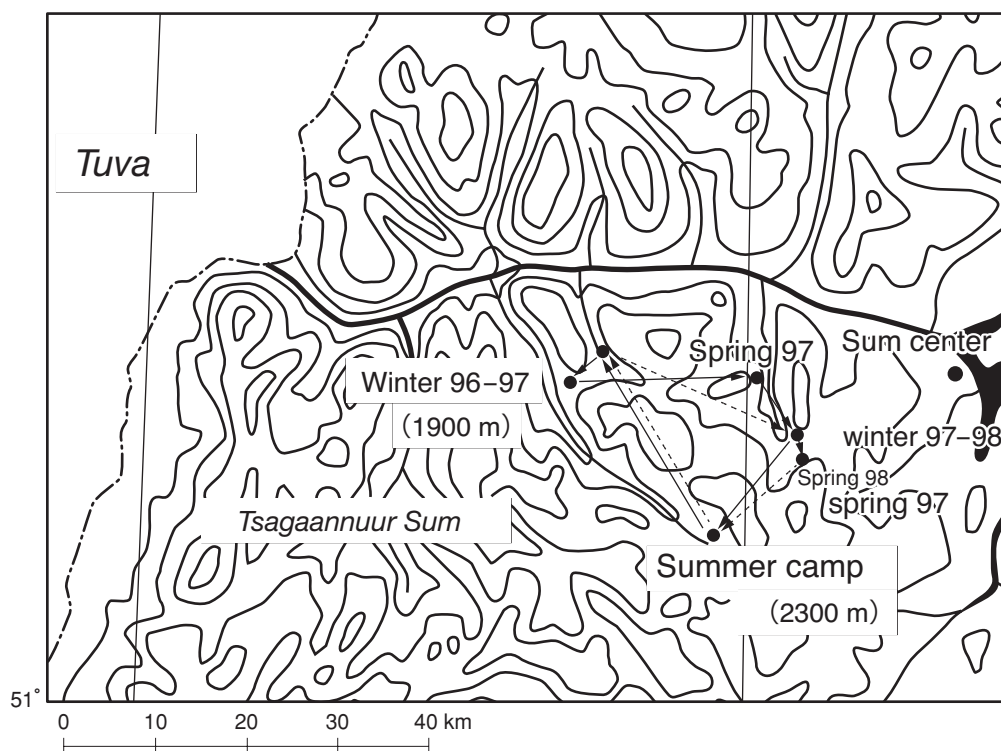
in an individual tent represents a unit for living, eating and substantial ownership of livestock. *Olal-lal* is the unit of co-residence and co-operation in herding.

We will now look at a case of a seasonal migration path of a residential group, taking *Gostya's* residential group as an example. Table 2 indicates the seasonal migration path and group members involved from the summer of 1995 to the fall of 1996. It

**Table 2** *Gostya-Tsewel's* residential group: migration path and group's membership (Summer 1995–Summer 1998)

| Time of stay  | Settlement Area   | Members of Residential Group   |
|---------------|---|--|
| Summer 1995   | "Mengebolaga" (Thousand fountains) Altitude: 2300 m   | 4 families (Tse, Go, Ga, Tsa)  |
|               | Migrated in late August   |  |
| Fall 1995     | "Hoolag" (Crane) Altitude: 2150 m   | 7 families camp together, and later became separated.                              |
|               | Early November  |  |
| Winter 1995–6 | "Doshdog" (raised soil caused by water from a frozen river)   | 1 family ( <i>Gostya</i> divorced his wife divorced and lived with <i>Tsewel</i> ) |
|               | Mid–April   |  |
| Spring 1996   | "Oboolgo" (place where there is a oboo)   | 2 families (Tse and <u>Z</u> )   |
|               | June 5  |  |
| Summer 1996   | "Mengebolag"  | 3 families (Tse, <u>B</u> , <u>Z</u> )   |
|               | Departed on August 7. they set up a camp at "Sornagiin Moharsalaa" (Small Valley of Mt. Sornag) on their way and stayed until August 15. (They stayed for a while, receiving guests from town.) |  |
| Fall 1996     | "Hoolag"  | 2 families (Tse, <u>B</u> )  |
|               | Oct. 25   |  |
| Fall 1996     | "Orh ashig"   | 3 families (Tse, <u>B</u> , Ta)  |
|               | Dec. 30   |  |
| Winter 1997   | "Hamdag" (timberland)   | 2 families (Tse, <u>B</u> )  |
|               | Mar. 30   |  |
| Spring 1997   | "Bagsalig"  | 2 families (Tse, Ta)   |
|               | May 1   |  |
| Spring 1997   | "Arshaan"   | 4 families (Tse, Ta, Ga, Tsa)  |
|               | June 20   |  |
| Summer 1997   | "Mengebolag"  | 4 families (Tse, Ta, Ga, Tsa)  |
|               | Aug. 10   |  |
| Fall 1997     | "Mengebolag"  | 2 families (Tse, Ta)   |
|               | Nov. 1  |  |
| Fall 1997     | "Sowarnag"  | 1 family   |
|               | Dec. 20   |  |
| Winter 1997–8 | "Arshaan"   | 1 family   |
|               | Feb. 20   |  |
| Spring 1998   | "Noortaishagmag"  | 1 family   |
|               | Apr. 30   |  |
| Spring 1998   | "Shagmag"   | 3 families (Tse, Ta, Ga)   |
|               | June 17   |  |
| Summer 1998   | "Mengebolag"  | 3 families (Tse, Ta, Ga)   |

Tse is *Tsewel*. Go is *Gostya*, her younger brother. Ga is their younger brother, Tsa is *Tsewel's* adopted son. Ta is *Gostya's* adopted son. B and Z are not relatives.



**Figure 2** Seasonal movement of a *Tsaatan* family

shows that the family of *Tsewel*'s adopted child (*Tsa*), occasionally joined *Gostya*'s group. While *Gostya* (*Go*)'s younger brother *Ganzorig* (*Ga*) lived temporarily with his wife's family in the Northern Group, he returned to the Southern Group after 1996 and lived together with *Gostya*'s group members. *Tartag* (*Ta*), adopted son of *Gostya*, sometimes lived among *Gostya*'s group with his wife and children. Occasionally, those who had no close kinship ties such as *B* and *Z* temporarily joined the group. In this way, aside from the core family members, membership in a residential group is variable.

Figure 2 shows the route of the seasonal movement of *Gostya*'s group (1996–1998), plotting the main places where they stayed. Table 2 shows the residential patterns and their movement, specifying the location of the places indicated on Figure 2 with an asterisk. They actually moved more frequently than what is shown on the map. Lately *Gostya*'s group has spent every summer at the *Mengebolag* (2300 m high), where they can enjoy the cool air. All the people of the Southern Group usually gather at the same location in summer, while they migrate as each residential group from fall to winter, taking different paths each year. *Gostya*'s group has a regular camp site (though not exactly in the same place) in the fall, but stay in different places during winter and spring.

Seasonal migration and the activities in each seasonal camp site are as follows:

- Summer

*Tsaatan* moves to the summer camp in the middle of June. Its altitude is 2300 m and there are fresh breezes. Owing to the cold climate throughout the year, open grasslands spread across the high valley. Reindeer cannot handle the heat well, so they must be pastured in such high plains in the summer. All members of the Southern Group stay in the same valley as the *Mengebolag*, because such an ideal summer environment cannot be found within the southern part of *Tsagaannuur sum* (Photo 1). Their tents are set up relatively close to one another (within a few kilometers), so ‘neighbors’ often enjoy visits with each other. The reindeer antlers are cut while staying at the summer settlement (Photo 2). This practice began around 1975.



**Photo 1** *Mengebolag*, or the summer camp site



**Photo 2** Cutting of the antlers



**Photo 3** Seasonal movement

- Fall

The beginning of August is the time for *Tsaatan* families to move down to different camp sites to spend the fall season (Photo 3). The residential group of *Gostya* and *Tsewel* usually settle down near a river at 2200 m altitude. When it begins to snow in mid-September, since there are no insects, the reindeer regain their vigor and the young male reindeer are castrated. From the end of September to early October is mating season for reindeer. The gestation period for a reindeer is about seven months.

- Winter

The *Tsaatan* usually settle down in the deep forest at an altitude of about 1800 m where they can avoid the frigid winds. At winter camp, people remain in one area for a month at the longest, and then move on to another place, especially when there are wolves near the herding area. Snow is not an obstacle for reindeer to eat moss because they can dig the snow with their hooves and find moss easily. Several *olal-lal* or residential groups band together and set out for *otor* (the herding of livestock by young men in distant areas). During *otor*, the reindeer are free to move about and can better eat moss and grass.

- Spring

Groups cannot travel quickly to spring camps because they must accompany the pregnant female (cows) reindeer. This is the time when weather tends to become harsh, with strong winds, so they settle in a place that shelters them from severe winds. Reindeer give birth between late April and mid-May. The rapid growth of a reindeer calf is notable in comparison with that of other domestic animals<sup>6)</sup>. When a reindeer reaches one year of age, it will have its ear marked with a knife.





**Photo 4** A winter camp site with an enclosure for reindeer

### **3) The use and management of reindeer**

The reindeer are usually kept hitched to stakes of birch close to the tents at night, though sometimes they are left free if no wolves are close by. Also, if the herd is large they are occasionally driven into a wooden enclosure, but those that are pregnant are tied to a post rather than left inside a fence (Photo 4).

The reindeer are usually pastured in pairs with their necks tied to each other with rope in order to impede their movement and keep them from running away. This is true especially in the fall when mushrooms, a favorite food of reindeer, are plentiful. Some of the younger reindeer would get lost in the woods looking for them. October is the mating period for the reindeer, so those of the same sex are set into pairs. If the pairs were composed of animals of different sex, the bulls would fight with a castrated male paired with a female. Although no special rules apply to organizing the reindeer into pairs, reindeer of similar size are usually grouped together.

The reindeer are categorized and given names according to their gender and age (Table 3). Males and females are classified differently after they reach two years of age. Male reindeer are castrated at three years, and they are given different names than the bulls. To castrate a reindeer, a knife is used to cut the scrotum and remove the testicles.



**Table 3** Reindeer names classified by age and sex

| Age     | Name           |                |             |
|---------|----------------|----------------|-------------|
| Fawn    | Hogash         |                |             |
| 1 year  | Tasban         |                |             |
| 2 years | Female         | Male           |             |
|         | Dongoi         | Dongor         |             |
| 3 years | Female         | Castrated male | Stud Male   |
|         | Hoodai Myangdo | Hoodai Zari    | Hoodai Eter |
| 4 years | Myangdojing    | Zari           | Eter        |

Reindeer milk is normally available from the time the female gives birth in May until late September. Of its four teats, in the spring, two are milked and the remaining two are left to feed the calf. Milking is generally done three to four times a day in the spring and twice in the summer. About 200 g of milk can be extracted from a deer in two minutes. To start milking, a woman ties the reindeer's front legs and crouches down at its right side. After placing the bucket for the milk between her knees, she lightly punches the reindeer's teat and squeezes two of them, one with each hand (Photo 5).

**Photo 5** Milking of a reindeer

In the summer, the calves are kept apart from their mothers so the herders can milk them. Before milking, the calves are hitched to stakes while mothers are left free to graze. Then, the herders gather and milk them and then hitch them to stakes, while the calves are allowed to graze freely. Sometimes a mother reindeer and her calf will have a rope tied around their necks while they graze. This trains the reindeer to be in pairs and keeps the infants from suckling.

Reindeer milk is customarily mixed with tea for drinking. Just as is the case with meat, milk is frozen in the winter and is preserved on a wooden shelf attached to standing trees. The milk contains rich protein and has a high fat content, which makes it creamy.

A dairy product called *horoot* can also be made from reindeer milk. First, the milk is let to stand in the open air for one to three days. The fermented substance is boiled until it solidifies. Then it is placed in a cloth bag. A heavy stone is placed on top of the bag and the milk by-product is put between wooden plates. When the liquid is gone, it is kept dried indoors for some time before the *horoot* is ready. The liquid extracted during the pressing is put in a bowl. When the liquid is boiled, the *tos* (fat) comes to the surface and is preserved for future use.

Each herder has a distinctive reindeer ear-mark, which is made with a knife. The ear marks are passed from parents to children, although it is said that there is no specific rule of succession. Therefore, those who do not receive a mark must create a new ear mark.

Because this area is typically hilly and covered with forest, reindeer are not used for pulling sledges, but for riding and loading. They are ridden and loaded for daily grazing, hunting, the collection of firewood, seasonal migrations, visiting relatives and friends, and traveling to the *sum* centers for shopping and trade. Some people also own several horses and use them for riding, mainly in the summer. The same saddle is used for riding both reindeer and horses. A reindeer is ridden with a 1.5 m long thin stick in the right hand to use as a whip. A rider gets on a tree stump and jumps onto the reindeer from the left side with the stick in the left hand, which is switched to the right hand once the rider is mounted (Photo 6).

To make use of a reindeer for riding, first the *dongor* (two-year-old reindeer) are trained. Adults are too heavy for *dongor*, so it is usually the children's job to train them. Adults ride on *hoodai* (three-year-olds) or older ones. They regularly ride on *zari* (castrated males). Special training is not necessary to train the reindeer as pack animals. The male reindeer usually carry loads weighing about 40 kg, while females carry up to 30 kg.

Reindeer skin is used for making winter coats. Bags, mats for traveling, and shoes are also made from the skin. Materials for shoes are taken from the skin on the shin.

Reindeer antlers are ingredients in Chinese medicine and have been supplied to *negdel* since 1975 (and to the national enterprise from 1985). During the summer, the horns are cut off. The reindeer's two front legs are tied to one hind leg to make the animal fall. They cut the antlers with a small saw. In fact, because reindeer cannot properly regulate their body temperature when they lose their antlers and easily become



**Photo 6** A boy riding a reindeer to drive a herd

exhausted, they usually do not cut the antlers of pregnant female reindeer.

A few reindeer are slaughtered during the year<sup>7)</sup>. To kill a reindeer they hit the back of its head with the head of axe.

## **THE HISTORY OF THE *TSAATAN* COMMUNITY – FLIGHT FROM TUVA TO MONGOLIA**

### **1) Life stories of the *Tsaatan***

Through a number of personal narratives of the *Tsaatan* people, I will illustrate what *Tsaatan* social life was like in Tuva and why and how they fled to Mongolia.

#### *(1) Tsewel*

I was born in Tuva in 1937. I used to raise reindeer and move seasonally to the area of that is now the national border between Tuva and Mongolia. I lived in a tent with my grandfather. My grandmother passed away before I grew up. My father Jambar had divorced his earlier wife and married my mother. I had a half-brother called Chuluun who was 5 years older than me.

My father was always out hunting. There were lots of wild animals in those days. The hunt continued from one day to three days when they hunted the prey that lived nearby, but the hunting of sables used to last over a month. Sables were hunted mainly in the fall and winter, and deer during the spring and summer. My father also used to hunt one or two bears in a year. Bear fat is particularly good for keeping our bodies warm in winter. I remember the happy times we spent when my father succeeded in getting a bear. The hunters usually rode reindeer on their way to hunt in the fall, winter

and spring, but horses were more convenient in the summer.

We kept around fifteen reindeer in our household. Five or six of them were female and used for milking, and five or six others were *zari* (male reindeer for riding). We also owned some horses and one cow. My elder brother and I took care of the reindeer. My mother's duty was housekeeping as well as looking after my younger brothers and making clothes. We wore no shoes until the fall. When it started to snow, we put on our shoes made of reindeer fur. Clothes for winter were made of the skin of reindeer, too. We wore clothes made of cloth in the summer.

We hardly ate wheat flour in those days in Tuva and often gathered 'wild potatoes' instead<sup>8)</sup>. We boiled them to eat, or ground them into powder to make soup. Because these 'potatoes' could be gathered in the woods or highlands, we would gather up to three bags in the fall and then eat them from winter until spring. Those found in the grassland tasted sour while those found in the woods were sweeter and more delicious.

Pine nuts were also a popular item in our community. We usually toasted them or pounded them and extracted the oil, which was put in tea.

We caught many fish as well in those days. We would find salmon swimming upstream and cast a net or just grab them with our bare hands. We generally broiled them or ground them into powder after taking out the bones for making soup. We also used to dry them to provide a future supply.

I started attending school when I was seven years old. The school, which 60 to 70 students attended had eight grades. Lessons were taught in the Tuvinian language until the fourth grade, and Russian was the language of education beginning in the fifth grade. The students consisted of Tuvinians and Russians, and the Tuvinian students included those who pastured livestock on the steppe and those who raised reindeer.

During my student life in the dormitory, I had a problem with my eyes. My younger brother also experienced a lung disease just after he entered the school. So, because of our sicknesses my father decided to move to Mongolia, saying "Neither the school nor the place is good for you." Before I became a third grade student (in 1948), I came to Mongolia with my grandfather, parents, elder brother and three younger brothers. My younger brother *Gostya* was only a few months old at that time. We accompanied seven other families on our way to Mongolia, but four of them returned to Tuva. The Northern Group had already set up a camp in Mongolia before us.

I didn't know about the existence of the national border at that time, but it must have existed, because we walked over the border at night so as not to be seen when we entered Mongolia.

We first established our camp in Ulaan-uul sum in Mongolia. We have never been able to go back to Tuva to visit our relatives since then. When I was thirty years old, I realized that we could not travel to Tuva because of the national border.

## (2) *Sanjim* (Former chief of the reindeer herding brigade at the *Ulaan-uul negdel*)

I was born as the fourth of nine children in 1940 in what is now Todja, located in the northeast part of the Republic of Tuva. We used to raise about 40 reindeer. That

was a place with much snow and it was difficult to raise livestock on the steppe, although there were some Russian families who each took care of two or three cattle.

We used to use put bark for our tent in the summer to keep it cooler, and we put tanned animal skins on it in the winter. We used to leave the bark when we moved to another place. Since there was no stove inside the tent, we arranged three stones to make a fireplace on the floor.

Our household owned no horses or cattle and we used to hunt wild animals for meat. If we were unsuccessful at getting game, we sometimes had to eat our reindeer. There were a variety of wild animals to hunt including elk, deer, bear, wild boar, squirrel and sable. Father usually went out on a reindeer to look for bear in the spring and fall, either by himself or with several others.

I remember the spring of 1957 (after coming to Mongolia) when my father and I set out to hunt for a bear. We managed to hunt bear without much difficulty as we knew where we can find them. We hunted a bear coming out of hibernation. We traveled for two days to reach the spot, spent three days after we got the bear, and took a day to return to our home.

I learned from my father that we were not allowed to get any more than seven deer in a single year. We also had to avoid taking deer of a similar kind. There was a limit of three bears and twenty sables in a year.

Wild reindeer were everywhere at that time although we do not see them nowadays. I recall seeing a wild reindeer mingling with our herd.

We occasionally used to travel to *Todja* on a reindeer to sell sables, squirrels and pine nuts. It took a day to reach the market in the summer but three days in the winter. At the market, we bought daily goods such as tea leaves, cloth, and bullets for our guns.

There were also people who came from *Todja* to buy squirrels, birds or venison. Russians were regular customers and bought frozen birds and venison. They used sledges pulled by horses to carry the goods on a frozen river.

Aircraft landed on the frozen river during the winter. As a young boy, I often went to see the single propeller planes. They seemed to be able to load as much as one whole horse. The plane carried things like wheat and goods used in the school.

My arrival to Mongolia was in 1948, but nine soldiers took us back to Tuva in 1951 to settle down in *Todja*. A total of 27 families were forced to return to their previous homes which were 300 km away from Mongolia. Two of the soldiers were Russian and the rest were natives of Tuva. On the way to Tuva, they took us to *Tengis*, where many Buryat Mongol had been killed. They showed us the skulls and threatened us saying that we would end up the same way if we did not keep going back to Tuva<sup>9)</sup>.

I was twelve years old when we returned to Tuva. I studied at school from the fall of 1951 to the spring of 1952; it was my first experience of receiving formal education. The schools in *Todja* adopted a system that provided ten years of education. There were Russian and Tuvinian schools. Even in the Tuvinian schools they taught both Russian and Tuvinian.

In 1952, we escaped again and came to Mongolia. My parents had kept the plan



secret before we set out for Mongolia. We spent 12 days on the way to our destination. A total of 26 families returned to Mongolia on that trip.

We were desperate to come to Mongolia because we thought we would be exiled far from our homeland when the Soviet Union closed the national border. Also, food was in short supply due to World War II. Disease was spreading and there were no doctors to treat them, so many schoolchildren's lives were lost.

We entered into Mongolia passing the border at *Hanh* (to the extreme north of *Hövsögöl Aimag*). We earned our living by hunting animals in the beginning. Then I took a job at *Hanh* Port located on Lake *Hövsögöl*, loading and unloading trade goods (to and from Russia) from commercial vessels between 1954 to 1956. Later, I worked under the *negdel* in *Hanh sum*. I was also engaged in the fishery business from 1959 in *Renchenlhunbe sum* at Lake *Tsagaannuur*. Beginning in 1955, the government provided subsidies and support for us, such as the distribution of guns for hunting. We became citizens of Mongolia the next year so we no longer had any reason to hide and could live freely. Children were able to attend schools from that time.

My parents' lives had been in the taiga. After the establishment of the *negdel*, six households tended reindeer. I was in the army from 1960 to 1964 and engaged in construction work on the airport at Ulaanbaatar. When I came back home, my parents had moved to their settlement to *Tsagaannuur sum*.

I got married in 1965 and moved to *Selenge Aimag* for a job moving timber in rafts. My parents and brothers also came and joined me in *Selenge*; however, everyone except for my brother *Gombo* died from severe illnesses. I returned to this place in 1971 and became the chief of the reindeer brigade in the *negdel* at *Ulaan-uul*. We used to raise about 50 reindeer in those days. I received my salary of 1 *tögrök* for taking care of two reindeer along with 100 *tögrök* for my duty as a manager of the brigade. (100 *tögrök* was worth about US\$25 at that time).

## 2) Why the *Tsaatan* fled from Tuva

Tuva became independent in 1921, when Mongolia gained its independence. At that time, the reindeer herders were able to freely cross the border between Tuva and Mongolia. However, when Tuva was annexed to the Soviet Union in 1944, the border was closed.

In 1944, Russia was involved in World War II. We know the situation in Tuva at that time through the writings of James Forsyth (Forsyth 1994:373–375):

In 1944, the way of life of most Tuvinians was nomadic pastoralism with herds of horses, cattle and sheep or, in the mountain forests, reindeer. By the late 1940s Tuvinian cattle-raising was in a state of decline. The number of livestock, which before 1917 and between 1932 and 1940, had averaged 1 to 1.5 million, was drastically reduced during and immediately after the Second World War by the Russian government's procurement practices, which were as arbitrary as they had been in the 'war communism' period of the Russian Civil War. In 1945, the herds amounted to only 760,000 animals, of which over 60 percent belonged to individual nomadic households which worked



together as cooperatives but were not collectivized or settled. Plans for a new collectivization campaign were proclaimed in 1945, and in 1948 yet another campaign of mass collectivization was launched among the Tuvian people. Although this took place almost twenty years after the first collectivization drive in Russia, the same kinds of excesses – that is, crude mistakes and the use of naked force – which had been perpetrated by the Communist Party at that time, now occurred in Tuva. In the same way, too, the dictates of the Moscow government encountered determined resistance and those who defended their stock were dubbed ‘landlords’ and ‘kulaks’, and no doubt suffered arrest and incarceration in concentration camps.

Elderly people gave the following reasons for their diaspora. They concur with the situation that Forsyth described:

- 1) Since the border zone was their original territory, they had good trade relationships with the Mongolian herders in the steppes.
- 2) There were food shortages in the Soviet Union due to the World War II.
- 3) Domestic animals were requisitioned by the Soviet government during the war.
- 4) Many schoolchildren’s lives were taken by the spread of disease.
- 5) People were afraid of losing their domestic animals due to the collectivization campaign.

## THE COLLECTIVIZATION OF REINDEER HERDING UNDER THE MONGOLIAN SOCIALIST REGIME

### 1) Collectivization of livestock herding in Mongolia

Unlike Tuva, Mongolia maintained its independence. Nevertheless, the movement toward collectivization was put forward under the strong influence of the Soviet Union in the 1950s and was led to the establishment of *negdel* (collective cooperatives)<sup>10)</sup>.

The administrative area of a *negdel* was organized according to a *sum*, and was composed of several brigades. In the *negdel*, domestic animals were communal property and a herding unit consisted of two or three families which were assigned to raise a single kind of livestock. Herders received a salary, but were no longer being able to trade livestock and its products in the market. Offices, residences, factories, hospitals, veterinary clinics, and other such structures were constructed at the center of each *negdel*. The *negdel* administrative office took charge of organizing the time and route of the seasonal migration, which was carried out utilizing tractors and other vehicles. Just as the other livestock herded on the steppe, the *Tsaatan* reindeer became subject to collective herding since the late 1950s, belonging to the *negdel* brigades in *Renchenlhunbe sum* and *Ulaan-uul sum*.

We will now examine the collectivization of reindeer herding and the changes seen in the *Tsaatan* community focusing on the Southern Group. In the 1950s, the *Tsaatan* herded about 200 reindeer in the taiga area of *Hövsögöl*. In 1959 *negdel* were

established throughout Mongolia, and also in *Ulaan-uul sum*, where the *Tsaatan* of the Southern Group lived. When the *negdel* was established, the government also built a settlement camp for the *Tsaatan* and a lumber factory to create employment among the *Tsaatan* in *Ulaan-uul Sum*. At that time there were seven *Tsaatan* families in the taiga area of *Ulaan-uul sum*; two families began to engage in herding reindeer belonging to the brigade, but the others began working at the lumber factory and resided in the *sum* center. However, because the number of communal reindeer had increased to more than 500, families who lived in the *sum* center began returning to the taiga. When *Ayorsed*, a scientist who specialized in reindeer, assumed his position as a director of the *negdel* (as well as the governor of the *sum*) in *Ulaan-uul*, reindeer herding became a promising business. In 1972, a festival was held to celebrate the achievement of the total number reaching over 1000. Later, the stock increased to more than 2000.

In 1978, *Ayorsed* resigned the post of director because of an illness in his family and a new leader took over. The new director slaughtered 800 reindeer in one year for food, considering that the reindeer were useless. Consequently, the number of reindeer decreased to less than 400 by 1980 (300 in *Ulaan-uul* and 80 in *Renchenlhunbe*).

At this critical point in overseeing reindeer herding, former director *Ayorsed* decided to establish another *sum* and raise a campaign to start a national enterprise there. It was approved by the prefectural assembly in the fall of 1984. Integrating the western region of *Renchenlhunbe sum* and the northern region of *Ulaan-uul sum*, they established a new *sum* called *Tsagaannuur*, in which a national enterprise was established. It was led by the director, *Ayorsed*. The number of reindeer reached 576.

In 1988, *Ayorsed* moved to the city of *Mörön*. Later he became an adviser on the prefecture's planning committee. By 1990, the total number of reindeer had recovered to 1000.

Working for the national enterprise, a single adult was responsible for raising at least 20 reindeer, receiving a salary of two *tögrök* per animal. A kilogram of wheat was exchanged for one *tögrök* in those days, so this income was sufficient for obtaining daily necessities.

Though sable hunting was prohibited from 1960 to 1975, the hunting resumed in 1976 and continued to 1990. The *negdel* (and later the national enterprise) provided guns, horses and reindeer. The sable pelts were sold to the *negdel* in return. At that time, a sable pelt sold for 180 *tögrök*. Single sable pelts were also exchangeable for a bag of wheat (70 kg). Because two bags of wheat easily lasted a year, sable hunting brought sufficient income.

The above description is the history of collective organization and life among the Southern Group. The Northern Group also became incorporated into the *negdel* at *Renchenlhunbe sum* and went through a similar process. A *Tsaatan* settlement and fishing industry were set up at *Renchenlhunbe Sum* in 1962. From then, many young *Tsaatan* took up residence in the settlement and engaged in logging and fishery work. So most *Tsaatan* settled down at the *sum* center to work and to let their children go to school.

However, beginning in 1990, Mongolia shifted towards a market-based economy.

The breakdown of the Russian economy and Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) had a strong impact on the Mongolian economy. Construction businesses and fisheries, providing largely to clients in Russia, were greatly affected, and the majority of *Tsaatan* workers went back to the taiga where they resumed reindeer herding.

## 2) Collectivization of reindeer herding in Mongolia as compared to that in Russia

Collectivization was implemented in Mongolia 30 years later than in the Soviet Union and the degree of social reform in Mongolia was not as radical as in the Soviet Union. The collective system of reindeer herding, in particular, hardly affected the nomadic lifestyle or the social structure such as residential groups in the *Tsaatan* community.

Takakura illustrated the following points concerning the changes in reindeer herding in eastern Siberia (Republic of Sakha) caused by collectivization (Takakura 1998: 23–27):

- 1) Reindeer herding was transformed from a means of transportation to a livestock breeding business specializing in producing meat and skin.
- 2) This also shifted traditional livestock herding based on the family unit to livestock herding performed by hired professional herders who raised livestock on rangelands far from the settlements where their family members lived.
- 3) Herding livestock became a profession that could be engaged in by anyone; they could retire from it at any time.
- 4) Soviet communities were founded, instead of communities based on ethnic ties.

In the case of Mongolia, the traditional reindeer herding system was maintained even after collectivization, that is, seasonal migration and various methods of reindeer raising were passed onto the next generation. Furthermore, the clan system with the custom of exogamy and residential groups was organized according to family and kinship ties that were also kept intact in the taiga area, although many of the *Tsaatan* gave up reindeer herding and moved to settlements in *sum* centers, engaging in fishery or construction.

On the other hand, the *Tsaatan* community experienced some changes, firmly incorporated into the socialist economic system through *negdel* (later national enterprises). Prior to the development of *negdel*, reindeer herders commonly owned relatively few (several to a few dozen) reindeer, which were beneficial in terms of transport, and for hunting. Old men often recalled their younger days spent hunting with their fathers. However, hunting was no longer considered an important means subsistence after the emergence of *negdel*. Under the *negdel*, the number of reindeer per household grew significantly. Thus, their herding-hunting complex shifted to a specialized form of reindeer herding. This became possible under the context of collectivization. *Tsaatan* people received a salary, contracting to raise reindeer and producing their antlers, which were useful as medicine. They could purchase wheat at



**Photo 7** Mrs. Tsewel and her daughter cooking noodles

the *sum* center and began to cook home-made noodle soup from wheat a new dietary habit – similarly to the nomadic people of the Mongolian steppes (Photo 7). Moreover, the supply of products such as clothing and food, as well as education, information and other public services improved their living standard, which engendered both the ‘Mongolization’ and modernization of the *Tsaatan* community.

## THE MARKET ECONOMY AND THE *TSAATAN* COMMUNITY

### 1) The rise of the market economy in Mongolia and the privatization of livestock

After 30 years of pastoral collectivization, Mongolia adopted democracy and a market-based economy in 1990. The government distributed coupons worth 10,000 *tögrök*<sup>11)</sup> as a way of sharing the nation’s public property among the citizens. Coupons consisted of a green one worth 7,000 *tögrök* and three pink ones worth 1,000 *tögrök*. Pink coupons could be sold or traded, or used to acquire assets such as domestic animals, automobiles, machinery, and fixed assets such as buildings and facilities, and to purchase small businesses such as grocery stores, restaurants, barbershops, transport businesses and manufacturing. The green coupons could not be traded or transferred to others and their use was only for purchasing company stock dealt in at a Mongolian stock exchange office, though livestock also became objects of privatization through the green coupon later.

The privatization of *negdel* brought about the establishment of agricultural and pastoral breeding companies (limited companies). Nevertheless, many of those companies were subsequently disbanded, and a substantial portion of all domestic animals was privatized.

Reindeer were also privatized through the coupon system from 1991, but at first there was a limit of three reindeer per household. Still in 1994, only 200 of the 1260 reindeer were privately owned. At that time, the herders received a monthly payment of 60 *tögrök* for raising a single reindeer for the national enterprise, and provided reindeer antlers and small amounts of dairy products to the national enterprise. They were obligated pay an annual tax of 40 *tögrök* per privately owned reindeer, but they had a daily supply of milk and meat.

After a discussion between the *Tsaatan* and the new president of a national enterprise, a leasing system was started in June 1994. The number of reindeer at that point totaled 956. The leasing system was intended to run the reindeer section of the enterprise well and independently. It was assumed that the sale of antlers could improve the standard of living of the *Tsaatan* and increase the number of the livestock. Yet, because of the closing of routes to the reindeer antler market, the plan never achieved success.

The national enterprise consequently went bankrupt and the reindeer practically all became private property as of September 1995. Such privatization was, in fact, two or three years later than the privatization of livestock in the steppe area of Mongolia.

## 2) Privatization of reindeer and the crisis in the *Tsaatan* Community

Reindeer underwent a rapid decrease in number after the lease system and privatization. The number decreased to approximately 600 in 1998 and the *Tsaatan* community was faced with a crisis. *Gostya* attributed the decrease in reindeer to the following:

- 1) A lack of veterinary and medical services.
- 2) Because of unemployment in the *sum* center, the *Tsaatan* residents returned to the taiga; the food demand rose with increased of population in the taiga area.
- 3) Reindeer that were raised by inexperienced individuals died.
- 4) The younger generation, especially those who got reindeer through privatization, sold their reindeer for consumption by people in the steppe area.

When salaries were no longer available from the national enterprise, those who had only a small number of livestock experienced difficulties in securing a supply of food. While it was possible to catch fish in rivers and lakes, the fish themselves had also diminished in number. Moreover, the number of wild animals, including sables, decreased.

During the time of *negdel* and the national enterprise, people had access to doctors, veterinary services, medicine, newspapers, and daily items sold in grocery stores. Doctors traveled and checked their health every other week and those who were pregnant were put safely into a hospital in the *sum* center. Veterinarians traveled in the taiga area. Agents went round to the households with daily consumer items brought from the *sum* center.

Doctors and veterinarians no longer visit the taiga, and the *Tsaatan* must supply their own medicine. Newspapers are not delivered, nor do any news reports reach their





**Photo 8** A horse riding tour group visiting a *Tsaatan* camp site

ears. Securing daily necessities has become very difficult.

Under such circumstances, some aid from other countries has come to the *Tsaatan* community. Nevertheless, various problems have arisen such as the sending of useless items due to the lack of sufficient information about the locality. For that reason, *Sukhbaatar*, my partner in this research, has established an NPO project to improve the effectiveness of these support activities. Such aid invariably bears the possibility of impeding independence, reflecting what *Gostya* mentioned, “Gifts sooner or later will be sold or consumed.”

The *Tsaatan* settlements have also come under the strong influence of tourism. In the summer of 1998, groups of horse-riding tourists from England visited their summer camp and tours using a large Russian helicopter also began (Photo 8). Foreign journalists and researchers like myself have also been visiting them. The consequences on a small-scale community such as the *Tsaatan* are not minor.

The *Tsaatan* community first became incorporated into the global political-economic system through socialist-based administration from the end of 1950s. Now it has become integrated into the capitalist world system. In addition, tourism has shifted to being one of the main resources in Mongolia. Hence, the *Tsaatan* society at the peripheral area of Mongolia suddenly became an object for consumption in global international tourism.

### 3) Adaptation to market economy and globalization

While the lives of the *Tsaatan* people during the socialist regime were relatively stable, they have experienced a difficult time under the new conditions of a market oriented economic system, especially in the late 1990s. However, the *Tsaatan* are



currently seeking effective ways to adapt to their new situation. Below are some of the strategies they are employing.

(1) Revival of hunting, fishing and gathering as a means of subsistence

At the time of pastoral collectivization, the *Tsaatan* received salary payments and regularly purchased wheat, so hunting as a means of subsistence became less important. However, privatization of reindeer ownership rapidly lowered the number of reindeer and the *Tsaatan* no longer receive a salary: now they need to engage in hunting and fishing for their livelihood. Even so, it is said that wild animals are becoming scarce because of the lack of controls. As for gathering, wild lily bulbs are being collected again.

(2) Strengthening relationships with people of the steppe

*Gostya's* son *Tartag* married a *Darkhad* girl from the steppe area adjacent to the taiga and they lived in the steppe and pastured cattle there. In the summer of 2000, they joined *Gostya* and *Tsewel*, and stayed together in *Mengebolag* or the summer pasture land in the taiga. They brought their cows to the *Mengebolag* from the steppe area and milked them together with reindeer.

Some other *Tsaatan* who own cows leave them in the care of their relatives in the steppe area. In short, the *Tsaatan* have searched for a new path in the complex of herding systems that consist of both reindeer herding in the taiga and the herding of multiple animals on the steppe, as a way of adapting to the new situation.

This also has to do with the fact that some *Tsaatan* have settled in the steppe area. *Tsaatan* boys and girls study at schools in the *sum* center together with *Darkhad*. Some are also engaged in fishery or construction near the *sum* center. Consequently, *Tsaatan* have had contact with *Darkhad* people, which has led to several marriages. The human network forged through such relations (kinship, affinity and friendship) have strengthened the ties between the taiga and the steppe, which facilitates the *Tsaatan* in adapting to the new conditions.

(3) Adjustments to the market economy

1) Selling of antlers from domestic reindeer and wild deer

Antlers were formerly exported to the Soviet Union through the *negdel* or the national enterprise. That trade was suspended when the collective organization of reindeer herding ended. Now the *Tsaatan* have begun selling horns to brokers, probably exporting them to China. The *Tsaatan* now not only cut the domestic reindeer' antlers but also collect those of wild deer, which grow naturally each year. The collecting of antlers has now become a stable source of household income.

2) Hunting for Animal Furs

The hunting of wild animals such as sables and squirrels for obtaining their pelts was controlled by the *negdel* or the national enterprise. Currently, most families have begun hunting them again. Hunting as a source of cash income now serves an important role in terms of adapting to the market-based economy.

### 3) Tourism

Today many *Tsaatan* are beginning to earn an income through tourism. First, some of the Northern Group began accepting tourists as requested by a travel agency, and began to sell engraved reindeer antlers as souvenirs. Then other *Tsaatan* also began making souvenirs. Antler carving is becoming a popular folk craft among the *Tsaatan*. Some families have adapted to the tourism more positively. They moved from *Tsagaannuur sum* to the highland near tourist camps at Lake *Hövsögöl*, where they can entertain guests by showing their way of life including reindeer herding and performing shamanistic rituals.

Table 4 lists the income for seven households and the sources among the Southern Group. The average annual income is 344,000 (\$340). Wild deer antler make up most of the cash income earnings (28.6%), followed by squirrel pelts, domestic reindeer antler, and pensions. Antler engraving (fifth) constitutes 8.1%, and 3.3% represents the charge for renting horses to foreign visitors. One household sells pine nuts and blueberries in addition to rearing a goat and getting cashmere wool. Although not viable as a source of cash, many families hunt deer, rabbits, and bears. They fish in the lakes and rivers for food, and an increasing number of families own livestock in the steppe area.

**Table 4** Annual incomes of 7 families of the south group

| Family<br>Item                  | 1       | 2       | 3       | 4      | 5       | 6       | 7       | Average<br>Annual<br>Income | Ratio  |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|-----------------------------|--------|
| Wild deer horns                 | 200,000 | 104,000 | 63,000  | 32,000 | 150,000 | 0       | 140,000 | 98,429                      | 28.6%  |
| Fur of squirrels                | 140,000 | 80,000  | 40,000  | 0      | 90,000  | 100,000 | 100,000 | 78,571                      | 22.9%  |
| Reindeer horns                  | 50,000  | 55,000  | 0       | 35,000 | 40,000  | 150,000 | 100,000 | 61,429                      | 17.9%  |
| Pension                         | 0       | 192,000 | 0       | 0      | 0       | 216,000 | 0       | 58,286                      | 17.0%  |
| Carving horns                   | 80,000  | 20,000  | 20,000  | 5,000  | 30,000  | 0       | 40,000  | 27,857                      | 8.1%   |
| Leasing horses<br>to foreigners | 0       | 20,000  | 0       | 0      | 0       | 0       | 60,000  | 11,429                      | 3.3%   |
| Nuts of pine trees              | 0       | 30,000  | 0       | 0      | 0       | 0       | 0       | 4,286                       | 1.2%   |
| Cashmere<br>wool of goats       | 0       | 18,000  | 0       | 0      | 0       | 0       | 0       | 2,571                       | 0.7%   |
| Wild blueberries                | 0       | 6,000   | 0       | 0      | 0       | 0       | 0       | 857                         | 0.3%   |
| Total                           | 470,000 | 525,000 | 123,000 | 72,000 | 310,000 | 466,000 | 440,000 | 343,714                     | 100.0% |

## CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE *TSAATAN* COMMUNITY AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD

I will conclude this paper by reflecting on the notable historical aspects of the *Tsaatan* community. Table 5 shows a chronology of the changes that have taken place in the *Tsaatan* community. When the border between Tuva and Mongolia was closed in 1944, some *Tsaatan* fled from Tuva to Mongolia. In Mongolia, reindeer herding was collectivized from the end of the 1950s to the beginning of the 1990s. At that time, the

**Table 5** Chronology of the *Tsaatan* Community

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 1921 | Independence of Mongolia and Tuva.  |
| 1944 | Tuva became annexed to the Soviet Union and the national border was closed.   |
| 1959 | Collectivization of animal husbandry within all of Mongolia, and the establishment of <i>negdel</i> (collective cooperatives) |
| 1960 | The number of reindeers at the <i>negdel</i> in <i>Ulaan-uul sum</i> was 74, reared by two families.                          |
| 1960 | Establishment of <i>Tsaatan</i> 's settlement village and timber factory in <i>Ulaan-uul sum</i> .                            |
| 1962 | Establishment of <i>Tsaatan</i> 's settlement village and fishery enterprise in <i>Renchenlhunbem sum</i> .                   |
| 1966 | The number of reindeer increased to 600. Some families in the camp returned to the Taiga region.                              |
| 1968 | <i>Ayorsed</i> became the <i>negdel</i> 's Director in <i>Ulaan-uul sum</i> (present until 1978)                              |
| 1972 | A festival celebrating the 1000 Reindeer was held in <i>Ulaan-uul sum</i> .   |
| 1978 | A new Director of the <i>negdel</i> held the post. 800 reindeer were slaughtered this year.                                   |
| 1980 | The number of reindeer decreased to less than 400.  |
| 1981 | <i>Ayorsed</i> began the campaign for resuming reindeer herding.  |
| 1985 | Establishment of National enterprise and <i>Tsaagannuur sum</i> .   |
| 1988 | <i>Ayorsed</i> moved to Murun city and became the advisory member of the prefecture's planning committee.                     |
| 1991 | Among the 1260 reindeer, approx. 300 of them were privatized.   |
| 1993 | Implementation of the Leasing System (956 reindeer)   |
| 1995 | Full privatization of reindeers (3–4 years after privatization in the steppe region)  |
| 1998 | The number of reindeer decreased to 600.  |

government also put forward a plan to make the Tuvian people sedentary, after which many of them came to settle down at *sum* center engaging in fishery or construction. Nevertheless, the number of reindeer increased as *negdel* reindeer rearing became stable. Some of the *Tsaatan* returned to the taiga to raise reindeer communally.

Under the direction of Mr. *Ayorsed*, leader of the *negdel*, herding reindeer reached its peak. However, the subsequent director of the *negdel* gave orders to slaughter reindeer for food, and reindeer herding was thrown into a state of crisis. Mr. *Ayorsed*, former director of the *negdel* saved it from that crisis<sup>12)</sup>. Through his hard work, *Tsaagannuur sum* gained independent status and a national enterprise was born. The number of reindeer rebounded.

But, since 1990, Mongolia has shifted its regime to democracy and a market economy. The reindeer were privatized in 1995. The number of reindeer decreased rapidly from then on; the *Tsaatan* community faced another moment of crisis.

As explained previously, the *Tsaatan* adopted several means to adapt to the new situation:

- 1) There was a revival of hunting, gathering and fishing as a means of subsistence.

- 2) Relationships with the people of the steppe area were strengthened.
- 3) Adjustments were made to adapt to the market economy.

Of them 1) and 2) are means of securing food and 3) is a means of obtaining money. There have been at least two types of adjustments to the market economy. One is to adapt traditional activities to the market economy, such as the cutting of reindeer antlers, the collection of wild deer antlers, the hunting of animals for fur, etc. The other is the introduction of new activities such as tourism and interaction with foreigners.

We have discussed how the *Tsaatan* community has changed and how the people have adapted to new conditions. Now we should ask how and why such a small group as the *Tsaatan* managed to maintain their community and their traditions.

I suppose that the *Tsaatan* community and their traditions have been maintained by the pastoral collectivization in Mongolia, which was less harshly controlled by the government than in Russia. As described in Section 4, although the *Tsaatan* community underwent some important changes during the pastoral collectivization, the main social aspects, such as the system of traditional reindeer herding (seasonal migration and various methods of reindeer raising) and forms of residential groups and families, were not affected and were therefore passed on to the next generation, unlike the case of Russia. On the other hand, their subsistence was supported by a stable income and food supply. Consequently, the community was supported by the government and was connected with the outside world under the control of the socialist regime. Now the situation has changed. They are exposed to the whole world both socially and economically. In order to adapt, the *Tsaatan* are developing relationships with their relatives and colleagues who live outside of the taiga, with the *Darkhad* through marriage and friendship ties, and with Mongolians and foreign tourists and visitors. Maintaining their community and their own culture in the future will depend upon how successfully they manage interaction with the outside world.

## NOTES

- 1) The region is located in the south of Mt. Sayan and is southernmost in the reindeer rearing fields. The hilly taiga lies next to the steppe. Some researchers argue that this area is the birth place of reindeer domestication, based on the hypothesis that the domestication of reindeer came about as a result of the influence of pastoralism on the steppes.
- 2) Some Tuvinians gave up reindeer herding after arriving in Mongolia, but they are still generally called *Tsaatan*.
- 3) My first opportunity to do fieldwork in Mongolia was in May 1993. On that occasion, I became acquainted with Mr. *Sukhbaatar* (a geographer who became a member of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences), Mrs. *Gunsmaa* (then a press staff member). Mr. *Enkhchuluun* (then a bureaucrat) supported me as a translator. We conducted a general survey of the northern and western part of Mongolia from August to September. Our first visit to *Tsaatan* community was during that time. They have remained most generous in their offers of assistance for my research activities. Mr. *Battulga*, lecturer of the National University of Mongolia, has also provided support since 1998. Although I have had no opportunity to do long term field research, those individuals have largely resolved the shortcomings. The advantage to my research was that I was able to visit their

- community repeatedly, thus solidifying my relationship with the informants, so that I could understand the diachronic perspective of the rapid and sweeping changes of their community.
- 4) His body was found in the summer of 2000.
  - 5) The author mainly conducted fieldwork among the Southern Group. The information on the Northern Group listed in the table was provided by the leader of the bag (a local administrative unit) and by *Sukhbaatar*.
  - 6) A newborn reindeer calf weighs about 6.5–8 kg. It increases to 32–45 kg after 2 months, and 50–48–59.5 kg by 4 months. (Ayorsed 1996: 27–28)
  - 7) Reindeer gain weight until December. They are usually slaughtered in October or November before settling at the winter camp. (Ayorsed 1996: 32)
  - 8) This is actually the bulb of a kind of lily (*Lilium martagon* L.).
  - 9) They say that the Buryat who fled Russia in 1928 were killed there the following year.
  - 10) For details on the organization of negdel and their management, see Onuki (1985). There were 255 negdel units and 787 brigades in 1982. Moreover, there were 51 national enterprises that aimed at strengthening state-level control. (Onuki 1985: 72).
  - 11) One dollar was exchangeable for 400 tögrök in 1993. In 2002, the rate had inflated was about 1000 tögrök. The exchange value of the coupons did not reflect the actual rate.
  - 12) Ayorsed was a specialist in the technology of animal husbandry. He was the director of the negdel (cooperative for stockbreeding) until 1976. I had several opportunities to talk with him before he passed away in 2000.

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