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Ecological Changes and Identity of Chahar Mongols

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In this presentation, I will introduce changes in Chahar activities and subsistence. The Great Wall of China is not only a political boundary but also ecological boundary. North of the wall is dry steppe, unsuitable for agriculture. To the south of the wall is yellow sand plateau where agriculture is possible. However, since the soil is not fertile, Han farmers leave their villages when there is a drought. As the Chahar live north of the Great Wall, they have been colonized by Han farmers since the early twentieth century. As a result of Han colonization, the Chahar people moved in four different directions. In the early twentieth century, large-scale government operated pastures of the Ching dynasty located in south and south-western Chahar, moved to the east and north-east of Chahar. The second movement is of individual pastoralists. Chahar living in the south moved to the northern areas, and joined the groups there. The third movement was by Chahar who have moved to neighboring areas not suitable for agriculture. The fourth was by a small number of people who remained in the same area and became farmers. Because of this relocation, the subsistence activities of the Chahar have changed a great deal. Those people who have moved to north remained to the pasturage. Those people, who had moved to areas not suitable for agriculture, also remained as small-scale pastures until the 1940s.

The author conducted intensive research at Adriga hota in Ulanhob aimak, Inner Mongolia (Alta 1995; 1998). At Adriga hota, people led nomadic lives throughout the year until the early 1940s. The number of movements gradually started decreasing around 1943 and nomadic migration had completely vanished by the late 1950s. Here, the lives of nomads in Adriga hota will be recounted and the causes of the disappearance of nomadic migration will be examined according to internal and external factors.

The six nomadic households in Adriga hota moved four times a year to four pastures in a mere 15 km² area. Although the fundamental cause of nomadic migration is the availability of vegetation, the activities of these nomads had no direct connection with vegetation except for temporary moves called *otor*. They moved according to the start of snowfall, births of domestic animals and date of the calendar. Attention was not paid to vegetation—the convenience of their fellow nomads was the main consideration in their movements. Out of the four pastures, spring camp was thought to be an extension of winter camp, due to its location and the conditions of its facilities. For the same reason, the summer and autumn camps were thought to have a similar relationship to each other. It was therefore concluded that the basic pattern of nomadic migration was movement between the winter and summer camps. If these two places are in a satisfactory condition, the simplest form of nomadic migration is possible. In other words, nomads moved around the same four pastures in four

seasons no matter how frequently they moved. They tended to concentrate on the winter and summer camps and return to the winter camp in the end.

This was clearly seen in the process of how nomadic migration disappeared in Adriga hota. Although the nomads in this area originally moved around four pastures, they reduced the number of moves to three or two. The decrease in the number of moves and the settlement of nomads were caused by the immigration of farmers from China. Although the settlement of farmers in nomadic areas does not necessarily lead to the disappearance of nomadic migration, the basic pattern of nomadic migration was disrupted as a result of the *incursion of farmers into nomadic areas in the case of Adriga hota*.

This disruption was caused by the construction of houses in the summer camp. Houses were first used in combination with tents and only had a supplementary function because there was no need for protection against cold weather in summer. However, nomads began to stay longer in the houses, decreased their movements and began to use tents only as incidental facilities. Especially in winter, houses became their main places of residence and each nomad began to go to the winter camp alone with a tent. However, this type of nomadic movement was only seen in the case of *otor*. Because *otor* was only a temporary movement, it could not be continued for long periods of time. These factors caused nomadic migration in Adriga hota to disappear completely (Alta 2002).

Then, I concentrated on the decrease of the Chahar population in settlements where they have settled down during the past 20 to 30 years. In these settlements, because of a Han pressure, the Chahar had moved to the north to join other Mongolian groups and remain as pastoralists, or they moved to the administrative center of the area to become factory workers or public servants.

I would like to detail what kind of identity the Chahar people have under such circumstances. I believe the Chahar people, who are continuously participating in pastoral life as before, have a clear identity of being Mongol or Chahar. But, what kind of identity do those people who moved to town have? For this case, I, as a Chahar, shall talk about my own experience. My home is located in the south of Chahar. My grandfather, grandmother, and father had a pastoral way of life up to the 1940s. When my father left the army of Inner Mongolia, in the late 1940s, he became a public servant. After my grandfather passed away, my grandmother and my parents moved to a town. But they did not like town life, so they moved out of the town to live on steppe 10 kilometers away from the town. They acquired several dozens of domestic animals and become part-time pastoralists. My father, at that time, used to commute to his office using a horse. Later, at the end of 1960s, the grazing land was opened to farmland. So we lost the land, and then we moved back to town.

After we settled in the town, although most of our neighbors were Han people, all of us including my elder brother, elder sister, and younger brother, can speak Mongolian. Also we are all conscious of being Chahar. As you know, Mongols are composed of several groups. Chahar neighbors are "Khalh" groups in the north. Since childhood, I had an impression that they had different customs on diet, and that their personality was rougher than ours was. In particular, a group located east of Inner Mongolia is "Horchin" who are linguistically different from us, and also they are farmers. So, they are always the target of our jokes.

As such, we are proud of being Chahar. But, in everyday life, I feel more Mongol than

Chahar. This kind of identity is reflected in every sphere, language use at home, diet and festivals. In childhood, I did not have a good impression of Han people. Because of this impression of them, I did not have a very close Han friend. So, if someone mistakes me for a Han, it upsets me greatly. It is said that the Han has 5,000 years of civilization. However, I did not feel this sense of civilization from my own experience. Rather, I have a strong feeling that Mongolian culture, which is often considered backward, as being far more civilized.

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