

Mongolia's Naadam Festival
past and present in the construction
of national identity

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Abstract

This study explores the significant role that Naadam has played, and continues to play, in the creation and maintenance of Mongolian national identity, both within and outside the boundaries of Mongolia. By regularly performing the Naadam festival, the Mongolian people are constantly constructing and restructuring their culture, customs, traditions, values and identity, both to themselves and to the world beyond.

Naadam, or more fully *Eriin Gurvan Naadam*, the ‘Three Games of Men’ is a specifically and distinctively Mongolian festival, comprising a religious, secular, political or social ceremony followed by the traditional three games of wrestling, archery and horseracing. The Games component of the festival is examined drawing on the anthropology of games and sport related to identity, liminality and the use of ritual to engender unity. Also considered is the historical importance of games in ancient religious and celebratory festivals.

An overview of Mongolia’s cultural history explores the ancient origins of the festival and its evolution from a simple hunting ritual, to its incorporation into a religious ceremony after the introduction of Buddhism into Mongolia, when the ruling Khans gave tribute to the new Living Buddha. It became a political festival by which to publically display and affirm the location of power, demonstrating the dualistic role of church and state in ruling the Mongol provinces under the Qing (Manchu) Empire.

In the twentieth century Naadam became a ceremony of state as it was adopted by the first Mongolia government to demonstrate its new political (theocratic) status. Ten years later, Naadam was instrumental in the construction of nationalism and nation building as the new socialist government sought to impose its communist ideals. The public performance of Naadam successfully articulated the political

hierarchy in both the spatial arrangements of the official audience and also in the construction of the festival itself.

The 800th Anniversary Naadam dramatically and colourfully reflects and enacts Mongolia's development into an independent, democratic nation with a spectacular ceremonial re-enactment of Chinggis Khan's Court on centre stage - displaying pride and identity in Mongolia's ancient traditions, symbols and rituals while also demonstrating its modernity.

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1. INTRODUCTION



Figure 1. The State White Standards (Sulde) entering the Naadam Stadium. July 2006. Photo D. Rhode

“Naadam is related to all aspects of Mongolian life, the culture, the traditions, the religion, and the symbolism. Even though Naadam is a short word, it has a wide meaning. It is related to the history, to the customs, to the costume and all things. To do the research of Naadam is to do the research of all of Mongolian life.”

D. Tumenbayer¹

¹ October 2006, Ulaanbaatar, personal communication

1.1 What is Naadam?

Naadam, or more fully *Eriin Gurvan Naadam*, the ‘Three Games of Men’ is a specifically and distinctively Mongolian festival. It comprises a public ceremony which can be religious, secular, political or social, followed by a performance of the traditional ‘Three Games of Men’, from which the festival derives its name. The words in the previous epigraph from a Mongolian friend who assisted with my fieldwork, underscored for me the central importance that the Naadam rituals and traditions have played and continue to play, in the social, cultural, religious and spiritual world of the Mongolian people.

The Naadam Games are the combination of the three sports of wrestling, archery and horseracing performed either simultaneously or sequentially, according to detailed rites and rules. They are highly stylized and imbued with symbolic meaning congruent with ancient Mongolian nomadic, shamanic and hunting practices. Although the preceding ceremony has changed considerably over the years, reflecting the political and/or religious hegemony of the era, my informants claim that the Naadam Games themselves have changed relatively little in form for hundreds - possibly thousands - of years, despite centuries of foreign domination and economic colonisation. According to popular Mongolian folklore, the Naadam games had been performed for millennia by many of the nomadic tribes of the Central Asian steppe. Wrestling, archery and good horsemanship were integral to the nomadic lifestyle on the steppe and essential for survival in a culture of hunting and almost continuous warfare. According to Sinor (1981) “fighting was a precondition for survival”, exemplified by the fact that neither the Turkic nor the Mongol languages have vocabulary for *soldier*, *war* or *peace* (1981:135). Fletcher (1986) proposes that even 800 years ago, the distinction between soldier and herdsmen did not exist: ‘The Mongolian culture of the thirteenth century was a warriorist [sic] culture that esteemed heroes the most’ (Fletcher 1985:14).

In ancient times, the Naadam games were both a reflection and an embodiment of an everyday life lived in closeness to nature in both a practical and spiritual sense. While utilising and perfecting hunting and warfare skills essential for life on the steppe, the Games were closely associated with religion and mysticism; the innate vulnerability of the nomadic lifestyle to the ever-present threat of natural disaster or warfare, necessitated frequent ceremonies to appease the deities. According to Kabzinska Stawarz, the games were also associated with sacrificial ceremonies related to ancestor worship (1991:82).

Since the formation of the 'Great Mongolian Nation' (*Ikh Mongol Ulus*) in the thirteenth century, the Three Games have been performed after important state occasions and military victories, while continuing to be a significant part of social and religious gatherings at a local level. They provided a vital social and military function, as successful contestants were recruited as retainers of princes and nobles (ibid).

During the seventeenth century, when Buddhism was formally introduced into Mongolia by the ruling elite, the first *danshig* (tribute) Naadam was performed at the inauguration ceremony of the first Living Buddha (Croner 2006:3). This utilisation of an existing popular festival by the elite, in a ceremony to introduce a new form of religious governance, demonstrates how the use of performance can successfully be utilised to gain public acceptance and display a new social order (Connerton 1989:50).

The Naadam festival became codified into a political and religious ceremony at the end of the seventeenth century. This ceremony was orchestrated to reflect a changed political era after the eastern (Khalka) Mongols submitted to Manchu suzerainty. While the three games continued to be a component of religious and secular festivals throughout Mongolia, this Naadam ceremony of the Khalka Mongols became a tribute ceremony honouring their spiritual leader (the Living Buddha or *Khutuktu*); it was performed every three years in the capital city *Ikh Khuree* (now known as

Ulaanbaatar). This Naadam became a unifying force that brought the leaders of all the Khalka tribes together on a triennial basis, providing a ‘unique arena for imagining and enacting a Khalka-wide unity’ (Petrie 2006). The unity of the Khalka khanates was later to be paramount in the construction of the first independent government of Mongolia in the twentieth century.

The ceremonial rituals in this *danshig* Naadam, which incorporated some Chinese/Manchu rituals and protocols, were later reconfigured to reflect a Mongolia-wide unity in the early twentieth century, and became the basis of the National Day Naadam ceremony today. This thesis will demonstrate how this ‘unique arena’ was used as a public performance to display the political and social order of the ruling elite in the early 20th century, and also as an instrument of its construction.

When the Qing dynasty fell in 1911, Mongolia declared independence from China, declaring that they had been subject only to Manchu subordination. The Living Buddha (*Khutuktu*) was elevated to Holy King (*Bogd Khan*) and a theocratic government was established under a combined secular and Lamaist government. The *danshig* Naadam ceremony provided an important public platform by which to convey the new order of governance to the people, by the substitution and reconfiguration of elements of the ceremony. Most importantly, these changes and substitutions made to the spatial order, such as the replacement of the Chinese Emperor’s representatives with the newly installed Bogd Khan and Government ministers (Petrie 2006), were carried out according to the social and political worldview of the Mongol people.

Less than two decades ago, a democratic government was elected and the Mongolian people became free of foreign influence or suzerainty for the first time since the seventeenth century, and as a consequence is in the process of ‘redefining’ its national identity. The 800th Anniversary Naadam was the platform on which this identity was visibly and publicly performed by drawing on an ancient identity of

former greatness, and incorporating the time-honoured rituals and symbols of the traditional Naadam Games.

In 2006, the Great National Naadam Festival celebrated the 800th Anniversary of the founding of the Great Mongol State, when Chinggis Khan² united the warring tribes of the Central Asian steppe to found the largest contiguous Empire the world has ever known. Although this vast Empire lasted less than one hundred and fifty years, its legend of historic greatness is synonymous with the identity of Mongolians today.

In the twenty-first century, the Naadam Festival has become synonymous with 'Mongolia'. Naadam is marketed as a national symbol of Mongolia as a central tourist attraction and an international marker of Mongolian cultural traditions. The Naadam Festival remains a relevant and vibrant symbol of Mongolian identity, both individually and collectively, and generates a cherished cultural link that binds the Mongol people around the globe.

1.2 The National Naadam

The Great State Naadam (*Ikh Mongol Ulsyn Naadam*) is celebrated annually on 11th and 12th July and takes place in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar, under the patronage of the President of Mongolia. The National Naadam Festival has now become a Ceremony of State, with highly regulated spatial and temporal dimensions. It is emblematic of Mongolian independence, sovereignty and national identity and is the official occasion on which the State of Mongolia is celebrated.

Across the nation the twenty-one provinces (*aimags*) and over two hundred districts (*soum*) are required by law to hold a National Naadam festival each year; these

² Although the popular spelling of this name in English is Genghis Khan, Mongolians consider this to be incorrect. It is the result of successive translations from spoken Mongolian to written Persian, and then to English: as there was no 'ch' sound in Persian they used 'j', which became Anglicised to 'g', with consequent mispronunciation. In this paper I shall use the Mongolian-preferred spelling, which more accurately reflects the Mongolian pronunciation.

Naadams are formal civic occasions organized under the auspices of the Grand National Organizing Committee and are presided over by the Mayor or City Governors of each area. By decreeing that all National Naadam festivals are held at the same time and to the same formula throughout the country, local communities are tied to the wider society in celebrating the National Day and honouring the Mongolian State in the performance of Naadam³.

The ‘modern’ National Naadam Festival was adopted (and adapted) in 1924 as Mongolia’s National Day, to celebrate liberation and independence from Chinese suzerainty. In 2006 it became the focus for reaffirming links with the former glory of Chinggis Khan and the Foundation of the State in the thirteenth century.

Since the ‘democratic revolution’ of 1991, when the government of the country was returned to Mongolian jurisdiction, the focus of the National Naadam has increasingly recognised, and restored, Chinggis Khan as a ‘founding father’ and national symbol. The National Naadam in 2006 was designated the ‘800th Anniversary National Naadam’ to celebrate the eighth centenary of the Mongolian State; the emotive re-enactment of the Chinggis Khan era with pageantry, dance, equine displays and iconography recalled much history and drama that was both restored and ‘re-invented’ to bring the image of Chinggis Khan into the twenty-first century (Hobsbawm 1983).

1.3 Purpose of Research

The purpose of my research is to explore the relationship between the performance of Naadam and the construction and reconstruction of national identity, using an historical perspective of Naadam as a central factor in cultural representation and reproduction. In this thesis I will trace the evolution of an ancient hunting and worship festival on the Central Asian steppe, into Mongolia’s Great State Naadam

³There is some flexibility in the date and place to take into consideration the economic and ecological conditions of the rural areas; this is decided by the provincial governors or civic mayor. However, even if the Naadam games are held on another date, July 11, 12 and 13 remain a National Holiday.

Festival as a National Day celebration and marker of Mongolia's 800th Anniversary portraying pride in a modern, democratic and independent Mongolia.

My decision to focus on the Naadam Festival emanated from my interest in the question of what had created common bonds for the Mongolian people and held the Mongol nation together over time. How had common cultural traditions endured for eight centuries in a land that was nomadic, very sparsely populated and with relatively limited regional migration patterns 'in an annual cycle of herding movements from one seasonal pasture to the next and then return' (Krader 1963, cited in Moses 1977:113). When and how did the nomadic herders have social interaction? This question subsequently led me to consider how governance had been enacted and understood, and how it affected and influenced a relatively small population of nomadic people in a landmass occupying one and a half million square kilometres. In 2006, there were only two and a half million people in Mongolia, half of whom were still nomadic. This had been considerably lower in previous years - at the turn of the twentieth century the population was estimated to be around 6-700,000 people (Baabar 2005:167).

I was interested in discovering what cultural markers the Mongol people had engaged to construct their sense of nationhood and community (or if they did so at all). I sought to understand how their traditions and rituals had apparently been maintained and preserved for centuries, and how they had been affected by periods of foreign domination. From my initial literature research and from personal observation, it became apparent that the Naadam Festival was a universal celebration enjoyed by all Mongolians; it embodied many uniquely Mongolian rituals and symbols that were shared across the vast land, and its enactment in many varied social, religious and political arenas had spanned the eight-hundred year duration of the Mongolian Nation. To determine whether Naadam was a conduit for the diffusion or construction and enactment of national identity, I sought to discover if there had been any other regular 'national' events that carried traditional elements. I questioned whether Naadam had been integral to the construction and maintenance of a political and personal identity, and if so in what ways, or if Mongolia simply

symbolised or portrayed its national identity *through* the performance of Naadam. Or both? I examined whether the Naadam festivals had been instrumental in state building and the confirmation of political legitimacy.

Many societies recall their history and re-create a commonality of nationhood around battle sites, ancient landmarks and historic buildings, but these physical reminders are not usually part of a nomadic culture – indeed until relatively recently, there was little recorded archaeological evidence of Mongolia’s history. Much of Mongolian cultural history is embedded in the traditions of the Mongolian people themselves, in their music, poetry, oral narratives, clothing, and rituals associated with festivals and performances such as Naadam. By studying Naadam, I hoped to see how the Mongolian people ‘represent themselves to themselves and to others’ through the symbolic representations contained in the festival (Geertz 1983:58/59).

My fieldwork data is centered on the performance of the National Naadam Festival in 2006 and its primacy in the celebrations for the 800th Anniversary of the founding of the Mongolian State. An analysis of this performance is complemented by an examination of Naadam festivals at critical or important times in Mongolia’s social, political and religious history. Naadam festivals have been an essential component in celebratory and commemorative occasions throughout the history of Mongolia. By examining when Naadam has been performed, and under whose auspices the festival has been enacted, I sought to discover the overt and covert reasons for both its performance and maintenance⁴.

This study will reveal how the performance of Naadam has persisted throughout the centuries in Mongolia, carrying meaning in the culturally understood pragmatic

⁴ For example: the investiture of Temujin as Chinggis Khan and the formation of the Great Mongol Nation (*Ikh Mongol Ulus*), the advent of Buddhism and inauguration Zanabazar as the first Living Buddha and spiritual leader of Mongolia, the return of the Khalka tribe to their homeland in Mongolia (and the beginning of Khalka hegemony), the end of Qing suzerainty and the declaration of the Mongolian Peoples Republic

markers of place, position and status demonstrated in spatial symbolism. These pragmatic markers have allowed for substitutions and changes to be made to the ceremony according to political and social circumstances of the time, by combining centuries old Mongolian traditions and newer Buddhist practices, together with adopted Qing (Manchu) customs, and importing them into the political arena. This was achieved by careful choreography of the ceremony with changes in the actors and the actions, but not the stage. My research revealed that the ceremonial aspect of the Naadam festival became over time a public vehicle for communicating to the Mongol people the 'right order of the world'. By using ritual as a collective text to provide 'the official version of the political structure', the Mongolian people were presented with (and by their attendance, invited to confirm) changes in political power relations through the public performance of Naadam (Connerton 1989:50).

I argue that the performance of Naadam has also been instrumental in marking the boundary of a unique national identity in Mongolian communities around the world, and also as a point of difference from immediate neighbours. Naadam is a time for Mongolian people – at home and abroad - to revisit their nomadic history and origins and to perform and honour their cultural unity; there is an important connection between the Naadam games and the imagined nomadic landscape. The symbolic importance of the Naadam Games to national identity is manifest in its key use on civic, social and increasingly, tourist occasions; a ceremony without the Games would not have the same authority - it would not *mean* the same - it would not be recognised and legitimated as specifically Mongolian. As there has always been some type of ceremony preceding the Games, be it a spirit worship ritual, military victory ceremony or an inauguration, it appears feasible that the Games are performed as a celebration in validation or confirmation of an event. To test this hypothesis I examine some historical applications of sports and games in festival and celebratory events in other cultures.

By using anthropological concepts to analyse the cultural and religious components of games, sport and play, I will attempt to show how the Naadam Games have had socio-religious importance in the lives of Mongolian people for centuries, evolving

from simple hunting rituals to modern – but still ritualistic – competition. I hope to shed light on why the Games have been perpetuated and changed relatively little over the years, and to discover why they continue to hold intrinsic cultural importance and relevance. I explore the concept of Naadam as a ‘festival of happiness’ and the correlation of sport and celebrations of joy in a secular and spiritual context. By investigating how, why, when and where Naadam was practiced and performed, what has remained and what has been discarded, I also hope to demonstrate that the Naadam Festival has, throughout the centuries, been a significant and contributing factor towards social cohesiveness and the generation and regeneration of a distinct and unique Mongolian national identity, or ‘what it means to be Mongolian’. To my knowledge, these concepts have not previously been brought together to analyse Naadam and its central importance in the cultural (also political and economic) world of the Mongolian people. It is hoped that this thesis will contribute to the body of knowledge on the Naadam Festival as it is celebrated today, situated in its historical perspective.

1.4 Background to Fieldwork

Fabian suggests that it is important for an ethnographer to provide some personal insights into their research interests, to give a deeper understanding into any bias to avoid ‘questionable representations, unless they show their own genesis’ (Fabian 1990: xiv). To this end, I will give a brief background into my interest in Mongolia and my preparation for fieldwork.

My decision to locate my research project in Mongolia is both simple and complex. Since reading a book in childhood, the country and people of Mongolia had held both a fascination and attraction – as much for its remoteness and difference as for its ‘otherworldness’ and a place that seemed impossible to know. When the time came to seek a topic for my Masters thesis, Mongolia was finally becoming open to outsiders; although I knew nothing of the ‘modern’ Mongolia, the fascination was still there and I reasoned that the best way to explore a country was to carry out research on a topic that was universally important to all Mongolians.

In 2005 I undertook an exploratory visit to Mongolia to ascertain if research would indeed be feasible in a country of which I had no practical knowledge, no linguistic competence and no personal contacts. I also needed to determine the availability and willingness of people for interview, the availability of archival material and the accessibility of translators. While in Mongolia I began to realise the central importance of Naadam as a universal festival of celebration that held tremendous significance as a symbol of Mongolian identity. I attended the annual National Naadam Festival in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. This gave me a practical background for my literature research in preparation for my thesis and also for comparative material.

I also attended a short Summer School course at the National University of Mongolia, which incorporated an introductory Mongolian language course and several seminars on Mongolian social studies. At the University I made contact with Dr. Munkh-Erdene, Head of Department of Anthropology, who offered assistance and encouragement for future research; I found that there was a strong interest in promoting research into Mongolia's cultural history, especially from a non-Soviet perspective. To extend my contacts in Mongolia I had also organised via the internet a volunteer job as proof-reader for a national English language newspaper, but was unable to carry this out due to other circumstances. I spent two months travelling around the country independently in a hired jeep (with driver), and was privileged to meet and stay with many nomadic families 'off the tourist track' in isolated settlements, to appreciate not only the nomadic way of life but also to experience both the beauty and harshness of life in the 'countryside' - which is the Mongolian expression for all of Mongolia outside the main cities. Prior to this trip to Mongolia I visited the library of the Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit (MIASU) at Cambridge University and reviewed some Mongolian literature resources that were not available at Canterbury University.

Fieldwork Preparation

Serendipitously, the year 2006 was the 800th Anniversary of the founding of the Mongol State by Chinggis Khan. It was therefore likely to be a time when Mongolians both within and outside the borders of Mongolia would be reflecting on notions of nationalism, national identity, national icons and history, in preparation for Anniversary celebrations throughout the country, and how these ideas would be played out and performed in the public arena.

In the summer of 2006 I spent four months in Mongolia carrying out fieldwork. I spent the majority of my time in Ulaanbaatar, with several long weekend trips to the countryside. I lived in a small guesthouse near the centre of Ulaanbaatar as I had met the manager, Erdene – a young woman in her early thirties – the previous year; she spoke excellent English and was a most valued informant, interpreter and friend throughout my time in Mongolia. She continued to contribute valued assistance in clarifying details by email as I wrote up my thesis.

I again attended the Summer School cultural programme at the National University of Mongolia; the anthropological content had increased from the previous year and a refresher language course was invaluable. However I did not become proficient enough to carry out interviews in Mongolian, so engaged an interpreter for all non-English interviews (which were the majority). I attended the three-day National Naadam Festival held at the Naadam Stadium in Ulaanbaatar. I sat in the stands of ‘local people’ rather than the more comfortable (and expensive) tourist stands. By sitting amongst the local people and witnessing their excitement, joy or disapproval I felt that I obtained greater insight into their experience of the event (Fabian 1990). On the second day I drove with friends to the horse racing venue about 30 kilometres west of the city and again videoed the events and recorded several informal qualitative interviews.

During my four months in Mongolia I was fortunate to be invited to attend many cultural and academic gatherings, which included both Mongolian and overseas presenters and attendees. These included: the Ninth International Conference of Mongolists, the first Convention of World Mongols, a Symposium on Nomadism and Shamanism, and a Conference on early Christianity in Mongolia, all of which gave me greater insights and understanding into many different facets of Mongolian life. Some volunteer activities also enabled me to interact with a wide cross-section of the community; I became 'English Editor' for the official magazine of the World Mongols Convention, and I acted as English language proof-reader for the 'New Policy Institute' (NPI) a newly-formed non-government organisation formed to oppose corruption in all aspects of governance and politics. I wrote a few articles for the local newspaper, for which I was given access to their Press archives, and I also became an informal hostel warden in exchange for subsidised accommodation. I also attended some meetings of local community organisations, such as the Mongolian Womens League, the Hash House Harriers, the Rotary Club and social evenings at the Steppe Inn at the British Embassy. All these activities gave me a much wider insight into many aspects of Mongolian life than I would have gathered by fieldwork alone and greatly contributed to my overall understanding of this fascinating country.

Fieldwork Practice

In addition to participant observation of the National Naadam festival, which I recorded on video and still images, I read (or had translated) local newspaper accounts of the event and carried out twenty formal and numerous informal interviews. The interviews were recorded on tape, either in English or with the assistance of an interpreter. The formal interviews were between thirty and forty-five minutes long, the location and method of interview (direct or with an interpreter) depended on the circumstances.

I interviewed Mr. Boldsaikhan, the Chief Executive of Ulaanbaatar City, in his office in the Council Chamber. His office was large and impressive, with two sets of enormous carved wooden doors. He was a very busy man who took numerous calls

on different phones during our interview but remained helpful and enthusiastic throughout; he was one of the many people who were genuinely appreciative that someone from outside his country was interested in his culture. As I was warned his time was limited, I asked my interpreter to carry out the interview with pre-arranged questions. Although this method did not allow me to clarify points at the time, I transcribed the interview later with my interviewer so she could also explain any discrepancies or ambiguities of language.

I interviewed Mr. Tuvshin, a former successful wrestler and now an official of the Mongolian Wrestling Federation who provided me with information on the rules and regulations of the Federation, the selection process and placements of wrestling contests, and also some background to the origins of and the prime importance of Naadam titles to Wrestlers. Another former wrestler, Ganbold, an amateur historian and avid wrestling enthusiast, watched my video tapes of Naadam and gave me invaluable information on the meaning and significance of many of the rituals connected to wrestling contests. The Secretary of the Archery Federation, Ms. Oyen, was interviewed in the office of a colleague, with the assistance of an interpreter. She had been competing in archery since childhood and shared her enthusiasm for her chosen sport, and felt that the inclusion of women into the Naadam games in the Archery section in the 1960s was a tangible indication that Mongolian women “could do anything” and was proud that they now competed alongside men. Three competitive archers, a young man, an older man and middle-aged woman were interviewed between contests at the Naadam stadium during the Naadam games.

My main informant on horseracing, S. Gankhuyag, was a former trainer and a well-known authority and author of books on horses, and the editor of a magazine for the World Mongol Convention on which I also worked, so our interviews were numerous and informal, always with the aid of an interpreter. I interviewed Tseren who rode in Naadam races as a child, and her husband (Saruul), who was a judge when he was a local doctor in the community, in earlier years.

I interviewed one male and two female newspaper journalists (Sartuul, Oyen and Tumen) and a television journalist (Tseren); they were all interviewed in English and were able to provide much background information regarding previous Naadam festivals as well as the 2006 celebration. Two of them became good friends and gave me many insights into the worldview of urban Mongolian women; one in particular was knowledgeable on the ancient rituals of archery. I was assisted in obtaining information about the government regulations of Naadam and history of Mongolia from Dr. Munkh Erdene, and more detailed information about Naadam from Dr. Dulam and Dr. Tumen, anthropologists from the National University of Mongolia. They were interviewed in English in their offices at the University. Dr. Dulam is an authority on Mongolian folklore and was most helpful in explaining the meaning behind many of the rituals and symbols of the origins of Naadam; he was an invaluable source of information on issues of national identity from an 'emic' perspective. Dr. Tumen (physical anthropologist) was able to give background information as to the patterns of nomadic life and knowledge acquired through archaeology. All three were also asked to give their childhood experiences of Naadam as they had all grown up in the countryside. I attended seminars by two historians on cultural identity and history (Dr. Munkh Ochir and Dr. Bira), which gave a broader scope of background information for my thesis.

In addition to the above I carried out twenty informal interviews of approximately twenty minutes duration each. My respondents were from the general public (those not directly involved in the organisation of Naadam or participants in the sports) and from a cross-section of the community, of ages ranging from twenty to sixty-two years. They were educated and now living in the capital city, although some had been raised or lived a number of years in rural areas; they were involved in a variety of types of employment and some were retired. I also carried out many short, informal conversations with members of the Naadam audience. There were no repeat formal interviews, but four respondents who became friends were questioned regularly to clarify points from other interviews, or from observations and video recordings. Local newspapers in Mongolian and English were reviewed, also literature from the National Library of Mongolia.

The people I met were proud of their nomadic culture; they maintained close ties to the countryside and many still had kin who followed a nomadic way of life. Many had a proud though non-specific sense of their history. My respondents were cognizant of the many positive attributes assigned to Chinggis Khan and his descendants: the establishment of the largest Empire known to man, the opening of free passage between East and West by ensuring a safe overland route for trade and travel (by the introduction of the *piazza*, an early form of ‘passport’). He is credited with promoting diplomatic immunity, liberal taxation and a sound administrative management system of governance⁵, and orchestrating the cultural exchange of art, craftsmanship and technology between East and West through previously closed frontiers. He espoused tolerance for all religions and ethnic groups.

Mongolians have a strong sense of what they are not. They are not Chinese and not Russian despite (or perhaps because of) having been under the political influence of both nations and being geographically sandwiched between the two; their traditions are neither specifically Asian nor European, yet contain aspects of both. During the expansion of the Mongolian Empire, the Mongols did not impose their culture on the lands they conquered, but utilised local expertise and regularly brought back artisans and skilled trades people from subjugated nations to be absorbed into the ‘homeland’.

Although Mongolia had been subject to over two hundred years of Chinese suzerainty, apart from some art forms and musical instruments, there are relatively few legacies of Chinese culture; the seventy years of Soviet domination added ballet, opera and theatre to their cultural repertoire. There were changes to meanings and substitutions of symbols in the civic ceremony during the Soviet era, but it appears that most of the ancient rituals and symbols in the performance of the Naadam games

⁵Ambassador Mr. Davaasambuu, 15 March 2006, in his speech for the 800th Anniversary Celebrations at the Mongolian Embassy in London.

(although being shortened in duration) have remained relatively untainted by either regime.

The Mongolian people take immense pride in their unique Naadam festival, which appears to hold deep cultural and emotional significance for most people. Neighbouring nations have some of the Naadam sports as their national sports, for example, horses feature in Afghanistan's national sport *buskazi*, archery is the national sport of Bhutan and wrestling (*sumo*) the national sport of Japan. However, it is the combination of the three sports into one festival, which has been performed in one form or another continuously for over 800 years, that is unique to Mongolia.

1.5 Literature Survey and Analytical Framework

A public performance that carries such collective cultural meaning as Naadam has been described by anthropologists as “a definitional ceremony, a kind of collective autobiography” (Meyerhoff 1978), or “a story people tell themselves about themselves” (Geertz 1973:448). William Blake refers to a cultural performance as “a means by which a group creates its identity by telling a story about itself, in the course of which it brings to life its ‘Definite and Determinate Identity’” (cited in Turner 1990:9).

Naadam, Identity and Performance

The anthropology of performance is an analytical ‘tool’ developed by Victor Turner as he sought to move away from structural paradigms and traditional functionalist methodology to that of process, describing the move as ‘from competence to performance, from the logics of cultural and social systems to the dialectics of socio-cultural process’ (1986:21). Turner argues that it is by observing and participating in a performance that an ethnographer can gain a greater insight into a society, as performance often contains a critical portrayal of the social life in which it is embedded, and affords a view into how that society perceives and portrays its history; performance can explain aspects of a culture that discourse cannot. The

study of performance enables an ethnographer to look at “how people represent themselves to themselves and to others” through symbolic forms (Geertz 1983:58/59). Naadam not only mirrors and reflects Mongolia’s political and religious history, it offers a window on to and helps us understand the cultural and symbolic worldview of the Mongolian people.

I found the experience of participant observation invaluable in gaining first-hand knowledge of a cultural event, not only at the event itself but by the many informal conversations afterwards, and by generally being immersed in the cultural milieu. Dyck (2000) adds that ‘ethnographic writing not only documents the particular but also strives to identify the process by which similarities and differences in relationships, meanings and activities are generated...(requiring attention to)... the immediate and larger geographical, cultural, social, historical, political and economic contexts within which they are located’ (Dyck 2000:18). Fabian (1990) proposes that participant observation puts the ethnographer and ‘subject’ on a more equal basis; they are both sharing, or witnessing the same event. A cultural performance cannot be predicted – you have to be there to fully experience the event, as ‘performance is not what they do and we observe; we are both engaged in it’ (1990:xv). He warns, however, the hazards of judging a performance on ethnocentric criteria, and points out two shortcomings of performance theory: political naiveté and positivity – of treating the performance at face value and failing to dig deeper. He also notes the importance of power relations, not only of the ethnographer but also of the actors in the performance (Fabian 1990:16/17). I found that the informal conversations that followed the performance were essential in gaining a fuller and more complete understanding of the official ‘message’ being conveyed by the organisers and how it was perceived by the Mongolian people themselves.

I draw on Turner’s premise that performance is a society’s art that is lived and in a constant state of process, not a static piece of sculpture or framed artwork in a gallery; the performance of Naadam is indeed a changing form, yet remains within the cultural repertoire of Mongolian culture. In my interviews I seek to understand if the actors and the spectators are reflexive in their connection with Naadam, drawing

on Turner's understanding that performative reflexivity occurs when a society can look at itself and reflect on its norms, values and structures through the performance, "to be able to communicate about the communication system itself" (Hockett cited in Turner 1986:76).

Power, spectacles and bureaucratic logic

Handleman (1998) proposes that the performance of 'modern spectacles' is the medium by which modern states 'show how the world is ordered' under the guise of entertainment and/or competitive events. He argues that a spectacle is pre-planned by the bureaucracy to show the order of society; the event mirrors the bureaucracy's ideals of what society *ought* to be like, and the actors have no agency to challenge this vision. However he does not take into consideration the latent effect of the performance or the reflexive stance which Turner finds to be the most important aspect of a performance. During times of social, political and economic upheaval in Mongolia, the Naadam festival remained a focus for maintaining social cohesion, and visually demonstrated the political 'order of things'. I also draw on Kertzer's argument that ritualised public ceremonies not only communicate a particular version of social order, but are also instrumental in maintaining it, or changing it (Kertzer 1988).

Handleman argues that spectacles are the result of modern bureaucratic societies and are representational, and suggests that rituals are derived from religious ceremonies belonging to traditional societies, which were transformative. The government-sponsored Naadam festival of today is heavily imbued with state power, although it has its evolution in the hunting and worship festivals of the 'ordinary people' (Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991:82). In this thesis I attempt to show how Naadam has evolved from a ritual sacrificial ceremony 'of the people' thousands of years ago, to a bureaucratic spectacle 'for the people' in the hands of the socialist government of Mongolia in 1922. For the seventy years of Soviet influence in the twentieth century, Naadam was both a model for and a reflection of the new society that the communist government imagined for Mongolia. In Chapter Five I illustrate how changes to the

order of governance since 1911 have been visibly demonstrated to the Mongolian people by each new regime in the replacements and substitutions made to the spatial organisation of the official seating at Naadam.

The Mongolian government is, and has been since 1922, centrally involved in the organisation of the Naadam Festival, and has maintained the authority to orchestrate the ritual of the Opening Ceremony. After 1922 the official ceremony gradually reduced the Buddhist or religious component, until prohibition of all religious practice ended with the purges of the 1930s. The communist and idealist changes in social organisation were visibly and practically demonstrated in the compulsory ‘peoples parades’, as the new ‘working class’ publically demonstrated their allegiance to their workplace or collective, and the power of the State was visibly demonstrated by the extensive parades of military hardware. Performance not only enables those in power to portray their version of the order of the world, but to do so dramatically.

Of more importance than its overt social function, according to Handleman, is the examination of the logic of organisation *inside* the public event: ‘If public events are constructs that make order, then the logic of how they are put together is crucial to how they work’ (1998:16). To explore the role of political forces in analysing the Opening Ceremony of Naadam, I draw on David Kertzer’s (1988) ideas on the utilization of ritual performances relating to politics and power, in particular the spatial arrangements of the President and dignitaries in the Presidents Stand at Naadam. Mach (1992) makes a similar point regarding the positioning of dignitaries in the May Day parades in Poland. Kertzer argues that ‘symbols and rites are crucial to politics’ and that power can only be expressed symbolically. He poses the question that if we understand the world through symbolic interpretation, how is change enacted? In the Naadam festivals during the years 1912 to 1924 when Mongolia underwent three significant changes in political and religious hegemony, this was overtly and covertly enacted to the Mongolian people in the official seating positioning in the Naadam marquee of the Monarchy, nobles, religious leaders and government officials. Turner proposes that this is how a performance is

transformative, and demonstrates how change can occur by the substitution and replacement of actors while the 'ritual' remains the same (Turner 1986:75).

Political legitimization through performance

Historically, the performance of Naadam as a 'legitimizing influence' is evidenced by its implementation in a formal, ritualised drama by the religious hierarchy and political regimes over the centuries. At times of regime change and times of transition, its performance can be understood as an illocutionary act (Rappaport 1999:450); the pragmatic staging of the ceremony serves to affirm and legitimate the new regime as 'a model of the Mongolian notion of the right order of socio-political power relations' (Petrie 2006).

A change in political regime, especially one imposed from another cultural tradition, is often enacted through an existing ceremony or festival to establish a new political agenda, with both subtle or overt omissions and substitutions, sometimes employing 'invented tradition'. Invented tradition is understood as a set of ritual or symbolic practices, governed by rules which seek to inspire certain values and behaviour, with an implied continuity with the past (Coser in Hobsbawm 1983:1). I draw on comparisons with two examples of newly independent states (or a change of regime) that have drawn on ancient ritual performances, which symbolically represent a (perceived) historical national unity, to engender solidarity and unanimity in the present. For example, Cronin (2003) illustrates the point whereby the newly independent Government of Ireland drew on an ancient festival to unite the people in 1922, when they proposed an annual re-enactment of the Aonach Tailteann, an ancient Games Festival established in 1169, demonstrating that all citizens of Ireland had a shared history. After the invasion of Poland, the new Soviet regime 'reworked' the traditional May Day celebrations to introduce and legitimate communist ideology, by using substitutions and omissions to 'reframe' the new social paradigm onto an existing event. When the communist regime was overthrown, another re-working took place (Mach 1992).

Naadam first became a ceremony of State in 1912 when it was utilised to help facilitate nation-building by the new ‘independent’ government, to unite the semi-autonomous provinces (and suzerain of China) into an independent autonomous State. It was during the Naadam festival that the new theocratic monarchy was inaugurated (or ‘elevated’) and for the first time a united Mongolian nation could be imagined. A cultural performance not only presents an image of how things are, but shows also how they could be, described by Turner (1985:20) as the ‘subjunctive’ nature of ritual performance. This is achieved by the meta-communication of symbols, by which people reflect on their circumstances, and consider alternatives.

However, not only is the Naadam Festival an instrument of legitimation for a change of political regime, the ceremonial performance is *made uniquely Mongolian* by the public contests of the Three Games. Nyambuu (1990)⁶ claims that key episodes in Mongolian epics ‘illustrated the tendency to characterise political legitimacy and moral right in terms of prowess in archery, wrestling and horseracing’ (Nyambuu cited in Petrie 2006:15). Christopher Kaplonski, a noted Mongolian historian, notes that the location of many Mongolian traditions and rituals can be traced to myths and legends; he cites Dorson (1966) who proposes that ‘the promoters of a national self-consciousness, whether in a republic, a monarchy, an empire, or a socialist state, clearly appear to have recognized the value and utility of folklore’ (Kaplonski 1975).

Mongolian folklore is steeped in references to inherent spiritual qualities contained in the rituals enacted during the horse racing, archery and wrestling contests. By drawing on this mythology, combined with theories of the anthropology of play, I examine the genesis of the Three Games and their importance in the Mongolian cultural repertoire. I will attempt to explain why the Naadam Games hold deep, intrinsic meaning for the Mongolian people and have become such a central and fundamental symbol of Mongolian identity.

⁶ Nyambuu was an historian who wrote an account of the Naadam festival in the early years of the twentieth century.

As a result of the dual performances of Ceremony and Games, I examine and analyse the Naadam Festival in two parts as they have different performative functions. In Chapter Two I discuss the Official Opening ceremony in which a political, religious or social worldview is enacted and portrayed, and in the following Chapter I describe and analyse the Three Games themselves - their social, spiritual and cultural importance and the symbolic significance of their rituals.

National Identity and Nationbuilding

Today Naadam demonstrates a unique cultural heritage in an increasingly homogenized world, as Mongolians both at home and abroad redefine their sense of identity after many centuries of foreign rule. I draw on Cohen's theories on the revitalisation of myth as I examine the rituals of Naadam and their boundary-marking applications. He argues that a boundary is important as it distinguishes the uniqueness of a group, tribe or nation; it 'encapsulates the identity of the community and...is called into being by the exigencies of social interaction' (Cohen 1985:12). Kertzer uses an evolutionary analogy to propose that all societies contain symbolic diversity and are therefore open to interpretation, but concurs with Coser that our symbol systems allow for individual interpretation which must be negotiated within the parameters of the cultural boundaries (Kertzer 1988:175).

The Naadam festival has for centuries brought people together in a common time and place to share in a collective and culturally understood festival. Today, as a National Day celebration, Naadam facilitates a communal bonding of citizens as they are reminded not only of their shared nomadic traditions, but also of a great and glorious past as descendents of Chinggis Khan. I examine the traditions in Naadam that have been maintained as well as those omitted, and draw on Connerton's (1989) assertion that modern nations invent rituals and organize ceremonies which claim continuity with memories of the past. In the case of National Day ceremonies in particular, a foundation myth is often resurrected or re-introduced to engender a sense of nationhood (such as Bastille Day) (1989:51). I suggest that a similar scenario is

being evoked in the performance enacting the era of Chinggis Khan and the ‘glorious past’ of the Great Mongol Empire.

The collective gathering of people at Naadam to take part in a ceremony that reinforces a common heritage, followed by Games that are imbued with ancient rituals, makes it important, memorable and meaningful. I propose that it is because of the enduring nature of Naadam that it has been appropriated and reconfigured, whilst remaining within its existing parameters as a publicly recognised celebratory event, to assist in efforts at nation-building, defining national identity and promoting national unity.

But how does Naadam portray the Mongolian national identity today? I propose that the ritualistic aspects of the Three Games enable Mongolians to connect to their nomadic past. The nomadic identity has traditionally been one of the strongest identifying symbols of what it means to be Mongolian (Enkhuvshin 2006). Despite the urban lifestyle of several of my informants, many of them expressed their love for the openness of the countryside and a closeness to nature, their nomadic heritage and its spiritual traditions related to the land, which was for them a defining point of difference from other nations, and particularly their neighbours. King suggests that the inclusion of sports events amplifies the significance of the occasion: “Sport is sociologically important to nationalism because it constitutes a charged interaction ritual out of which imagined national communities arise” (King 2006:251).

The Games of Naadam and the Anthropology of Play

In looking at the nature of the Three Games, I draw on some anthropological theories of the origins of games and play and their historic role in ancient festivals as a means of communication with the spiritual world, and I discuss some theories of the origin of games related to concepts of work, religion and human nature. Carl Deim argues that games originated from religious or spiritual festivals from the need to appease deities, as “all physical exercises were originally cultic” (cited in Carter and Kruger

1990:136), while Sansone (1988) suggests that the origin of sport can be explained using ethnological theories regarding human behaviour and ritual. He finds that sport and games today are a progression through the ages and although changed in meaning but not form they relate to the ancient function of games as “the ritual sacrifice of human energy”. However their ritualized performance indicates that many are still heavily imbued with intrinsic cultural and spiritual meaning (Hardy 1990:46).

The role of ‘play’ in the Naadam games is an important aspect of the performance; indeed one meaning of the etymology of ‘naadam’ is *naad*, meaning ‘to play’, (it can also mean ‘joy’ or ‘celebration’). Although the Games are seriously competitive for the top contestants, Naadam can also be understood as ‘play’ (or entertainment) for the spectators. For many of the performers the act of participation in Naadam is paramount even when there is no expectation of winning, as the act of participation in Naadam as a contestant carries considerable prestige⁷.

Unity and Boundary Marking

The Naadam festival performed throughout the country on July 11th as Mongolia’s National Day, utilising historic rituals and symbols in the formal Opening Ceremony and the Three Games (which is also broadcast live on public television from Ulaanbaatar), is a move by the Government to ensure that all Mongolians, regardless of economic status, tribal affinity or lifestyle (urban or nomadic), are able to experience the occasion as inclusive. As ritual allows for individual symbolic interpretation, there may be diverse interpretations of the symbols employed; however as they are all contained within the Mongolian cultural repertoire, they are still ‘owned’ and recognised as specifically Mongolian. In arguing this I draw on the ideas of Anthony Cohen (1985), who finds that cultural codes or symbols in social communication allow for some personal agency, as they ‘do not tell us what they mean, but give us the capacity to make meaning’. In other words, although everyone

⁷ Erdene, August 2006, Ulaanbaatar, personal communication.

is seeing and experiencing the same event, they do not necessarily attach an identical meaning to the performance; however, even though their own subjectivity might attach different meanings, they remain within the broad cultural parameters of the society. It is the malleability of symbols that allow individuals to ‘experience and express their attachment to a society without compromising their individuality’ (Cohen 1985:18). Kertzer proposes that rituals work as they engender solidarity, as members of society participate emotionally and practically in familiar and shared rites, which Kertzer refers to as ‘social dependence’. It is what we do, not how we think that is important in political ritual, as ‘beliefs are privately held and in some sense unknowable, while rituals provide public statements of acceptance of a group’s position (Kertzer 1988:68).

Cohen proposes that it is the *sharing of symbols* that creates unity, and community. “It continuously *transforms the reality of difference to the appearance of similarity* with such efficacy that people can still invest the ‘community’ with ideological integrity (my emphasis). It unites them in their opposition, both to each other and to those outside. It thereby constitutes, and gives reality to, the community’s boundaries (Cohen 1985:21). Using the concept of performative reflexivity I examine Turner’s ideas of liminality and *communitas* and the notions of community in boundary marking (Turner 1990:9).

Mongolian Literature on Naadam

My research on Mongolian literature covers the previous 799 years of Mongolia’s history, and briefly into Mongolia’s pre-history and the Central Asian Steppe culture, from which the Naadam festival originated. Literature references to Naadam prior to the establishment of the Mongolian State in 1206 are limited. According to Petrie (2006), Nyambuu refers to evidence of ‘games celebrations’ that were cited in ancient epics of the Hsiung-nu era (3rd century BCE), in which expertise in archery, wrestling and horseracing ‘conveyed political legitimacy and moral right’ (Nyambuu 1990a:17 cited in Petrie 2006).

As the Mongol tribes did not have a written language until after the formation of the Mongol state, there are no indigenous accounts of Mongolian cultural history prior to the thirteenth century. As his Empire increased, Chinggis Khan saw the need for a written language in order to disseminate laws and regulations throughout the land; he instructed that the language be encoded by Uighur scholars in the Mongol court using the Uighur script⁸. As Naadam was at this time a local festival of the steppe people, it is unlikely that either Chinese or Persian historians would have mentioned it in official chronicles, unless there was historical importance attached. The earliest reference to Naadam that I have discovered is by a Chinese chronicler during the Kitan period:

It is recorded in the ancient scripture that the ritual ‘singing the praises of wrestlers titles’ has been held in 1123, the year of black rabbit at the Chin Mountain Naadam. The Naadam was organized during the gathering of all the Tribal Leaders of Mongolian provinces announced by Elyui Dash the general commander “dganjin” of Kidan state (Baasandorj cited in Damdin 1966).

The most significant and important Mongolian chronicle of the events of the thirteenth century was completed in 1240⁹, “in the seventh month of the Year of the Rat, for the meeting of the Great Imperial Diet” (Heissig 1966:18). Entitled *The Secret History of the Mongols*¹⁰, subtitled *The Origin of Chinggis Khan*, it is a

⁸ The Mongolian language belongs to the Altaic language group. The writing system adopted was the Uighur alphabet, a right-to-left, top-down vertical script which was used to write other Altaic languages related to Mongolian, like Uighur and Manchu. Uighur had been acquired from the Sogdians, who had in turn taken it from the Aramaeans (Heissig 1966:36/7).

⁹ Although many sources cite this date, it has been disputed.

¹⁰ The original work has been lost, but a Chinese translation of the manuscript was discovered in Peking (now Beijing) in the nineteenth century under the name of Yuan Ch’ao Pi Shih. It was found by members of the Russian Orthodox Church who were in Peking to set up a mission to convert the Chinese to Christianity; one of their tasks was to translate Chinese historical documents. Translating the *Secret History* was especially challenging as it had originally been written in Uighur script, and the version that was discovered had been transcribed phonetically into Chinese, using Chinese characters but not into a known (nineteenth century) Chinese language. Archimandrite Palladius translated one document in 1866, and another in 1872. Palladius died before he could complete the translation, which was finally published many years later by A. Pozdneev (Oestmoen 2009).

chronicle of the life of Chinggis Khan and his descendents¹¹. Due to difficulties and inconsistencies in translation, it is not conclusive but appears to contain references to games and festivities in Section 131-2, although the word 'Naadam' is not used.

During and after the thirteenth century there were occasional references to 'the three games' from travellers, geographers and historians, though more often on the rules and techniques of the games, rather than anthropological analysis (Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991). There is little direct information about Naadam from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as few indigenous documents remain due to continual conflict and internal unrest. During this period, the Mongol people were ruled by independent Khans, so there was little interest in recording history (Bira 2002). Mongolian literary scholarship was renewed in the seventeenth century after the introduction of Buddhism into Mongolia, which gave rise to 'the genre of aristocratic-ecclesiastical chronicles', which flourished until the nineteenth century (Akiner 1991:25).

As the country became more settled under Manchu rule towards the end of the seventeenth century, there was a resurgence of interest in recording and preserving history¹². Chinggis Khan is a central figure in these chronicles as they recorded the genealogical and ideological basis to provide legitimacy to the ruling class (Moses and Halcovic 1985). There is also a rich legacy of Mongolian poetry, mostly oral epics, which is commensurate with a nomadic lifestyle. Oral narration is still an important art form in Mongolia and can be witnessed at Naadam; before the commencement of a contest, wrestlers are introduced to the public with a long recitation of their past performances and victories. Oral narrative is also important in

¹¹ So named because it was considered so sacred it was kept secret from anyone not connected to the Royal family. Ancient Chinese records were also considered sacred as they were written to record events for the gods, not for historical purposes for the people, so were often lacking in chronological accuracy (Le Goff:1977) This perhaps also explains inconsistencies in the *Secret History*.

¹² There were four important Mongolian documents written in the seventeenth century: Altan Tobci Anonymous, Erdeni-yin Tobci 'Precious Summary' (Sangang Sechen), Altan Tobci Nova (Lubsan Dandzan) and Yeke Sira Tuji.

proclaiming the lineage and the virtues of a successful horse after the horse races at Naadam (Akiner 1991:26).

I am aware of some literature resources by Mongolian and Russian authors that I have not been able to access due to my language limitations. However, in recent decades three English-language publications have become available with research analysis of specific aspects regarding Naadam: Kabzinska Stawarz (1991) has provided an invaluable source of information in her research on *Games of Mongolian Shepherds*, where she asserts that games are linked to magic and the spiritual world. Carole Pegg gained many useful insights into the performative aspects of the Games in her ethnomusicology research into Mongolian music; she found the study of Naadam gave insights into performance aspects "...that go beyond the actions of a game. They all involve poetical recitations, songs and ritual use of the body" (Pegg 2001:214). A recently completed PhD Dissertation by Katherine Petrie, the *Transformation and Persistence in the Performance of the Ikh Bayar Naadam Ceremony of Mongolia* which focuses on the political appropriation of the Naadam ceremony in the twentieth century, has been an invaluable resource for the translation and interpretation of otherwise unobtainable data, and also for her thorough research and analytical insight.

1.6 Objectives of Thesis

It is my intention in this thesis to show how the Great National Naadam Festival (*Ikh Ulsyn Naadam*), celebrated annually throughout Mongolia as a National Day Celebration, has become a key symbol of Mongolia's national identity and become emblematic of Mongolian identity both at home and for Mongolians around the world. I examine the longevity and continuity of the Naadam Festival throughout the centuries, and suggest that it has been a conduit for the generation and re-generation of cultural, ethnic, political (and later national) identity. I argue that the Naadam festivals, in all their different forms, were occasions when Mongol identity was generated and regenerated, renewed and reinforced, by regular performances that were 'filled and fed by collective memory' (Halbwachs 1992:25).

Naadam has had a leading role in the nation-building processes of the twentieth century, initially in its role as central focus celebrating Mongolia's independent status in 1921, which subsequently became Mongolia's official National Day celebration throughout the nation. Today this uniquely Mongolian cultural event, representing the national 'face' of Mongolia, was proudly presented as the showpiece of the 800th Anniversary Celebrations of the Great Mongolian State in 2006 as a platform for the restoration of Chinggis Khan as 'Father of the Nation'.

I hope to add to the body of knowledge of the cultural and historical aspects of the Naadam Festival by drawing together material from many different sources, supplemented by participant observation and personal interviews, to produce a comprehensive linear analysis of Mongolia's paramount national celebration. To my knowledge, a cultural analysis of the historic progression of the Naadam Festival throughout the eight hundred years of Mongolian nationhood has not been attempted in English, although I fully acknowledge that there may be literature sources in Mongolian or Russian of which I am not aware.

1.7 Chapter Outline

I discuss the Opening Ceremony and the Three Games of the National Naadam separately, as I suggest that they have different performative functions, and different origins. Discussion and analysis of the Three Games deserve particular attention as they are the aspects that make Naadam truly unique, inherently Mongolian, and a cultural marker for Mongolians at home and abroad.

In Chapter Two I give an account of my fieldwork in Ulaanbaatar and participant observation of the National Naadam Festival in 2006, supplemented by historical data and interview analyses. I report on the formal Opening Ceremony and examine the symbolic 'messages' of the re-enactment of the Chinggis Khan era and the cultural entertainment performances on the first day of Naadam, and also the formal

prize giving ceremonies for the wrestlers, archers and horse riders at the Stadium on the third day of the festival. These activities all took place in the Naadam Stadium, attended by the President and official dignitaries and formed the official component of Naadam.

The Three Games are discussed and analysed in Chapter Three which comprises my fieldwork observations from the 2006 Naadam, and I also examine their symbolic significance and spiritual qualities that make them so important to the Mongolian people. I also propose several hypotheses as to why the games have survived over the centuries, with relatively little change, and discuss their relevance as Mongolian cultural symbols today. In order to understand why the Naadam games hold such iconic and symbolic significance for the Mongol people today, it is necessary to explore the sources of these traditions along with a history of the Mongolian people, to determine why they have become so embedded in the Mongolian consciousness. I will provide a linear account of the performance of the Naadam games from their origins in hunting and worship rituals, to adoption into important social, religious and political events in Mongolian history, and into the present era.

To this end, Chapter Four traces the emergence of the Mongol people as a discrete tribal group from among many non-aligned tribes, and the evolution of the skills of hunting and warfare into festival games, which become a distinct ceremonial event at communal gatherings. The origin myths of Mongolian folklore will be examined, with their significance in the formation of the Mongolian national identity today. I trace the development of the Naadam games from shamanic worship rites and briefly describe the many occasions in which the Three Games were performed, demonstrating their ubiquitous nature in Mongolian life. The Naadam Festival as we know it today has its origins in the tribute ceremonies to the Living Buddha after Buddhism was introduced into Mongolia in the sixteenth century; this ceremony continued to be performed triennially during the period of Manchu suzerainty, publically displaying the dual form of governance of church and state.

Chapter Five describes the transformations of Naadam in the twentieth century as changes and substitutions are made to the festival in an effort to legitimate, and make public, the changes in political regime. With Mongolia's first call for independence in 1911 (after the demise of the Qing Empire) the changes in power relations are publicly played out in the pomp and ceremony of the extravagant and grand Naadam festival in the capital city. This independence did not last long, resulting in a brief return to rule by China before the Mongolian army, supported by Soviet military, stormed the capital city and declared independence in 1921. The anniversary of the occasion was marked by a 'Military Naadam' to celebrate independence and to honour the sacrifice of the soldiers in the fight for independence. Two years later a permanent date was fixed and Naadam became Mongolia's 'National Day' and a celebration of Liberation.

The role of Naadam in the creation and maintenance of national identity, nationalism and unity is discussed in Chapter Six. It could be argued that Chinggis Khan established Naadam as a distinctively Mongolian festival as it became a popular form of celebration during the formation of the Mongol Empire at clan meetings, in military victory celebrations and as contests in preparation for war; the rituals and symbols inherent in these festivals began the process of displaying a distinct 'Mongolian identity'. I examine the evolution of the Mongol nation/people as a discrete group as they subjugated the tribes of the Central Asian Steppe, and how in the seventeenth century the eastern Mongols (Khalka tribes) became dominant after the civil war. Khalka customs and traditions became hegemonic in the twentieth century, as the fledgling government of Khalka nobles and princes declared independence. This change of political authority was demonstrated to the people through the public performance of Naadam: the public could see who sat in the honoured positions in the viewing stands. The concept of a National Day was not indigenous to Mongolia but introduced in 1922 by the Soviet-inspired government, to begin the process of nation-building through socialism; national unity was actively encouraged by declaring Naadam a festival to celebrate its independence and liberation from Chinese suzerainty. The government today is 'rebranding' the National Day Naadam Festival as a commemoration of the Foundation of the Mongolian State. I conclude with an examination of the way in which Naadam is

now frequently performed by Mongolians around the world, demonstrating that Naadam is a truly unique and indigenous Mongolia festival, and a performance celebrating 'what it means to be Mongolian'.

2. THE 2006 NATIONAL 800 ANNIVERSARY NAADAM



Figure 2. The Inauguration of Chinggis Khan Statue, Ulaanbaatar, July 2006. D. Rhode

The National 800th Anniversary Naadam Festival was celebrated throughout Mongolia, as part of a three-day national holiday. As a National Day ceremony, every city, town, village and hamlet throughout the State of Mongolia stages a Naadam Festival on 11th July, when the national anthem is sung, respects are paid to the national flag, formal speeches are made and contests of the ‘Three Games of Men’ are enacted.

The most important and prestigious Great National Anniversary Naadam was held in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar, and was the focal point of Mongolia’s year-long national celebrations dedicated to the 800th Anniversary of the Mongolian State.

In this Chapter I describe my fieldwork observations of the activities that took place in Ulaanbaatar during the period of the Naadam Festival, beginning with the traditional wreath-laying ceremony on the day before Naadam, and the dedication of

the new Chinggis Khan Statue. I examine the formal component of the Opening Ceremony of Naadam and discuss the cultural and political significance of the official entertainment. I conclude with the ceremonial Prize Giving on the third day of Naadam of the archery, wrestlers and horse riders as these also take place in the stadium; the award ceremony for the horse races is particularly unique incorporating age-old rituals of ‘praise singing’ and anointing the winning horses with *airag*¹³. The description and analysis of the Three Games will be covered in Chapter Three.

The official format of the Opening Ceremony has remained similar in form but undergone substantial changes in meaning since Mongolia realised its full independence after the fall of communism and Soviet control in 1990, demonstrating Kertzer’s argument that ‘...new political systems borrow legitimacy from the old by nurturing the old ritual forms, redirected to new purposes’ (Kertzer 1998:41). Since 1991, the National Naadam Festival has regained or restored many of its cultural symbols from the pre-communist era, most dramatically the ‘return’ of Chinggis Khan. In 2006 the focus of Naadam was reimagined, from its former designation as a celebration of Liberation (from China) it was re-presented to celebrate the ‘Founding of the Nation’ by Chinggis Khan in 1206.

2.1 The 800th Anniversary National Naadam Celebrations

The official start of the celebrations for the 800th Anniversary Naadam Festival began on 10th July 2006, the day before the Naadam Games, with two ceremonies in Sukhbaatar Square, the ceremonial centre of Ulaanbaatar. These two ceremonies, organised by the State and incorporated into the Naadam Celebrations, succeed in combining two commemorations representing the old and new ‘meanings’ given to the Naadam Festival in the twentieth century: a celebration of the People’s Revolution and independence from Chinese rule in 1921, and the more recent commemoration of the ‘Foundation of the Mongolian Nation’ eight hundred years ago, embodied in the imagery of Chinggis Khan.

¹³ A fermented milk product which is discussed more fully later in the chapter.



Figure 3. The Chinggis Khan Statue, Ulaanbaatar. September 2009. D. Rhode

The first celebratory event on July 10 was the dedication of the huge and impressive Chinggis Khan Statue, situated in the new Chinggis Khan Memorial Complex. This Complex was completed in 2006 and was built on to the front of the Parliament Building in central Ulaanbaatar. It replaces the mausoleum of two former national Statesmen, Colonel Sukhbaatar, hero of the revolution and foundation member of the Mongolian Peoples Party in 1921, and Marshall Choibalsan, a former President during the communist era. The mausoleum has now been relocated to a less prominent position in the city. The second ritual enactment was the laying of wreaths in memory of these Statesmen under the statue of Sukhbaatar, honouring the Soviet-Mongolian military history that enabled Mongolia to celebrate its current independence.

The formal dedication of the Chinggis Khan Statue began with a procession of the Honour Guard, carrying the ceremonial State White Standards, or *Tug Sulde*. The Honour Guards, specially selected members of the regular army and mounted on nine white horses, resplendent in new red and blue uniforms with silver helmets, circumnavigated Government House in front of an attentive and appreciative audience. The State White Standards were ceremonially set down in a circle on a

newly erected dais and placed directly in front of the new statue that was still covered by blue cloth, awaiting the formal unveiling. The ceremony was accompanied by the military brass band playing a stirring musical piece written by Jantsannarov, one of Mongolia's most prominent composers. It is a relatively new work written after independence in 1990, and ironically a case of drama being merged with reality in that it was originally written for a Mongolian historical epic movie¹⁴.



Figure 4. The *Sulde* on *dais* in Sukhbaatar Square, Ulaanbaatar. July 2006. D. Rhode

The *Sulde* was formally placed in a circle with the larger standard in the centre. The centre Standard is topped with a trident-like emblem, symbolizing the sun, moon and fire¹⁵. According to the *Secret History of Mongolia*, after the founding of the Mongolian state in 1206, the white *Sulde* was positioned outside the *ger* (round felt tent) of Chinggis Khan. Chinggis Khan had two Standards; the white *sulde* held a protective deity and symbolized peace, and the black *sulde* (comprising five poles and black horsehair pennants) represented war.

¹⁴ The movie is entitled 'Munkh tengeriin huchin dor' (Erdene, Ulaanbaatar September 2009, personal communication)

¹⁵ Bolor, March 2008, Christchurch, NZ, personal communication.

The State White Standards have become symbolic of the political and legal jurisdiction of modern Mongolia, and are ceremonially displayed on three state occasions: the investiture of a new government, the first speech of a new President, and for the National Naadam¹⁶. They were restored to the repertoire of Mongolian national symbols in 1991 and first presented to the public (in a modern context) at the inauguration of the first democratic President and the swearing in of Members of Parliament after the establishment of the new government.

After several speeches by the President and other dignitaries, the statue was unveiled to the vocal appreciation of the large assembled crowd. There had been much speculation that the unveiling would not be able to take place on the auspicious 800th Anniversary as building delays had put the construction of the Chinggis Khan Memorial Complex behind schedule; however in the days preceding the unveiling the scaffolding was quickly disassembled and the unfinished building covered with a temporary facade. The crowd was probably relieved as well as proud of the impressive statue.

Dyck (2000) refers to philosophers Eliade (1952) and Heidigger (1971) who propose that a statue holds great power to promote unity, as “such images bring men together...more effectively and more genuinely than any analytical language” (Eliade 1952:17 cited in Dyck 2000:229). The huge, imposing statue does indeed look over the city square in a commanding and authoritarian manner, yet the fact that he is seated with hands placed on armrests by his side also portrays a manner of paternal composure and benevolence as befitting a ‘Father of the Nation’.

Since Mongolia became a democratic nation in 1991, there has been an increasing portrayal of Chinggis Khan in the country’s cultural repertoire, culminating in the expansive and extensive articulation of his re-elevated position as ‘Father of the Nation’ during the 800th Anniversary National Naadam celebrations. The image of

¹⁶ Itchka, September 2006, Ulaanbaatar. Personal communication.

Chinggis Khan has once again become a 'key symbol' or metaphor for the Mongolian people (Ortner 1973). A metaphor, according to Turner, is 'our means of effecting instantaneous fusion of two separated realms of experience into one illuminating, iconic, encapsulating image' (1974:25). For the Mongolian people, the name and image of Chinggis Khan metaphorically represents pride, goodness, power and success¹⁷; its utilisation is now ubiquitous throughout the country from small consumer goods, bars, restaurants and nightclubs, to large physical structures in Ulaanbaatar. The 'brand name' of Chinggis Khan has been widely used by private companies, tourist related products and local government institutions alike. In the 1990s the airport was renamed Chinggis Khan International Airport, a main north-south thoroughfare from the city centre to the Naadam Stadium was renamed Chinggis Khan Avenue (from Lenin Avenue), the large and prestigious Chinggis Khan hotel built with foreign capital was completed in 2005. However, legislation has now been passed and the name may not be used without authorisation¹⁸, perhaps in an official attempt to prevent its overuse, reducing its respect and prestige. The government appears to be focusing on utilising the image of Chinggis Khan as a symbol for unity and national identity

The public and political recognition and glorification of Chinggis Khan in modern times relates to the search for national identity since Mongolia became free from foreign intervention in 1991. Indeed it is not only the image of the person as a unifying icon, some of the people I interviewed felt that the freedom of *being able* to use the name was a significant representation of Mongolia's independence. Mention of the name Chinggis Khan was forbidden during the Soviet era due to his 'feudal' lifestyle; indeed Marxist ideology reviled him as 'a figure in reactionary history to be utterly deplored' (Heissig 1966) and according to Tsetsenbilig (2001:184) 'his name was forbidden and banished to oblivion' (cited in Kaplonski (2004:3).

¹⁷ Erdene, August 2006, Ulaanbaatar, personal communication

¹⁸ Tsastral, September 2009, Ulaanbaatar, personal communication.

Halbwachs argues that “our conceptions of the past are affected by the mental images we employ to solve present problems, so that collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past in light of the present” (Coser in Halbwachs 1992:34). By drawing on the image of Chinggis Khan as a symbol of national unity, the Government is associating itself with his authority and charisma to promote a collective identity, community and a sense of nationhood. The need for unity and social co-operation has been identified by politicians and also academics as lacking in many aspects of Mongolian society today, and essential for the future social and economic progress of the nation¹⁹.

While most Mongolians are proud of their illustrious ancestor (whose image in Mongolia is starkly different from that in the West) not all Mongolians today agree with the government’s expensive glorification of Chinggis Khan. Some of my informants shared their concerns at the financial cost of the Chinggis Khan memorials around the city, at a time when there were many more urgent practical needs for the municipal and federal government to attend to, such as the poor state of the roads in suburbs and rural areas, and acute unemployment. Two informants, who were Christians, also expressed concern that Chinggis Khan was being made into an idol of worship; indeed I did see some older people visibly moved, with hands in the position of prayer as the huge statue was being unveiled. However this could also have been a sign of respect and awe, and reverence for an ancestor. Man (2005) suggests that the fact that there was much secrecy surrounding Chinggis Khan’s death and burial place ‘explains in large measure his survival in the hearts and minds of the ordinary people’ Man (2005:23).

2.2 The Wreath-laying Ceremony

In the afternoon of 10 July 2006, the President and other dignitaries carried out a wreath-laying ceremony which took place in Sukhbaatar Square in Central

¹⁹ President Enkhbayer, 11 July 2006, Ulaanbaatar, Naadam Opening Ceremony Speech
Professor Enkhuvshin, August 2006, Ulaanbaatar World Mongols Convention

Ulaanbaatar. On this occasion, as with the investiture of the Statue in the morning, the President wore a dark 'western' business suit, not the traditional Mongolian *del* which he wore during the Naadam ceremony (which will be described later in this Chapter). The wreath-laying ceremony commemorates Sukhbaatar - the young soldier who rose to power and fame as a 'resistance fighter' in 1921; he is credited with being instrumental in liberating Mongolia from China, and fighting alongside Soviet soldiers. During the Soviet era, his imagery was a crucial aspect of the Naadam ceremony and symbolic of Mongolian/Russian relations; the early State Naadam Festivals not only celebrated independence but also honoured the military, and the close political association with the Soviet Union. He died young and became a symbol of independence and freedom; he was buried in Altan Olgii cemetery in 1923. However in 1954 his body was moved to a large mausoleum in front of the Government Building in the Central Square (named Sukhbaatar Square in his honour), together with former president Choibalsan. This symbolic move by the Soviet-influenced government worked to foster closer Soviet ties to Mongolia, and to legitimate communism, by publicly honouring the Mongolian 'heroes' who were instrumental in fostering Mongolian-Soviet relations (Bawden 1968:40).

The role of Sukhbaatar in the cultural repertoire of modern Mongolia is gradually being diminished as Chinggis Khan is being restored as the representation of Mongolian identity. The democratic leaders of the nation have been steadily changing the meaning of Mongolia's National Day from that of liberation and independence (from Chinese suzerainty), to the foundation of the Mongolian State by Chinggis Khan. While the achievements of Sukhbaatar and the soldiers who fought for liberation cannot be forgotten, his importance in the contemporary Mongolian worldview is being reduced. In the words of Katherine Petrie (2006) 'Sukhbaatar's achievements are to be recalled, not re-enacted...it is by performing a wreath-laying ceremony that this respect is demonstrated' (2006:286). With the continuing reminder that 'Inner Mongolia' (formerly the southern provinces of Greater Mongolia) is now part of China, it cannot be forgotten that without Russian military and political assistance in the 1920s, Mongolia might not be the independent nation it is today.

2.3 Archery

While the wreath-laying ceremony was taking place, I attended the archery competitions at the Naadam Stadium in the southern part of the city to conduct interviews with the competitors, accompanied by an interpreter. The contests began the day before the official opening of Naadam to allow for all the divisions of archery to be completed during the three-day event, as there were greater than the usual number of entries for this significant anniversary year. Naadam festivals which occur in a year ending with '0' or '5' are auspicious and particularly well supported, as participating in Naadam in an auspicious year is said to bring good fortune and good luck²⁰.



Figure 5. Bolor and author.

My first respondent was Bolor, a young man of 23, a student from Ulaanbaatar who spoke a little English. He was accompanied by his parents; his father had retired from competition but was instrumental in archery becoming his son's chosen sport. Bolor enjoyed the sport as he felt that it upheld an ancient Mongolian tradition and was also challenging – though he acknowledged that there were not

many young people his age competing regularly, which he thought was sad. He enjoyed competing at Naadam as it was the most important archery contest in Mongolia, an opportunity to attend a 'truly Mongolian event' and to wear his formal national dress; he considered it an honour to be part of such an important Mongolian celebration.

My second respondent was Tseren, a woman in her 60s who had been attending Naadam for about 40 years, and won many awards. She was shy and seemed unused to being interviewed, but became enthusiastic as she showed me her large array of

²⁰Erdene, September 2006, Ulaanbaatar, Interview.

different bows, and described the finer points of their differences. She was from Ulaanbaatar. Her husband also competed at Naadam, it seemed that most archers had family members who also competed. Her archery equipment was tailor-made in Ulaanbaatar. She emphasized that the bows are heavy and one needed to be strong to pull the arrow back – but she did not find this a difficulty once trained. Tseren also emphasized that the historical and traditional significance of archery was important for Mongolian people.



My third interviewee of the day was Baatar, a man probably in his 60s who had been competing for many years and came from a province in the northeast. He competed in Naadam festivals closer to home but always tried to come to Ulaanbaatar for the National Naadam contests. He thought that to compete in Naadam was to celebrate ‘being Mongolian’. However when I asked him if he had enjoyed the wrestling or other aspects of Naadam he replied that he had remained in

Figure 6. Baatar at Archery Stadium.

the Archery stadium all day as he was competing in several different classes, so he did not see much of Naadam. As the Archery fraternity seemed close, this did not seem to bother him. It became obvious that Naadam was many things to many people – but most of all a special holiday, and an opportunity to ‘celebrate being Mongolian’.

Suddenly a torrential downpour enveloped the stadium and the archery centre and all competition was curtailed. Having not anticipated this I was unprepared with any warm clothing, and had no choice but to join the crowds jostling for the buses to

return home. The archery competitions began early the next day and ran concurrently with the Opening Ceremony taking place in the Stadium.

2.4 The First Day of Naadam

Naadam is usually held over two days, but the 800th Anniversary Naadam was a prestigious event so included many more contestants in each of the sports; the 2006 event took place over three days - returning Naadam to its earlier format as a multi-day event.

Remembering the long queues the previous year, I arrived at the Naadam Stadium early. A few people were already in line. Even by nine o'clock it was starting to get hot – I shared my umbrella (traditionally used as a sunshade at the Naadam stadium, where all the seats except in the dignitaries stands are uncovered) and began talking to the young woman beside me. She was accompanied by her immediate family and also relatives from the far west of Mongolia. While she was dressed in fashionable western clothes the older women were all dressed in the traditional *del*²¹, a robe-like full length dress, similar in style for both men and women, though different in colour and fabric. Like many educated young Mongolians, she spoke some English. She told me that for her Naadam was a time when as many family members as possible came to Ulaanbaatar for the holiday period, from all parts of Mongolia. They came to the Stadium for the Opening Ceremony, but often watched the Games on television later in the day as they gathered for the family meal.

The wearing of new clothes has traditionally been a feature of the Naadam festival, either in the city or the countryside. The wearing of 'best clothes' is universally symbolic of a festive occasion, and Naadam is also a time for wearing the traditional

²¹ The traditional Mongolian dress, a wrap-around ankle length robe worn by both men and women. The material depends on the circumstances for formal occasions it is made of colourful Chinese silk; the *del* of nomadic herdsman can be leather or canvas.

del as a manifestation of one's 'Mongolianness'. An informant told me that it is becoming increasingly fashionable for young people to wear the national dress at Naadam, but in recent years new styles have been introduced that are close-fitting and tailored, accompanied by high heeled shoes; thus combining modernity and tradition as an expression of national identity (Schein 1999).

There was colourful activity in the stadium central area where the participants in the Opening Ceremony were splendidly enrobed in many varieties of traditional national dress from previous eras. The large number of police officers lining the perimeter of the central stadium was noticeable; the organizers were alert to the need for increased security in light of recent international incidents.



Coca-cola umbrellas were prevalent, as were advertising boards around the perimeter of the stadium, a noticeable marker of a market economy.

Figure 7. Naadam Stadium July 11, 2006. D.Rhode

Before independence, Naadam had been entirely financed by the Central Government and attendance was compulsory. Since independence, attendance is optional, and tickets have to be purchased for entry into the stadium. The (local) price of tickets ranged from (USD) \$3.00 to \$10.00, but was considerably more for the 'tourist stand'. Commercial advertising has become a financial necessity.

People began to fill up the stands, bringing in *khoshuur*, a meat pasty that is a traditional gastronomic addition to attending the Naadam festival. An informant later told me that for many people, *khoshuur* has become symbolic of Naadam and was an essential aspect of the day; when describing a rural Naadam the first question often

asked is “how was the *khoshuur*?”²². They greeted each other with ‘*ta saikhan naadaj bainuu?*’ – “are you celebrating Naadam well?” or “are you having a good Naadam”?

Seating was not allocated, people shuffled along bench seats to make more room until the stands were packed – steps included. Police officers controlled the stands, including some very elegant young policewomen in impossibly high heels, who attempted to organize people into their designated seating area – though when one well-dressed young man clambered over the barrier and completely disregarded the policewoman, there was little she could do except shout to her male colleague – he didn’t hear her and the offender was gone. It transpired that so many people had turned up at the entrance gates (each seating area had a separate entrance gate) the officials had locked some of the gates an hour before start time. The area that the youth had been trying to get to was the southern-end of the stadium, where some of the spectators were also part of the pageantry of the Opening Ceremony – they all had large wooden boards, which they raised above their heads to create a large composite picture, slogan or symbol, opposite the President’s and dignitaries stand. I later heard that many people had been unable to get into the stadium even though they held ‘valid’ tickets. A major scandal arose when it was discovered that many people – locals and tourists alike – had been sold counterfeit tickets.

In the President’s stand, on the opposite side of the stadium to where I was seated, a final dusting of seats was taking place. (This is what it appeared to be from my distance; upon reflection perhaps it was a security check). In the centre of the stadium, all the participants were milling about – warriors, regal ladies, musicians, medieval soldiers. For this special Anniversary Naadam, thousands of people were involved in the Opening Ceremony entertainment; make-up was being finalized, adjustments made to outfits and photographs taken of each other. For the ‘800’ theme of the Anniversary Naadam, there were reportedly 800 children, 800 singers and 800 *morin khuur* players (the traditional ‘horse head’ two-stringed Mongolian

²² Bolor, March 2008, Christchurch, New Zealand, personal communication.

fiddle) involved in the entertainment. Children were milling around in extraordinarily bright outfits.

The Stadium field was encircled by banks of wooden seating, with three covered stands reserved for the President, dignitaries, government officials and (recently) foreign tourists. The position of the official stands at the northern end of the stadium was in keeping with the ‘correct spatial order’ according to the Mongolian cosmic worldview, which is also congruent with the spatial relations inside the *ger*, the traditional round felt-covered dwelling of the Mongolian nomadic people.

The ‘correct spatial order’ is applicable to many aspects of Mongolian life and concerned with concepts of respect and hierarchy, based on the spatial configuration of the *ger*. According to Dr. B. Dulam in a paper entitled ‘Technologies of Respect’, the *ger* is ‘an inseparable part of Mongol culture deeply related to their everyday life’ (Dulam, B 2009:2). He adds that ‘for Mongols everything from concrete to abstract, from living and non-living can be classified as upper or lower...everything has its suitable place or status’ (ibid.). Social roles are also identified by spatial relations along the axes of north-south and east-west. In the *ger* the northern end (opposite the door) is the most prestigious location, the position of the altar or table displaying sacred items. The most important guests sit on the right of the altar; this is the west side as orientation is from the north, facing south. Women and female members of the household family are located on the left of the head of household, on the eastern side of the *ger*. (For spatial arrangements inside the *ger*, see Appendix VIII).

In the Naadam Stadium, the Central Stand houses the President and important members of the Government; the western Stand locates the officials from the *aimags* (provinces) and important officials from key departments and agencies of the government. The eastern Stand houses the Ambassadors, Consulates, the foreign diplomatic corps and non-governmental officials. This seating arrangement replicates the practice of past regimes with respect to the position of foreign persons or officers who recognized the State (Petrie 2006:323) as foreign recognition of the independent

status of Mongolia has always been crucial to the existence of the nation. The addition of 'foreign guests' in the official dignitaries' stand is relatively recent and relates back to the autonomous period in Mongolian political history at the beginning of the twentieth century, when foreign (Russian) officials were included in the official dignitaries area for the first time, in recognition of their political assistance. In 1911, when the Mongolian political and religious elite attempted to declare independence from China, the lack of foreign recognition and international acceptance made it unsustainable, militarily and politically. The Chinese army re-invaded and independence was lost. It was only after the Russian government politically recognized the fledgling autonomous Mongolian state (and offered military assistance), that Mongolian goals of independence became a reality. Mongolia applied for inclusion into the United Nations in 1946, but opposition delayed acceptance. It was not until 1961 that world recognition was finally achieved which assured Mongolia's sovereignty. This important international recognition was explained thus:

Mongolia's membership of the United Nations has been the most viable guarantee of its independence and sovereignty. The use or threat of force against Mongolia and its territorial integrity has become impossible with the United Nations standing behind us²³.

2.5 The Official Opening Ceremony

As the starting time of eleven o'clock neared, the President took his seat in the Central Presidential Stand. On either side of the President were seated the Speaker of the Great Hural (Parliament) and the Prime Minister. Other guests included members of the Great Hural, the Chief Justice of the supreme and constitutional courts and the Naadam Commission.

The seating of dignitaries - as with the positioning of the Stands within the Stadium - also symbolically reflected the spatial arrangements within the *ger*. This has been the same for all Naadams; it is the way Mongolians show and understand hierarchy and status, and is discussed more fully in Chapter Five. These pragmatic markers were

²³http://www.mongolianembassy.us/government_and_policy/mongolia_and_united_nations. Retrieved 20 December 2009.

used to great effect in the 1920s when new forms of governance were established after the revolution; by substituting the seating position of the Buddhist clergy with the military, and the Spiritual Leader with a secular President, the new form of governance and change of power was spatially articulated to the people.

At 11.00am on the morning of July 11, the Great White Standards were welcomed into the stadium to the cheers of the crowd; the soldiers rode in procession in a clockwise direction around the stadium.



Figure 8. Honour Guard carrying the *Sulde* into the Naadam Stadium, July 2006. D. Rhode

This ‘new tradition’ of a Procession of the Great White Standards is another ritual marker that has been restored from a previous era in Mongolia’s history, replacing the pre-1990 communist-inspired Peoples Parade (which is explored more fully in Chapter Five). The Procession reflects a return to the theocratic era (1912 – 1921) when the Honour Guard escorted the Monarch, the Bogd Khan (Holy Leader/King) to the site of the Naadam ceremony at the Great Assembly Hall or Central Yellow Palace at the beginning of the twentieth century (Petrie 2006).

Despite the secular nature of the new democratic state, the sacredness with which the *Sulde* is held and its ritual link to a past ceremony is denoted linguistically. According to Petrie (2006), the verb *zalakh* is a specialised term denoting the ritual act of carrying a deeply respected or spiritual item; the act of transferring the *Sulde* is

called '*lkh tsaagan tugiig zalakh yosloᠯ*', 'honourably carrying the Great White Standards'. This term was also used when referring to the ceremonial travels of the former Living Buddha (*Khutuktu*), which conveys the ritual importance of the act and expresses the spiritual significance of the Great White Standards and their representation of the 'spirit of Mongolia' (Petrie 2006:321),.

The Procession carried the State White Standards from Sukhbaatar Square down Chinggis Khan Avenue and into the Naadam Stadium. Falassi refers to the opening of a ceremony as a 'framing ritual', which he terms the *rite of valorization*, 'that modifies the usual and daily function and meaning of time and space' (1987:5). The *valorization* ritual at Naadam is marked by the entrance into the Stadium of the State White Standards to the accompaniment of a musical piece that is only played on important civic occasions, followed by the ritualistic placing of the Great White Standards on a dais in the Naadam stadium. This ritual marks Naadam as 'a significant event', and converts the Stadium which is also utilized for large gatherings, sporting events and other festivals, to a dedicated 'Naadam space' for the next three days. The *rite of devalorisation* takes place at the end of the festival, symmetrical to the opening one, which demarks the end of the festive activities and a return to the mundane spatial and temporal dimensions of daily life. The formal return of the Great White Standards to the Government building marks the closing of Naadam for the year.

After half-circumnavigating the track inside the stadium in a clockwise direction, to the enthusiastic applause of the crowd, the infantrymen turned and rode in single file onto the stadium field, stopping near the three-tiered green circular dais positioned in front of the President's stand. With stylized and ritualized precision, foot soldiers goose-stepped forward to take the Standards from infantrymen before they dismounted. The infantrymen retrieved the Standards and in ceremonial step proceeded to the dais; the Standards were placed in a circle with one larger standard in the centre. The soldiers' goose-step is a legacy of Russian rule, a formal militarized ritual that appears to be endorsed and embraced by the new democratic regime - perhaps to convey military modernity and discipline. It also exemplifies that

when pragmatic, a new practice can be absorbed and adopted into a different cultural repertoire. It does not detract from the authenticity of the ritual as it has not been a replacement, as (in this case) there would not have been a Mongolian military marching tradition, as soldiers were always on horseback.

The soldiers marched with the right arm swinging high across their chest and the left hand holding the head of the long curved stylized sabre, a reproduction of the military hardware of the medieval period (Storey 1997). The Honour Guards are dressed in specially designed blue and red 'traditional' uniforms and silver helmets, the horses' saddlery comprised silver ornamentation on the mouth-bits and stirrups. Their mounts were nine white horses, followed by twenty-one infantrymen on dark horses.

The white colour of the Standards and the white horses symbolically denotes cleanliness, goodness and purity. The 'power' of the colours red and blue can be traced to the days of Kubilai Khan, when the guards on either side of his personal entourage wore red on one flank and blue on the other (Weatherford 2004:215). Blue and red are significant colours in Mongolia, they are 'strong colours' and the two main colours of the Mongolian State flag. In the spiritual realm are said to represent fire and sky.

The ritual enactment in placing the State White Standards on a dais in the centre of the stadium is very specifically choreographed and evokes the rituals that surrounded the new Mongolian monarch as he was installed on his throne during the Naadam ceremony in 1912 (Petrie 2006:322). The *Sulde* symbolically represents the spirit of Chinggis Khan and is the 'sacred space' around which the wrestlers perform rituals of respect and of triumph. Today, all Mongolians understand what the *Sulde* represents and how it should be regarded, its historic importance and inherent spiritual authority, although for many years it was not part of Mongolia's cultural repertoire. This is an example of what Connerton refers to as 'embodied memory' when

memory is 'recharged' with a ritual performance reconfirming that memory (1989:71).

The reinstatement of the White Standards into Mongolia's cultural repertoire is one of the most visible manifestations of the 'return' of Chinggis Khan into the Mongolian worldview. As a central symbol in the National Naadam festival today, it is now understood to represent not only the spirit of Chinggis Khan, but also his political and legal authority. It takes the central symbolic space in the Naadam Stadium, literally and figuratively replacing the Red Flags of communism. This exemplifies Cohen's interpretation of the 'processural nature' of a performance, that allows for changes in meaning while remaining the same in form (Cohen, A. 1993:4). The form remains within the paradigm of Naadam tradition, yet the meaning has been transferred from reverence for communist state in the form of the red flag, (back to) that of Chinggis Khan, in the symbolic form of the Great White Standards.

The procession and the placing of the State Standards are accompanied by music from the army brass band. This same piece was also played when the Standards were placed before the dedication of the Chinggis Khan statue the previous day; it is now used on almost all occasions when the Honour Guard are present and appears to being gradually absorbed into the repertoire of formal Mongolian state occasions. For rituals to have emotional impact, they must first be made to be symbolically important. Replacing the formal Soviet military music with the stirring music of the Mongolian composer Jantsannarov was a popular move by the government to further restore Naadam to the Mongolian people.

The President's Speech

Following the placement of the White Standards, the President walked from the Central Pavilion into the stadium to make his opening speech, along a wide red

carpet to a round dais, located just to the north of the Sulde, accompanied by aides and four Honour Guards. The dais is covered in white felt; it is traditionally held that the inauguration of Chinggis Khan took place on a white felt carpet so has been ‘reclaimed’ as a ceremonial tradition for the leader of the nation (Ariyasuren and Nyambuu cited in Petrie 2006:325). During the late 20th century, when Petrie carried out her fieldwork, she noted that the carpet the President walked down was also white, presumably reflecting the traditionally honoured white felt; however at both Naadam festivals that I observed the carpet was red, perhaps another ‘Western’ influence reflecting a modern indicator of status.

The clothing worn by the President for the Naadam ceremony was also significant. The re-introduction of traditional Mongolian dress (the *del*) for the President at Naadam occurred in 1991 as part of a government-sponsored initiative to restore ancient Mongolian traditions to Naadam. The President wore a dark business suit for the wreath-laying ceremony preceding the Games, which appears to indicate a demarcation between the serious ceremony of honouring the dead (in a Soviet-inspired commemoration), and the joyous, specifically Mongolian festival of Naadam.

The President’s attire symbolically demonstrated that he was indeed ‘clothed with authority’ and drawing this authority from the past (Kertzer1998:5). He wore a formal, cream-coloured *del* of rich brocade, one of two traditional colours worn by high-level nobility during the Qing era: “the colour of the rich clotted cream produced in autumn”; for the prize-giving ceremony he wore a reddish-gold *del* “the colour of the rising sun” (Ariyasuren and Nyambuu quoted in Petrie 2006:325). His large leather belt was decorated with silver, one of the ‘nine symbols of sovereignty’ A belt is a symbol of authority in Mongolia; an extremely large and ornately decorated one would intensify this representation. He wore traditional high leather

boots (*guta*) and the traditional peaked silk hat; the President displays his ‘right to rule’ in the coral rank button atop the four paneled hat²⁴.

The placement of the White Standards on the dais and that of his own platform, were so positioned that for his speech the President literally spoke to the audience ‘through’ the White Standards. Petrie understands this spatial configuration as demonstrating the high respect and esteem in which the White Standards were held and their spiritual authority ‘embodying the legitimacy of statecraft and unity of the estate’ (Petrie 2006: 326); the President was in effect sanctioning his speech by way of the power of the Standards. The President used the formal tone acquired during the Soviet era, denoting the authority of his position: it is a uniquely mono-tonal vocal pitch and syntax indicating that (in the Mongolian vocal repertoire) it was a formal speech from the person of the President to the people of the Nation.

In his speech, the President reminded the audience that Naadam was a ‘festival of all good things and good thoughts’ and that it was a symbol of peace and development. He advised the Mongolian people that unity of purpose was essential to the progress and development of a strong Mongolia. He used many specifically Mongolian phrases that do not translate easily, but could be interpreted as encouraging a positive view for an economically and politically stronger Mongolia: he likened the situation of Mongolia to a sunrise that will “grow and get brighter”. The sunrise symbolism was also recalled in his greeting to everyone “I wish you all as a sunrise”, a traditional welcome meaning ‘good wishes to you’. He gave his greetings to all visitors and foreigners on this anniversary day of Mongolia, a correlation of the Mongolian tradition of sending greetings to others on one’s own birthday. He placed

5 The colour and rank button on the crown of the hat denotes rank and position (Petrie 2006:325). A coral button denotes authority to rule.

his hand on his heart and declared the 2006 Anniversary Naadam to be formally commenced²⁵.

At the conclusion of the President's speech, the national anthem was sung, led by eight hundred singers with musical accompaniment of eight hundred *morin khuur* (the traditional Mongolian two-stringed fiddle). Many members of the audience had cards on which were the words to the National Anthem, which were also written on the back of the entrance ticket. I was later told that a new national anthem had been written for the 800th Anniversary, and was being used for the first time at this event. I was informed that the previous national anthem was written in the 1960s during the communist era; in 2006 the Anthem reverted to the 1946 version. Many people had their hands on their hearts during the anthem, but an informant advised me that people are reverting to the Mongolian tradition of placing the hands on the area of the liver; a traditional saying roughly translated asserts that "a healthy heart and liver are vital for a long life"²⁶.

As the President returned to his seat in the Central Pavilion, the entertainment component of the Opening Ceremony began with an orchestral rendition of a musical piece called *Tumenii Ekh* (First of Ten Thousand) played by the eight hundred *morin khuur* players but with recorded assistance from the sound system. This song was reportedly written after the Naadam of 1696, in praise of the unexpected and popular win of a horse owned by a poor herder named Bonghor Donid, who won the horserace in this Naadam (Montague 1956:148). During the theocratic years (1911-1921) it was played before the start of the horse races (Nyambuu and Magsarjav *Khurts* cited in Petrie 2006:326). Eventually it became the theme song of the Naadam Festival.

²⁵ The Presidents speech was translated by Bolor (Christchurch, New Zealand March 2008), from the VCD Recording "Mongolian National Festival - Naadam 2006". (No further publishing or recording details available).

²⁶ Bolor, March 2008, Christchurch, New Zealand, personal communication.

2.6 The Official Entertainment

After the official formalities, the centre field came to life with thousands of colourful actors. The applause reached a crescendo as actors representing Chinggis Khan and Borte, his wife, entered the stadium on a huge mobile *ger*, the traditional round felt tent on a large wooden cart, pulled as per tradition by eight large oxen led by four soldiers. It slowly made its way around the stadium, followed by 120 actors resplendent in the brilliantly colourful national costumes of the different tribes of ancient Mongolia. The entourage symbolized the *quriltai* of 1206 when Chinggis Khan was proclaimed 'Grand Khan of all who live in felt tents'. The sight evoked the Golden Era of Mongolia – the time when Chinggis Khan and his descendents controlled an empire that encompassed almost the entire known world in the thirteenth century. Falassi proposes that ritual dramas are often concerned with creation myths: "by means of the drama, the community members are reminded of their Golden Age, the trials and tribulations of their founding fathers in reaching the present location of the community" (1987:5).

The military exploits and positive attributes of Chinggis Khan as a great leader are well embedded in the 'memories' of the Mongolian people, although their history differs from that of the West. In Mongolia he was a visionary leader, a statesman whose military genius conquered the known world and created unity and peace for the Mongol nation. Cohen describes the emblematic use of an historical figure to convey a 'message' or to legitimate a political position, as a means to 'précis much more complicated stories and messages into a mnemonic or shorthand form', or what Turner refers to as a condensation symbol (1986:101/2). A condensation symbol refers to a symbol or symbolic action that concentrates many references of meaning into a single thought or idea; the symbolic significance of Chinggis Khan to Mongolians encompasses a national pride (relating to the former Mongolian Empire), the wisdom and strength of the 'ideal Mongolian man', an intelligent and fearless warrior and brilliant military strategist.

Anthony Cohen proposes that myth confers ‘rightness’ on a course of action by extending to it the sanctity which enshrouds tradition and lore. He refers to a namesake, P.S. Cohen who wrote that myth works as a medium because “... it blocks off the past, making it impervious to the rationalistic scrutiny of historians, lawyers and others who may dispute precedent and historiographical validity” (cited in Cohen 1985:99). There are many versions of the Mongol conquests under Chinggis Khans army, and many myths; the ones which best suit the present circumstances are those which are perpetuated.

The Chinggis Khan entourage circumnavigated the Naadam Stadium, to the delight and cheers of the spectators and also the sixteen-hundred singers and musicians who lined the perimeter of the track. They made the traditional Mongolian welcome of holding out both hands in front of them with palms upturned, making a circular motion with both arms in a clockwise direction while chanting ‘*uukhai*’ three times. This traditional greeting has been explained to me as bringing good luck from the spirit world, encouraging a person on their path through life by literally ‘waving them forward’ and symbolizing the circular nature of life itself²⁷.

After the procession, actors performed a stylized re-enactment of a shamanic fire ceremony, which I suggest was a portrayal of Chinggis Khan’s personal belief system rather than a religious statement from the organizers. The enactment portrayed two lines of men dressed in dark colours, kneeling in the presence of a shaman, followed by a symbolic fire ritual performed by actors swirling in flowing red silk. Chinggis Khan had a close relationship with his shaman, *teb tengrii*, and fire ceremonies were paramount. As freedom of religion has returned to Mongolia, shamans and fire ceremonies are once again becoming an accepted part of spiritual life. “The idea that fire is holy and to be worshipped is one of the oldest religious conceptions of the Mongols”, according to Heissig (1970:69/70); the fire-deity has the functions of fertility and protecting the herds. It was regularly invoked for

²⁷ Itchka, September 2006, Ulaanbaatar, personal communication.

worship rituals connected to marriage and seasonal rituals concerning animals, with an offering-ceremony taking place on one of the last days of the year. Under the influence of Lamaism the fire-deity changed from female to male and was adopted into the Buddhist pantheon as Fire King Miranca (ibid. 70).

In the thirteenth century, Chinggis Khan was closely guided by his shaman who was consulted in all important decision making, such as troop movements and the timing of warfare. After the seventeenth century the Lamas became the important consultants in matters of auspicious timing of events, and played a major role in Naadam celebrations. Today there is no reference to Buddhism at all during Naadam; this aspect of Naadam has not returned since the festival was secularized by the communist government. This appears to be a result of the Government's desire to separate church and state (as the National Naadam now represents a State occasion), rather than a state denial of Buddhism, as in recent years the President has begun to take part in regional Buddhist ceremonies and Naadam games associated with Mountain Worship rituals²⁸. However the inclusion of the symbolic 'spirit deities' which guided Chinggis Khan and his descendents in the rituals surrounding the Nine White Standards, is indicative of the spiritual significance that Naadam has to the Mongolian people.

The shamanic fire ritual was followed by massed dance performances with the 'honoured white scarf' (*khutag*). The *khutag* is a silk scarf that symbolises peace, good luck, good wishes or blessings, depending on the occasion. It is customary to present a *khutag* to begin all ceremonial occasions. When a gift is given or a presentation is made, a *khutag* (usually blue) is folded several times into a long narrow strip; the open side is turned towards the guest, symbolising that their heart is open to him/her; the guest takes the gift with both hands, and with the right hand puts the *khutag* into the left hand, keeping the open side toward the host (Dashdondov 2004:50). The stylised performance utilising the ceremonial scarf thus demonstrated

²⁸ Mongolian National Television, Evening News Broadcast, Ulaanbaatar. August 24, 2006.

a modern use of the traditional custom of welcome, as the dancers welcomed the audience to Naadam.

Throughout these performances, the stand on the south end of the stadium – directly opposite the President – was the source of a continuous display of moving art, slogans and emblems, depicted on large cards held aloft by members of the audience. Unfortunately from my seating position (parallel to them) I was unable to see them during Naadam, but viewed them later on a video recording. The dancing was followed by a dramatic equine display, which perhaps represented a show put on by Sukhbaatar at the ‘Peoples Great Naadam’ in 1922, when the proceedings were opened by a demonstration of trick riding (Montague 1956:149).



According to Montague (1956), Sukhbaatar was a master at horse acrobatics: “...at full gallop he could shoot a target, slash a potato with his sword, stand in the saddle or lift a handkerchief from the ground with his teeth” (1956:149). Some of these techniques were performed in 2006.

Figure 9. Trick Riding, Naadam 2006²⁹.

Trick riding was popular, especially among the military, during the early years of independence after 1911 (Academy of Sciences MPR 1990:260). This performance was hugely popular with the crowds who cheered constantly, the sense of *communitas* amongst the crowds around me was palpable – it was obvious that good horsemanship was much esteemed and enjoyed by the spectators, many of whom were probably excellent riders themselves and understood the intricacies of the movements. It is commonly held that Mongolians are ‘born in the saddle’ and horses

²⁹ Photo: <http://www.photography-fotografia.com/taylor/Naadam/pages/Naadam%20143.htm>

have been an essential part of many myths of Mongolian folk lore. The importance of horses to the Mongolian identity, both personal and political, is covered more fully in Chapter Three

The dancers, performers, martial arts demonstrations and equestrian displays all reflected events in Chinggis Khan's life; they literally and symbolically demonstrated unity and teamwork by using images of the past and positive attributes mentioned in the President's speech. This appeared to be a significant departure from previous years when there had been an emphasis on the diversity and modernity of Mongolia in the Naadam entertainment. In 2005 there had been performances of European opera and Western rock music, young people performing modern dance, and demonstrations of (Western) classical ballet and ballroom dancing. In 2005 (and I understand in most previous years) the military gave an extensive dance and marching performance, which was a common Soviet practice. Naadam had also included modern sports competitions such as cycling and running races.

However, for the 800th Anniversary Naadam, rather than emphasizing Mongolia's ethnic diversity and the adoption of outside influences in the arts and culture of previous years, the 2006 Naadam emphasized a shared common identity and a long history honouring ancient cultural practices. Cohen suggests that "we use our past experiences to render stimuli into a form sufficiently familiar that we can attach some sense to them" (Cohen 1985:99). To reinforce the message of unity and shared identity, the eight hundred *morin khuur* players and long-song singers encapsulated the unique and traditionally distinctive Mongolian musical tradition, the displays of horsemanship evinced a core Mongolian ideal that 'Mongolians are born in the saddle'³⁰, the stylized fire-ceremony recalled a real or mythologized past when Chinggis Khan ruled by 'divine right'³¹, and the choreography of the dance

³⁰ This sentiment was mentioned to me on numerous occasions by many people

³¹ Chinggis Khan believed that he was ordained by divine right to rule (Ronay 1978:137)

³¹ I recognized some of the props (such as holding large gold-coloured *shagai*³¹ models) and some of the dance movements; however the significance of some of the specific sequences I did not fully understand.

movements was steeped in symbolism and tradition³². One stylized movement that I recognized from historical literature was a military technique credited to Chinggis Khan. To make his archers more effective they advanced toward the enemy in straight rows; after the first row had fired their arrow they knelt down to reload. The row behind fired their arrow and then knelt down and the procedure was repeated – the impact of this was a constant hail of arrows and constantly moving targets for their enemy. This technique was mirrored to great effect in the dance display.



Figure 10. Stylized dance at 800th Anniversary Naadam, July 11 2006, Ulaanbaatar.

Although people do not have personal memory of most of their nation's history, Halbwachs suggests that memory can be stimulated and maintained within a group, through participation in commemorative activities and by attending "festive occasions when people gather together to remember in common the deeds and accomplishments of long-departed members of the group" (Coser 1992:24). He argues that while collective memory draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people (ibid.p22), it is individuals who remember, and proposes that our memories are moderated by present-day situations and conditions, so that 'collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present (ibid.p34). However Connerton takes Halbwach's concept of collective memory further by asserting that memories and images of the past are 'conveyed and sustained by (more or less ritual)

performance' (Connerton 1989:4) in bodily practices. He proposes that it is in regularly enacted bodily performances, such as ceremonial festivals and presentations that individuals and groups 'remember' their past.

The Games Begin

When the official opening ceremony was concluded, the first wrestlers came on to the center field, and the first of many rounds began. After watching the preliminary rounds of wrestling, the President left his seat in the Central Pavilion, to walk amongst the people outside the stadium. The area outside the stadium is still considered 'Naadam space' and all day is teeming with crowds of people. Most people were wearing their best clothes and many wore the traditional *del*. Many people nowadays do not go into the Stadium at all, but enjoy the festival atmosphere of the crowds and activities in the area outside the stadium by eating traditional foods at the many stalls, buying souvenirs, watching the archery and *shagai* competitions, meeting with friends and family, playing the occasional game of pool and generally being part of a holiday activity. Going to the fairground with the family in the central 'Children's Park' is also a popular Naadam tradition; it is during Naadam that the fairground opens for the summer holiday period. Many people watched the ceremony and the Games later on TV at home; they felt that they got a better view of the proceedings and did not have to endure the cost and the often oppressive heat of the stadium, as the general stands (unlike those of the officials and elite) were not covered.

The Games contests of archery, wrestling and horseracing, are covered in Chapter Three and will be discussed in relation to their importance in the past and present social context in Mongolia. While the wrestling contests all take place within the Stadium, the Archery competitions are practiced at a dedicated arena outside the stadium and the horse races take place thirty kilometres outside the city. Therefore, I will proceed in this Chapter with a return to the Stadium for the Prize giving which took place at the end of the third day of Naadam.

2.4 Prize giving and closing of Naadam

On the third and final day of Naadam, the prize giving ceremonies took place in the Naadam Stadium, intermingled with the final rounds of wrestling. These awards and titles were all presented by the President, who congratulated the successful contestants as they received their honours from the Presidents stand.

Since 2003, the National Naadam is the only occasion when the highly prestigious National Titles and honours are conferred. Control has been centralized under the auspices of the government (formerly the individual sporting bodies) and these titles are now only bestowed at the State National Naadam, by the President of Mongolia. The National Naadam therefore is essential for the maintenance and defense of National wrestling titles, and the creation of heroes. Titles must be conferred in front of audience and by someone in power to have meaning and authority. Success during times of special anniversary Naadams carry titles that are even more prestigious.

The National Naadam thus has the authority to make National Champions. It is the 'non-discursive dramaturgical and rhetorical levels of performance' (Schiefflin 1985:707) that makes Mongolian National Champions and heroes. It is not only the act of winning the wrestling, archery or horseracing that creates a National Champion, it is because it is performed in the appropriate spatial and temporal location: at the Great National Naadam before the President of Mongolia and the *naadamchin* (spectators). It is in the 'performative utterance' of the President that the authority lies to proclaim a national champion (Austin 1979:238).

Despite recent commercialization and monetary incentives, the honour of a Naadam title remains the goal of most sportspeople in their field. The awarding of titles is complex and based on a compounding system; titles are added to titles, and qualifying epithets are attached; the prestige increases with subsequent wins. I believe that the system was a natural outcome of the constraints of a nomadic society when the entire household had to be packed up and moved several times a year;

material awards such as trophies would have been a burden. The honour of a title was individual, easily transportable and it could never be lost or stolen.

The honour of a Naadam champion is not restricted to the sports arena, but remains with the individual as part of their personal identity throughout their lifetime. They are a source of great pride for Mongolians, and are used outside the Naadam arena as a source of esteem and status. Historically, when the nation was nomadic and largely pre-literate, titles were an important manifestation of honour and prestige, and prestige conveyed power (Baaber 1999:63). “Dynamic power was respected in the nomadic society, and both the terms *bokh* (champion wrestlers) and *mergen* (expert in archery) were used as honourable titles for outstanding men” (Jagchid 1988:53). *Bokh* also means ‘powerful man’ and *mergen* means ‘wise’; *mergen* is now also used as an honourific for women.

The archery competitions are the first to be completed at Naadam, so the archery awards were presented first. As with the other sports, status in archery competition comes not only from winning, but in being repeatedly successful. This prestige is manifest in awarding a title which increases in honour after each successful win: for example, a first-year winner is titled *ulsyn mergen* (state marksman); if he or she wins the second year they are *ulsyn hoshoi mergen* (state two-fold marksman); for a third time they become *ulsyn gots mergen* (state district marksman) for a fourth time *ulsyn garamgai mergen*; for the fifth time *ulsyn dayar duursah mergen* (state glorious marksman), and the final honour or the six-time champion the title *ulsyn darhan mergen* (state absolute marksman).

2.8 Praise-singing

The elaborate prize-giving for the race horses took place before the final wrestling round. The prize-giving ceremony for the horse races is a lengthy procedure as medals, rank and praise are given to the first five horses in each race category; it takes place on the final day of Naadam in the stadium, in front of the President’s

stand. The first five horses, known collectively as the *airag turuii* (*airag* five) are all awarded prizes. (*Airag* is fermented mare's milk. It is imbued with many spiritual properties and used in worship rituals and sacred ceremonies of both Buddhist and shamanic practice).

After reciting praises for the winning horse, the official who sings praise takes a sip of *airag* from the bowl then pours a small amount on the horse's forehead and flank. An official holds the reins of the winning horse, and then each rider holds the reins of the next horse in turn. The bowl of *airag* is passed on to each trainer who anoints his horse and then gives the bowl to the rider; it is then passed to the second placed rider who repeats this process; this procedure continues to the fifth horse.

The 'praise-recitations' of the horse is an ancient ritual. Prior to 1921 there was a separate ritual official for each race; however now there is just one. The praise recitations also used to be considerably longer, when there were lengthy references to feudal aristocracy and religion; there are no longer any references to religion or class (Serruys 1974a:90).

After the praise recitations each group of the five young riders, looking extremely small and smart in matching new shiny outfits, are led up the steps to the Presidential pavilion. They are each in turn held up to the President's height by the trainer; he kisses each child on the cheek and presents them with a large white-covered box (contents unknown). The trainers, horses and riders – carrying their huge boxes – promenade around the stadium track to the applause of the audience.

The winner of the */kh Nas*, the most prestigious race for six-year old horses, is the overall winner of Naadam horse races. The following Praise Recitation (*morinii tsol*) was recorded in 1957:

Racer of the herd of *arat* so-and-so (name of herder)
Of such-and-such *bag* (name of village),
Such-and-such *soum* (town),
Such-and-such *aimag* (province) of the Peoples Republic of
Mongolia!

Pride and beauty of the wide and fruitful earth,
Untold joy of the whole people,
Embodiment of the power of the Great Naadam,
Racer, flying like the wind at the head of ten thousand racers,
Racer, straining on your iron bit,
Racer, straining tirelessly against your silken bridle,
Racer, whose teeth gleam like ivory,
Stretching your supple neck in the gallop,
Pricking your wondrous ears, your black eyes shining,
Racer, with upright body and supple back,
With a mane like a hero's cap,
With a tail like a sultan,

With hooves that beat fast as they flash at the gallop,
Legs that shine in running,
Best of horses of the whole people,
Swift as a running deer,
Horse on everyone's lips,
Racer, who all admire,
Horse with a bit of steel

Racer of strength and fire,
Obliging all at the Naadam to praise you,
Meriting to be remembered at all future Naadams,

Racer, beauty acclaimed by the many-thousand people,
Beautiful in power, flourishing in calm,

Racer bringing joy to your master,
Numbered among the immortal victors,
Horse of indescribable beauty,
Of qualities lovely and uncountable,
Of value and worth immeasurable,
Racer of the Silken Bridle! Pure Chieftain!
Peace! Calm! Joy! Happiness!
Best of ten thousand!
See, all, what a fine horse this is!
(Cited in Montague 1956:154/5)



Figure 11. Young rider finishing Karakorum Naadam August 2006. Photo D. Rhode

Awarding Wrestling Titles and Epithets

Prior to the final round of wrestling, awards were given to the previously successful wrestlers. The awardees then walked around the track inside the stadium and displayed their certificates to the crowd; the youngest wrestler receiving the title of

nachin (winner of first five rounds) was presented with a young horse with which he walked around the stadium.

Wrestling titles are awarded for winning a minimum of five consecutive bouts. The title names have origins in shamanic worship - animals from the mountains and hunting birds associated with power or strength. In Mongolian mythology there are four animals that are considered strong and powerful, these are the mythical Garuda, Lion, Elephant and Tiger. Some of the animals are not indigenous to Mongolia (for example the lion or elephant), although during the days of Kubilai Khan elephants were imported into Mongolia from Southeast Asia for the Khan's court (Weatherhead 2006).

After several successful matches, epithets are added to the wrestlers' titles which are personal descriptions of the style, strength or tenacity of the wrestler. They are given when a wrestler wins a title more than once, it 'gives distinction' to the title. For example, a winner of five consecutive bouts is awarded the title *ulsyn nachin*, but if he is successful the following year he may be called a "growing powerful *ulsyn nachin*", meaning that he is 'up and coming' and destined for greater success. An epithet is also awarded a wrestler who wins more than three rounds during one Naadam. An epithet can also describe the style and character of a wrestler. While there are no formal regulations concerning the descriptive words in the epithet, there is a pool of words customarily used, which consist of sets of compound-adjectives concerned with skill, technique, speed, strength and power.

Certain adjectives are used for each category, for example the epithets used to describe the *nachin* (winner of five rounds) are not the same words used to describe an *arlsan* (winner of nine rounds)³³. The number of epithets increases with further successes of the contestant. For example, Bayanmonke, a nine times Naadam winner, received the epithet "Eye-pleasing Nationally Famous Mighty and Invincible

³³ Erdene, September 2006, Ulaanbaatar, personal communication .

Champion”. There is no limit to the number of epithets a wrestler can be awarded and it is recorded that at the end of the 19th century a wrestler (Dugar) had thirty words of adulation and praise preceding his title of “Great Champion” (Damdin 1996)³⁴.

Prior to the twentieth century, successful wrestlers received small prizes such as blocks of tea, salt, and *aruul* (curds of dried cheese). Milk products (*tsagaan idee* literally ‘white food’) were considered to have magical properties, and gave the wrestler strength. Giving *aruul* to the wrestler returned his strength to him (Kabzinska-Stawartz 1991:88). After the victor first touched his forehead with a piece of *aruul*, he took a small bite and then tossed them the audience, to the *ovoo*, towards the mountains and the sky. In this way, he shared the victory with them, and it is said that this action would give the whole population strength (Humphrey & Onon 1996:151). Young wrestlers in particular tried to taste some of the winner’s *aruul*, believing that it would give them additional strength to win in future. Milk products were important in the exchange of power between the wrestler and the Earth. By throwing the milk products in the direction of the four cardinal points, and toward Heaven, he asked the Earth for help to give him part of its strength, and at the same time he “shared the food with Nature in order to become strong again” (Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991:89).

Although today wrestling prizes can be substantial, the most important prize for a successful wrestler is the same today as it was in the past - national fame, status and popularity. In recent years as individual (financial) wealth in Mongolia has greatly increased, many successful people, and businesses, convert economic capital into cultural or symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1991:372), and backing successful wrestlers

³⁴ “The most famous wrestler of all, Khorloogiin Bayanmunkh, born in 1944, has a collection of titles which runs as following: Pleasure of The Leader, The Bright Remarkable, Chief of The Naadam, The Perfect among Ten Thousand, The Great Flame, The Glory of All, The Clear and Beautiful, The Firm and Loyal, The Everlasting Pleasure, The Outstanding Notable, The Invincibly Powerful, The Really Outstanding, The Truly Faithful, The Happiness of Many, The Famous throughout Country and Sea, The Holy Titan, World Champion of Wrestling, Honoured Master of Mongolian and Soviet Sports, Mongolian Hero of Labour” (Oliver Corff 1992)

or owning good racehorses is becoming increasingly popular. Cultural capital is gained by association with successful sportspeople or sports teams, in the reflected glory. Sporting success is attractive to commercial interests who wish to align their business or product to achievement at the National Naadam.

In the past, wrestlers were sponsored by the political elite. Princes, nobles and also high lamas sponsored wrestlers, the Monarch and also his Queen had their own wrestlers. After the Revolution, wrestlers represented Government Ministries. Today, sponsorship is in the form of commercial endorsement:

The organisers and sponsors of sporting events associate themselves advantageously to bask in reflected honour that may issue from venues of competition. Yet through their control of these events they may also acquire tangible social, ideological, political and economic resources that can be employed both inside and outside the sporting realm (Dyck 2000:30).

Today, a Naadam wrestling champion is still a national hero, which opens up commercial (advertising) opportunities, business contracts and also be an avenue into national politics.

End of Naadam

After the prize giving of all former events is completed, the Final Round of the wrestling contest takes place; it is the highlight of Naadam and the Stadium is packed. It is in the final round of wrestling that the *zashuuls* perform a special ritual to honour the two finalists. The *zashuuls* of wrestlers who lost the previous eight or nine rounds to the finalists, follow the finalists into the ring and stand in a line on either side of the wrestling area. As the two wrestlers walk towards each other to begin the bout, the *zashuuls* behind each wrestler all descend to their knees and touch the ground; it is a sign of respect and signifies ‘that they are giving their strength to the wrestler’. They call the *ukhaii*, the traditional Mongolian method of showing approval; they do not clap their hands but make the cry and make a circular motion with their arms, with upturned palms. The *zashuuls* of the two successful ones then chant or ‘sing’ their wrestlers praise.

The final round of wrestling can last for many hours. There is no official time-limit and the final two protagonists are usually well matched. However, the end of the 2006 Naadam came quickly to the great surprise of the audience, the bout was over in about ten minutes. An excerpt from my field notes captures the last few moments of the contest, and a moment that demonstrated for me the agency that the Mongolian people now have over ‘their’ Games:

The end of the final wrestling contest came abruptly; often the final bout can last a couple of hours, but unexpectedly, after a matter of ten minutes, one wrestler was thrown to the ground. The stadium suddenly erupted – those seated all around me leapt to their feet shouting, yelling, waving their programmes, hats – anything to make themselves more visible. The police, who had been quietly enjoying their ‘ringside’ views of the contest, began to mobilize. I was concerned that they were expecting trouble. From my position in the stand, I couldn’t understand what was happening, and no one around me spoke English. I hear people yelling something about the President, but as yet, cannot understand what they are saying.

I was sitting amongst an enthusiastic wrestling crowd - the excitement was palpable. I later learned that the crowd was entreating the President to use his Presidential authority to award the winner the title *Aarvaaga* ‘Grand Champion’. Usually the title *Aarvaaga* is only awarded to a Naadam finalist who has previously been a Naadam Champion; this year’s winner had been in the semi-final many times but the ultimate victory had previously eluded him. He was a very popular wrestler, and the people wanted him to have the highest honour. The audience also felt that he deserved this title as this Naadam was an Anniversary occasion and there were ten rounds instead of the usual nine.

In the National State Naadam the organizing committee, which holds the records of a wrestler’s previous titles, submits the recommendation for a national title to the President, who will personally confer the title to the wrestler. After some discussion after the crowd quietened down, the spokesman for the President stood to announce that: “By order of the President – the winner will be given the title *Aarvaaga*”. Che

ers erupted from the stands and the police mobilized to protect the wrestler who was still in the centre of the stadium; touching a champion wrestler brought good luck.

The prize-giving ritual was followed by a short speech by the President. The closing ceremony was relatively brief; the Great White Standards were retrieved from the dais in a ritual ceremony in the reverse of their placement, and carried back along Chinggis Khan Avenue in procession and returned to the Parliament Building in the evening.

In the evening of the first day of Naadam, a State Reception is hosted by the President, which is by invitation only and not open to the public. The attendees are the winners of the previous year's Naadam and also members of the government and invited guests. However a public concert is also held in Sukhbaatar Square which is a social occasion enjoyed by all, people 'dress up' and walk around meeting up with friends. The evening ended with a spectacular fireworks display.

2.9 Summary

In this chapter I have recounted the official ceremonial aspects of the 800th Anniversary National Naadam. Over the past three centuries, the Opening Ceremony of Naadam has been the arena in which the political aspirations of the ruling elite have made manifest their agenda to the people, by orchestrating changes and substitutions to the spatial arrangements of the official hierarchy, but played out in the age-old familiar setting of Naadam (Kertzer 1988). Today, the democratic and independent government has been actively restoring the imagery of the Chinggis Khan era in the ceremonial performance, as they change the 'meaning' of the National Day Naadam from that of liberation (from China) in 1922, to the Foundation of the Mongolian State in 1206. The re-elevation of Chinggis Khan is also reinforced by reducing the national status of Sukhbaatar (in holding the wreath laying ceremony the day before Naadam instead of it being part of the official Naadam festivities), to allow for the re-establishment of Chinggis Khan as 'national

warrior' and defender of Mongolia. This demonstrates the processural nature of performance as it retains a familiar and recognizable form, yet changes in the meaning it conveys (Turner 1986:76) and it is also an example of how agency can be enacted while maintaining a 'state spectacle' (Herzfeld 2001). This is also visually demonstrated in the restoration of the State White Standards (*Sulde*) as the place of honour around which the wrestlers and archers pay their respects. During the Soviet era this ceremonial space held the red flags of communism.

The 'return' of Chinggis Khan dramatically performed in the Opening Ceremony reflects a desire by the government to assert the independent status of Mongolia with a uniquely Mongolian symbol. However, as Kertzer (1988) suggests that 'through ritual, political parties seek popular legitimacy by identifying with powerful symbols', it could also be argued that the government is attempting to popularize its own party by aligning itself with a former great and powerful symbol. The image of Chinggis Khan recalls the days of a former glorious, successful Empire that remained strong while it was united and dynamic, thus reminding the Mongolian people that unity and co-operation were essential attributes of a strong nation. This imagery was not only recalled in the unison of 800 musicians and singers but also in the symbolic entertainment depicting shamanism, horsemanship and stylized warfare practices.

Connerton suggests that individuals and societies 'remember' their past in ceremonial festivals and presentations by observing regularly enacted bodily performances. Rituals strengthen group unity by reinforcing the shared values of society: 'Participation in ritual involves physiological stimuli, the arousal of emotions; ritual works through the senses to structure our sense of reality and our understanding of the world around us' (Kertzer 1988:10). Cultural performances such as Naadam are 'occasions in which as a culture or society we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and histories, present ourselves with alternatives' (MacAloon 1984:1). A cultural performance such as a National Day Festival is meta-communicative; it contains 'messages' in symbolic form which can be understood by those of the same cultural milieu (Turner 1990:24). During the Opening Ceremony of the Naadam festival, the choreography of the entertainment,

the symbolic placement of the Nine White Standards, the seating position, dress and formality surrounding the President, all contain symbolic messages that are communicated to, and understood by the audience, as they all remains within the recognized 'correct spatial order' of the Mongolian worldview.

The uniquely Mongolian rituals and symbols associated with Naadam (the greeting, the special foods, the symbolic entertainment, the wearing of national dress and the ritualized prize-giving) all ensure that the Festival is recognized as specifically Mongolian and thus creates a sense of commonality by its link with a shared past, creating a state of 'communitas'. Turner defines communitas as a feeling of communal 'one-ness', achieved by sharing with others in a state of separation from the usual hierarchies of power, such as class, age or religion. It is experienced in the liminal state of rites of passage, but can also be achieved by participating in communally-understood rituals (Turner 1974:47).

In the next Chapter I will discuss the performance of the Games themselves. The three sports of wrestling, archery and horse racing are highly stylized, ritualized and imbued with symbolic meaning congruent with the ancient Mongolian nomadic existence. Over the centuries, the games have changed relatively little and retain many ancient and traditional rituals, in which, I suggest, the Mongolian people find a sense of commonality and 'communitas', as they remain the 'folk element' of Naadam and a link to their nomadic identity.

3. *ERIIN GURVAN NAADAM* (THE THREE GAMES OF MEN)



Figure 12. Karakorum Naadam, 2006. Photo D. Rhode

Before there were any towns, they would come together, the grassy plain becoming for a few days alive with yurts and carts, for a fair and market, dances, singing and storytelling, display of horsemanship and the three great national sports.

Montague 1956:148

This thesis is concerned with the National Day Naadam Festival in its entirety, the formal Opening Ceremony with the Presidential Address and spectacular entertainment, and the *Eriin Gurvan Naadam*, the national championship contests of the Three Games of Men. Having looked at the Opening Ceremony in Chapter Two, I will now describe my observations of the Three Games at the National Naadam of 2006. I examine some of the religious and spiritual aspects of the individual games, and will discuss some of the occasions on which they were performed in the past.

For the Games to have been maintained throughout the centuries beyond their environmental or pragmatic usefulness, suggests that factors beyond pragmatics are at work. The Three Games of Naadam are an embodiment of the rituals of nomadic people (Connerton 1989:88), but remain relevant and significant today as they are played out in a 'modern' context. I suggest that they are important today as they are a means by which Mongolians can bridge modernity and tradition, rural and urban, nomadic and settled; they are simple, ancient enactments of shared and valued cultural traditions played out in a modern context (Schein 1999).

Following on from performance theory in the previous chapter, I will examine some theories on the origin of games in general, drawing on religious practices in ancient festival games (Sansone 1998). I look at factors that may have been instrumental in the perpetuation and continuity of the games using concepts based on the anthropology of games and play (Callois 2001; Kelly 2004; Dyck 2000), together with notions of *communitas*, conflict resolution and cultural capital (Turner 1990), and ritual (Kruger 1990). I examine spiritual and religious aspects of the ancient Greek Games (Sansone 1988), in relation to the Naadam games which are purported to 'fulfill the role of a mediator between man and the powers of nature' according to Kabzinska-Stawarz (1991:118).

The Games carry great symbolic significance in the Naadam Festival as they are the 'thread' that has been constant in almost all festive celebrations of the Mongol people for at least 800 years. I am particularly interested why the games of the Naadam festival have survived relatively unchanged for centuries. For example, archery, wrestling and horseracing were popular tournaments in Europe in the middle ages, but are not practiced as a trio today. Why have *these games* become the festive components in Mongolian tradition and not, for example, polo or fencing or boxing? Indeed, why have *games* been maintained as the Mongolian form of celebration and not singing, dancing or marching parades?

3.1 Why These Three Games?

In some form or another³⁵, the Naadam Games have been an enduring factor in almost all Mongolian celebratory events for centuries. Indeed, many Mongolian people that I interviewed, either formally, informally or in casual conversation, told me that the true spirit of Naadam was, for them, to be found in the Games (and most particularly wrestling). For the Three Games to hold such importance in the hearts and minds of the Mongolian people, it is clear that they are much more than mere spectator sports.

While much has been written on the history and technical aspects of sport, the anthropology of play, games and sport has only recently been given more attention. Turner considered some of these concepts when he developed his theories on the liminal aspects of rituals and their implication in the creation of ‘communitas’. Turner’s concept of the transformative aspects of liminality can also be understood in Huizinga’s assertion that play or games may have an important role in the evolution of culture, as they allow for a freedom of ideas and inventions. However Turner argues that Huizinga’s definition of play is limited as it does not account for play that is ‘often spectacular... in Rose Bowls, Superbowls and Olympics’ (Turner 1990:125).

As with other forms of performance, Turner (1982) would describe play as ‘liminal time’, it is outside of the serious labour of everyday life; it is ‘time out’ and bounded in time and space. Callois adds that “...play is essentially a separate occasion, carefully isolated from the rest of life, and generally engaged in with precise limits of time and place” (Callois 2001:6). The Naadam games are always performed in a space that is dedicated to that use (albeit temporarily). In almost all cities, towns and villages there is a stadium, sports arena or special area defined as the ‘Naadam

³⁵ In some Naadam festivals in small towns archery is not included if there were insufficient competitors, and in some Naadams overseas, for practical reasons horseracing is not included. Wrestling appears to be the essential component.

ground'; if another space is used, it is first sanctified in a spiritual ceremony by the Buddhist clergy³⁶.

According to Bateson (1973), play is first and foremost a communicative act and these boundaries are communicated by culturally understood signals; he gives the example of a dog 'bite' or 'nip' – one indicates play and one indicates fighting, they may appear the same but communicate a very different meaning, and can only be understood in their cultural context (1973:155). Bateson also asserts that play is a major factor in social and cultural evolution, as it provides a model for learning that is not too complex. This theory can be directly applied to wrestling and archery; it has been proposed (Damdin 1966) that wrestling evolved from demonstrating, after the hunt, how a bear could be brought to the ground. By 'playing at archery' - firing arrows to hit small cylinders on the ground - accurate shooting methods essential for hunting and warfare were learned and practiced. By racing horses, both riders and horses were trained for speed and endurance, and the most successful colts could be selected to improve the bloodstock.

My literature survey found three main theories on the origins of games related to concepts of work, human nature and religion (Carter 1990:136). The Marxist theory argues that work was the first basic condition of human existence, and that games/sport is a conscious preparation for work. According to Lukas, running and spear-throwing were the first 'sports' which were directly derived from hunting techniques; as humans were also social beings, competition emerged as hunters practiced their skills during leisure time. Carl Deim argues that games originated from religious or spiritual festivals from the need to appease deities (cited in Carter and Kruger 1990:137). I propose that the Naadam festival games have emerged from this latter classification, although the former two are also relevant, and this will be discussed further in the next section of this Chapter.

³⁶ Erdene, July 2006 Ulaanbaatar, personal communication.

3.2 Games and Religious Festivals

For millennia, athletic contests have been important components of religious festivals. Naadam began as a religious festival, the games were offered to the deities as part of a sacrificial ceremony³⁷. Contests as a celebratory marker are not unique to Mongolia; Sansone argues that games have long been a form of ritual sacrifice along with burnt offerings and libations, and that athletic competitions were always an integral component in all formal Greek festivals (Sansone 1988:110). The athlete was ‘sacrificed’ to the gods because he was the finest. In games, this sacrifice is symbolic; the act of competition determines the most worthy to be dedicated to the gods (ibid:79). This logic accounts for the status of an individual being defined by his athletic performance: “he who can run the fastest or lift the most has the greatest amount of energy to sacrifice, and is therefore worthy of the greatest honour” (ibid:64). This theory of physical endeavour as sacrifice could perhaps explain the Mongolian notion of ‘good luck’ being associated with the sweat of a wrestler and also horses after a race, symbolizing the ‘sacrifice of effort’, and spiritual connection to the deities. Sansone (1988) offers another explanation, as he finds that bodily fluids ‘are identified in primitive thought with the life-force and with strength’ (ibid:70).

The Games became the Mongol mode of divine offering, I suggest, because games simply evolved from essential features of everyday life on the Central Asian steppe, and were ideally suited to the environmental conditions. All the equipment and space for the enactment of the games was easily found within the lifestyle of the nomadic people - every household had horses, bows and arrows, and every man learned to wrestle from childhood. All three sports have their roots in the hunting and the warrior traditions of the Mongols.

Kabzinska-Stawarz (1991) asserts that the Mongols believed in the magical power of games, possibly until the turn of the 20th century. She suggests that this was due to their ‘unconditional subordination to the powers of nature’. Games were a means of

³⁷ Prof. Dulam, September 2006, National University of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, personal communication.

communication with the spiritual realm, a means by which they ‘could win the friendly attitude of these powers’ (ibid.113). She also argues that games had a similar function to a sacrifice, as they were an expression of respect, and performed as an offering to the deities.

The games do not serve as amusements only. Thanks to the functions ascribed to them, they fulfil the role of a mediator between man and the powers of nature... The best players participate in events, the significance of which goes beyond the range of the shepherds’ community (re-creation of the Universe, the transition of power between the Earth and people...) (Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991:118).

Each of the Naadam games contain references of communication with the spirit world. After death, it was held that souls were transported to heaven on horseback. Mares’ milk has long been imbued with many religious and spiritual properties, and it is a medium by which to sanctify an arena to be used for sacred purposes. It is believed that wrestling was a communication between man and the earth, and archery a communication between man and the heavenly world (ibid). Naadam festivals were always linked to spiritual phenomena; they took place on auspicious dates according to religious prescription. Festivals of games and worship took place throughout the summer months to give thanks to the deities for surviving the winter, protecting the flocks and herds, and for the return of the warmth of the sun.

3.3 The Spirit of Naadam

Callois suggests that it is the *spirit* of play that is essential to culture, and that games are the physical manifestations of cultural traditions (Callois 2001:58). I argue that this elusive concept of the ‘spirit’ of Naadam (which I define, in this instance, as a feeling of close association to the spiritual realm) is located in the many rituals derived from shamanic practices, that have endured in the Mongolian consciousness. It is these rituals which have defined the form of ‘how Mongols celebrate’ today, and for the past eight centuries.

This concept of the ‘spirit’ of Naadam was a constant theme in my interviews. From organising officials to spectators to ‘ordinary people’ – frequent references were made to the intrinsic character of the Naadam games as being fundamental to the Mongolian self-identity. This was borne out by the comments of several respondents: “Watching the final round of wrestling when the *zashuuls* kneel in honour of the two champions makes me very emotional”³⁸; “the horseracing shows how we Mongolians feel, our love of the countryside and sense of freedom on a horse”³⁹; “I am always happy at Naadam, because everyone is enjoying themselves; it is a happy time for Mongolian people”⁴⁰; “the Naadam is special as it is only Mongolian”⁴¹.

3.4 Naadam as rites of competition

In *Time out of Time* which focuses on cultural festivals, Falassi argues that sports competitions are an important way for society to reinforce its own moral codes; ‘by singling out its outstanding members and giving them prizes, the group implicitly reaffirms some of its most important values’ (1987:5). He suggests that when games are part of a festive occasion they can become *rites of competition*. The players have their roles and they perform according to prescribed rituals, the competitors enter as equals and are turned into winners or losers; games demonstrate the creation of hierarchy from equality (Falassi 1987:5, Huizinga 1938).

As the Three Games became more politicized and performed as part of important military or political celebrations, it is likely that the competitive aspect of the Games provided an important opportunity to gain cultural capital (Dyck 2000:30). They provided an opportunity for ordinary people to gain honour and military advancement. Cultural capital is the importance and status given to an object (or concept) that makes it prestigious and desirable, within a specific cultural milieu (Bourdieu 1991:372); success at sport can be converted into social (or cultural) capital as it can transcend class and economic boundaries.

³⁸ Erdene, August 2006, Ulaanbaatar

³⁹ Itchka, August 2006, Ulaanbaatar

⁴⁰ Tsegii, August 2006, Ulaanbaatar

⁴¹ Tumen, August 2006, Ulaanbaatar

In a society based on meritocracy, political capital was achieved by accomplishment. Success at Naadam therefore incurred great status it became a route to positions of power through leadership. “Very good wrestlers become heroes, and therefore become good soldiers. So, good wrestlers were given a higher rank in the army as they would then command respect and be obeyed” (Damdin 1966:108). The status and prestige of becoming a champion wrestler or archer was considerable and commanded immediate respect and loyalty; the long and meaningful titles awarded sequential winners testifying to this. Status is also reflected in the use of a lifetime honorific preceding a person’s name; a wrestling champion is honoured by the title *bokh*, meaning strong – a champion archer is honoured by the title *mergen*, meaning wise.

Chinggis Khan’s military success has been attributed to his ability to engender unity in his warriors by overriding the tribal distinctions that had existed on the Central Asian steppe for centuries. He organised his military units into a system of ‘*tumens*’, or groups of thousands, which cut across tribal affiliations as they were based on meritocracy and loyalty to a strong leader. Naadam contests were reportedly used by Chinggis Khan to select leaders; they could have been instrumental in fostering unity by breaking down tribal and class barriers.

3.5 Socialization and Conflict Resolution

Turner suggests that conflict and play are closely linked and have been expressed in many kinds of theatrical genres, which may be understood as a ‘cultural defense mechanism against conflict’ (1982:106). He proposes that societies find different ways to divert an outbreak of open crisis, from elaborate rules of etiquette to ritualized violence. Conflict, if properly controlled and managed, can have the effect of enhancing and even reviving a group’s self-image, by forcing the antagonists to look at their common bonds over and above those that divided them. The Games festivals perhaps served as a venue for conflict resolution, either inter-tribal or intra-tribal. As the wrestlers’ rites both before and after a contest are heavily imbued with shamanic ritual and symbolism, the ‘innate sacredness’ which the wrestler takes to

the contest, would ensure that the outcome would be recognized as divinely ordained and accepted as the ‘right’ outcome.

Callois builds on the notion of the ‘civilising’ effect of games, and argues that as stadium games are by their nature limited, regulated and specialised, they allow for a rivalry that is not personal, and in fact encourages loyalty and ‘communitas’. He suggests that rule-bound games ‘spread the custom of and respect for refereeing’, which he maintains encourages civil behaviour; he cites great civilisations in which ritualistic games were a national feature, such as the Aztec, the Chinese, and the tournaments of early Christendom. These contests had a civilising influence as the goal was “...not victory at any price, but prowess exhibited under conditions of equality, against a competitor whom one esteems and assists when in need, and using only legitimate means agreed to in advance at a fixed place and time” (2001:109).

Sansone also argues that the concept of ‘fair play’ can also be attributed to ancient rituals where sportsmanship and fair play was important, and victory was not the only goal, as illustrated by Homer in the Iliad 23.439-546 (Hardy 1990:49). Games are a non-violent means by which superiority can be gained without resorting to direct contact, by which “champions, without directly confronting each other, are involved in ceaseless and diffuse competition” (Callois 2001:17).



Archery has other attributes according to Confucius: ‘If two men are to compete, it should be in archery. As they face the same direction, trying to accomplish the same goal, it is the most civilized of sports’⁴².

Figure 13. Archery practice, Ulaanbaatar 2006. D. Rhode

⁴² ‘Mongolian Archery’ on www.mandarinmansion.com. Accessed 17December 2009.

3.6 Unity and Performance

How do these rituals work to bring a sense of unity? The Naadam games work in creating social cohesion as they contain many rituals that are multivocal, they ‘condense many references’ (Turner 1974:55), and bring them together in a single spatial and temporal field where people have a mutual understanding of their emotional content and orientation. This not only eliminates feelings of conflict, but encourages a feeling of social cohesiveness, or ‘communitas’.

Walter Burkert (1983) argues that many present-day rituals in sport are maintained today as they provide a medium for social interaction, much the same as the act of hunting did in the past:

But the hunting ritual had become so important that it could not be given up. Stability stayed with those groups who managed to make use of the social and psychological appeal of the hunting tradition by transforming, by redirecting, until the whole action became a ritual. As the pragmatic importance declined, the symbolic value increased (Burkert cited in Sansone 1988:42).

Rituals, from a functional viewpoint, can be derived from behaviour that in many instances has been forgotten, but the symbolic action remains (for example the presentation of laurel wreaths to Olympic champions). The rituals performed in the ‘*devich*’ before and after a wrestling bout, the ‘*uukhai*’ cheers of encouragement of the archery officials and the ceremonial singing of the ‘*gingoo*’ before the horse races are all ritual enactments that are no longer essential. However, while they may no longer have a practical utility, I argue that they have remained an important part of Naadam for their symbolic function, in building a sense of identity and a national consciousness, and in their powers of connection to the past and myths of the spirit world (Connerton 1989:72).

The value of performance is in its inclusivity. When the Three Games are performed in front of an audience, in a dedicated place and in the presence of an important Mongolian symbolic icon (such as the *sulde*), it reinforces and accentuates the power of the occasion. My informants’ description of Naadam as a ‘deeply special’

experience is considered by Huizinga (1938) as he explores the correlation of play and sacred performances; as with religious ritual (and Turner's concept of 'liminal time') the Naadam games take place in a defined temporal and spatial area, and are bound by specific rules and regulations that are understood by both players and spectators, which acts to increase their intensity.

I now return to the 2006 National Naadam, and the Games component of the Festival. The wrestling contests traditionally open the Games, as wrestling has always been considered the most important of the contests. In major celebratory festivals (such as the 800th Anniversary), there were 1024 contestants, requiring ten rounds to complete the competition.

3.7 Wrestling

The First Round of Wrestling competitions began at 1.00 pm, after the completion of the Opening Ceremony. For a great many Mongolians, wrestling is the most popular of the Three Games and it always takes place inside the Naadam Stadium. The Archery contests took place in the Archery arena just outside the Stadium (but within the complex), and the horseracing course was in the countryside about forty kilometers west of Ulaanbaatar.

Mongolian wrestling is an ancient sport that has retained its unique rituals and form for centuries; although international professional wrestling is practiced in Mongolia, for Naadam only the traditional Mongolian form is used, reflecting the strong bond with the past. Research suggests that wrestling was the first of the three games to be performed in a festive ritual of the ancestors of the Mongol people, reportedly originating seven thousand years ago (Dashdondov 2005:20). Damdin (1966) proposes that wrestling first emerged in the days when bears were hunted singlehandedly⁴³; at the celebration after the hunt, the successful hunter would

⁴³ Recent studies have revealed the existence of a smaller, sub species of brown bear (*Ursus arctos gobiensis*) in the southern Gobi desert (Balint, P.J. and J.A. Steinberg. 2003).

demonstrate how he fought the bear and brought it to the ground. He explains this as the origin of the rule that the wrestling contest ends when any part of the opponent's body (except the hand) touches the ground (Damdin 1966).

From my interviews with wrestlers, officials in the wrestling association and dedicated supporters, it is evident that Mongolian Wrestling far exceeds the boundaries of mere sport. Wrestling has been popular as a sport in celebratory events for centuries and remains the most important sport in Mongolia today. To understand the close association of wrestling to the self-identity of the Mongolian people, I will examine some of the myths, legends and history of Mongolian wrestling and its importance in everyday life.

Historically, the status of successful wrestlers almost exceeded royalty and religion; they were thought to be incarnations of epic heroes and 'personified the strength, skill and courage of the ideal man' (Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991:90). Today, wrestling is still a symbol of 'Mongolness', wrestlers are considered to embody Mongolian values, the aspirations and the ideal of Mongolian 'manhood'. The physical characteristics of the 'ideal wrestler' (identified in a book on Mongolian wrestling) appear to be based on the physiology of the Khalka Mongol. The 'ideal wrestler' must also adhere to a set of moral values (Damdin 1966:109). For more details on this refer to Appendix II.

As the wrestlers enter the stadium they perform the ceremonial *devikh*, a stylized slow dance/leaping movement representing the strength and stealth of the lion, and flailing outstretched arms representing the eagle, or mythical garuda⁴⁴. This performance symbolizes (and demonstrates) the wrestlers' prowess, strength and mastery of wrestling moves. The close association of wrestling with mythology and hunting is demonstrated in the *devikh*, performed by the wrestler before and after a

⁴⁴ This ritual is also termed the 'garuda' or 'eagle' dance.

wrestling bout. This ancient tradition has changed little over the years. Montague (1956) describes the performance thus:

One thousand wrestlers (1024 to be precise) leap into the arena. The word leap is literal, not figurative. With extraordinary cries, the wrestlers bound forward and cavort, their movements as strictly prescribed by traditions as those of ballet, the chest thrown forward like a lion, the arms held out at full length sideways from the shoulder with drooping hands, waving as the body bounds, to simulate ...the wings of an eagle (Montague 1956:149).

The *devikh* is performed to show pride and prowess. The form it took used to vary between tribes and according to the individuality of the wrestler, but all forms included the essential elements of running and leaping while gracefully flapping outstretched arms, and slapping the thighs front and back before touching the ground. These actions also have the useful effect of warming up the body before a match. Touching the ground connects the wrestler to the spirit of the earth, which then affords protection. By imitating the *garuda* (in the movement of the arms) and lion (in the torso and legs) the wrestler hopes to gain their strength and agility (Damdin 1966).

Each wrestler is assigned a *zashuul*. There is no direct translation for *zashuul*, he has been variously termed a 'second', a 'coach' or a herald. His duties are to announce the wrestler, to issue the verbal challenge before the bout, to encourage and advise his wrestler, and to hold the wrestler's hat. In English tournaments of the twelfth century, the ancient position of 'herald' appears to have served a similar role. According to Carter (1990), "... they were expert too in the art of composing and interpreting a refrain to launch this team or that champion, lauding their feats and, for a share of the profits, advancing their worth" (Carter and Kruger 1990:48).

Damdin (1966), a respected Mongolian historian who specialized in the history of Mongolian wrestling, suggests that the position of *zashuul* is of ancient origin; the name comes from *zas*, meaning to improve or to correct. Traditionally he was an 'old person with white hair' presumably denoting wisdom, and 'must always wear traditional Mongolian costume'. A *zashuul* always wears the traditional *del*, sash,

leather boots and four-sided peaked hat (Baasandorj 2000). According to Adishaa and Erentei (2005) since 1924 the position of *zashuul* has been codified and directions were given that *zashuuls* on the east and west side must wear different colours. In 1990, a ruling was made that the *zashuuls* on the west side must wear a yellow ribbon-edged red/brown silk *del* with a green belt, and on the east side a blue *del* and a yellow belt, and he must wear the traditional four-sided hat, Mongolian *del* and boots (Sh. Adishaa and B.Erentei (2005:40). *Zashuuls* are selected by the Wrestling Association for a three-year term. They are generally assigned to the wrestlers at Naadam, although the more successful wrestlers can choose their *zashuul* and often have the same one for all their important matches.



After performing the *devikh*, the wrestlers go to their respective *zashuuls* who are lined up east and west, those in marooned-coloured *deels* on the west and those in blue on the east. He puts his right hand on his *zashuul's* left shoulder and gracefully

Figure 14. Wrestlers and Zashuuls, Naadam 2006

prances around in front of him; he then reverses this movement. The wrestlers then take off their hats (which the *zashuuls* hold), and in a group all run towards the *Sulde* to pay respect. They return to the *zashuul* and are paired with another competitor. Before the match, each wrestler is introduced to the spectators by the *zashuul*, who chants the name, titles and rank of his wrestler, and any special attributes or achievements. The oration of the *zashuul* is an ancient rite and was an important part of the contest; before common usage of the written word this was the only medium by which to communicate the status and prestige of a wrestler. The *zashuul* sings their wrestler's praise of success after the third, fifth and seventh rounds.

Montague narrates the challenge that a *zashuul* made to an opponent in his 1956 description of Naadam; after the opening repartee, the senior *zashuul* declared:

At this joyous and great Naadam!
my chief of wrestlers, captain of the mighty
most eminent of the host of the sinew
foremost of ten thousand battles
strongest of the strong, bursting with bravery
gloriously invincible before the people
challenges wrestler so-and-so
of such-and-such aimag (province)
such-and-such soum (town)
in the family of the mighty
joyfully to match strength
in the flower of his manliness and might. (Montague 1956:150)

The opposing wrestler replies with an acknowledgement that he is honoured and they begin the bout. The wrestlers face each other ‘eyeing each other askance like elks about to gore or hawks to swoop’ according to one of Montague’s informants, reaffirming the close association of wrestling to the natural world (ibid).

There are relatively few rules in Mongolian wrestling, and the test is on skill or technique rather than strength and size. There are no age or weight divisions, the wrestler who is felled first is eliminated from the competition, and the winner goes on to the next round. At the end of a bout, the winner runs toward the *Sulde* with arms raised and acknowledges the crowd. He returns to his opponent who has untied his jacket as a mark of respect, he then raises his right arm for the losing wrestler to walk around him and under his arm. This symbolizes a form of submission that shows respect for the winner. (Outside the wrestling arena, in Mongolia it is considered demeaning to walk under another’s arm)⁴⁵. In his book, Montague described the action as ‘...the loser sheltering beneath the victor’s arm, outstretched like a protecting wing, in a sign of friendship’ (Montague 1956:151). However if the loser is a highly esteemed older wrestler, the young winner may walk under his arm as a sign of respect. The winning wrestler retrieves his hat from his *zashuul*, raises

⁴⁵ Erdene, Ulaanbaatar August 2006, personal communication.

his arms and performs the *devich* again before prancing with outstretched arms around the *Sulde* on the raised dais. Some take off their hat and bow in deference before the *Sulde* as they return.

The wrestling contests are open to all-comers. It is considered an act of bravery to enter a Naadam wrestling contest, and it holds much prestige. In Ulaanbaatar there are three or four wrestling ‘stables’ (*devjee*) or club training schools; wrestlers go to a *devjee* for one to two months before Naadam to train. Several universities, colleges, the army and police academies also have their own sports clubs, which include wrestling training⁴⁶.



The clothing of modern wrestlers is minimal, and in stark contrast to everyday clothing, uncovering parts of the body that would be unthinkable during an ordinary day. This demarks the Naadam games as ‘time apart’ from everyday life.

Figure 15. Wrestling Contest Naadam 2006

The wrestlers wear very brief shorts (*shuudag*), high leather boots (*guta*) and an unusual type of top (*zodog*) that has long sleeves and a back, but no front except strings to tie it in place. The material of the clothing is now synthetic but traditionally it depended on ranking: the lowest ranks wore cotton and higher ranks wore silk. Wrestlers take great pride in their clothing and have special bags in which to carry them. The boots are made with a flat sole and upturned toe, with a strip of leather tied around each foot to secure the boots tightly to stop them from slipping as the feet are frequently used in wrestling moves.

The style of the clothing has changed over time, and the origin remains controversial. It is argued that the minimal clothing is so styled to prevent it from being torn.

⁴⁶ Bolor, Christchurch, New Zealand March 2008, personal communication.

According to Damdin they are styled in order to be comfortable and to enable the wrestlers can hold on to each other, but it is also to 'show off the man's body, to give evidence of their strength and power, with a good chest and biceps' (Damdin 1966). He records that at some time in history they did cover their chests, although a date is not mentioned. However the wrestlers from Inner Mongolia have similar wrestling rules yet wear loosely flowing shirts and longer trousers, so the argument seems more in favour of 'showing the man's body' than ease of wrestling. Wrestling was originally performed naked, as were Greek athletics⁴⁷; the minimalist modern-day clothes are similar to this form (Damdin 1966).

Mongolian folklore contains many wrestling myths including several that allude to formidable female wrestlers who overpower male opponents. Stewart recalled the story of a princess who would not marry until she met an opponent who could defeat her (Stewart 2000:116); Marco Polo relates the tale of a female wrestler who became rich by challenging men to forfeit their herds and flocks if they could not defeat her. A popular tale recalls the story of a woman who entered a Naadam contest disguised as a man, and won; henceforth the open-chested 'shirt' was so styled to make this deception impossible (Severin 1991:92). This theme of (or the fear of) men being defeated by women wrestlers is interesting, and perhaps related to the fact that the wrestler is thought to be the 'embodiment of Mongolian manhood'.

It appears that today the colours of the wrestler's clothing do not have symbolic significance. Red and blue are the most popular colours, and were established as prestigious colours at the time of Chinggis Khan. During the Manchu era, only wrestlers belonging to the Bogd Khan (Holy Ruler) could wear red; wrestlers from other provinces wore blue and yellow, or they could wear a red top and blue shorts. Wrestlers representing the *Zaya* (equal to Bogd Khan in other aimags) could wear yellow.

⁴⁷The Greek word for sport, 'gymnastics', comes from the adjective 'gymnos', which means 'nude' or 'lightly dressed'. Article entitled *Ancient Olympics* www.ancientolympics.arts.kuleuven.be. Retrieved 20 December 2009.

Wrestlers remove their hats before a bout and it is held by his *zashuul*. In Mongolia a man's hat is symbolic of his 'personhood' and must always be treated with respect; it should never be placed on the ground or treated carelessly. Red 'streamers' are attached to the back of hats (*malgai*) on which gold chevron marks are added after each successful win; the stripe gets wider as the wrestler has more wins. Sansone (1988) records that the Greek heroes were adorned with 'fillets'— strips of (red) cloth to signify their victories and esteem in which they were held; they 'signify the consecration of the victor to the gods'(Sansone 1988:81). The 2006 Anniversary Naadam awarded blue chevron markers to successful wrestlers. When Mongols were at war, they also wore a knife during wrestling contests, but this was only for decoration. It was also symbolic of the need for caution and to maintain discipline (as it could not be utilized); the knives were exchanged after the match (Damdin 1966). This practice perhaps originated from early times when - it is proposed - after a bear was injured from arrows, men wrestled the bear to the ground for the final kill.

3.8 Archery

I now return to the 2006 Naadam Festival. The President left the Central Pavilion after watching the opening rounds of wrestling, and together with a large entourage and bodyguards 'walked amongst the people' in the festival area around the outside of the Stadium, to watch the archery and *shagaii harvah* competitions. He had a ceremonial attempt in the archery contest. His first shot was off the mark ⁴⁸ but well applauded; his second and third shots – equally wide – began to cause the officials and spectators confusion whether to applaud or not. The people I spoke to around me responded that 'he was not a good shot'.

Prior to 1922, the Leader of the Nation (the Bogd Khan, a royal deity) did not leave his official podium at Naadam. The modern President was affirming that the democratically elected President was 'of the people', not a deity or an autocrat.

⁴⁸ http://www.atarn.org/mongolian/mn_nat_arch/messenger.htm

According to Corff (1992), the archery contest 'is an event of the highest political level since it is the only competition where Mongolia's statesmen participate

personally'. Both the late Marshall Choibalsan and the late President Bumatsende were proficient archers; they participated ceremonially and 'their arrows brought the archery competitions to a close' (Montague 1956:152). Archery has a tradition of association with the elite in Mongolia; Lattimore (1942:262) proposed that archery and horseracing were for the gentry, while the common people 'did' the wrestling (although patronized by the princes and nobles).

All archers now wear the traditional *del* for archery competitions, with additional adornments to assist the archer. Sleeve straps, made of leather and decorated with silver, are used to prevent the long sleeve of the *del* from coming in contact with the bow, much the same as fifty years ago when 'their left sleeve was tightly bandaged to the elbow' (Montague 1956:151). When they are not being utilized, the arrows are clasped together in a case with a symbolic 'tassel', which represents power and strength. Both men and women wear the traditional four-sided peaked hat, which differs only very slightly according to gender.



Figure 16. Archery practice, Ulaanbaatar 2006. D. Rhode

Detailed descriptions of the construction of the composite bows, which are unique to Mongolia, are included in Appendix III. Each contestant has 40 arrows; whoever shoots the most targets is the winner. In the case of a tie, the competitors continue to shoot taking one step backwards after each shot. More detail on the rules for the different categories can be found in Appendix IV.

There are three divisions of Archery: Khalka, Urianghai and Buriat. Although these are ethnic categories, competitors do not have to belong to the specific ethnic group, and some archers compete in more than one category. The Urianghai section is only open to men. They all use the same equipment but the different categories apply different distances and different targets, the Khalka category being the longest at seventy-five metres for men, sixty-five for women. The contestants compete in teams of twelve archers, who in turn launch four arrows each at the small leather cylinders on the ground. For competitors under 18, the distance is set at a rate of three to four metres per year of age for girls and boys respectively⁴⁹.

A distinguishing feature of Mongolian archery is that the archers do not aim at one target but at a low 'wall' of small leather cylinders in a line (*surs*) measuring 8 cm x 8 cm. Each archer has four arrows and the objective of a ten-person team is to hit not less than 33 *surs*. In subsequent rounds the wall becomes smaller and smaller with very round until about a dozen *surs* remain.

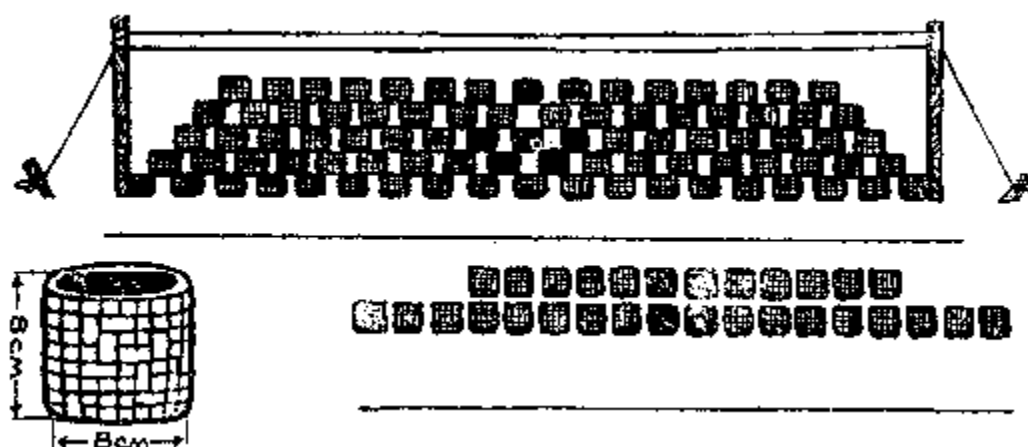


Figure 17. Diagram of placement of archery targets 'surs',⁵⁰

The scorers and supporters of the archers stand near the targets and advise the archer of the quality of their shot by using the traditional *uukhai cry*. This cry starts as the

⁴⁹ Mongolian Archery Association pamphlet, published Ulaanbaatar 2006

⁵⁰ From 'Mongolian Archery Rules. www.atarn.org/mongolian/mn_nat_arch/messenger.htm Retrieved 20.12.09)

arrow is released and increases in strength as it flies towards the target; if successful, the intensity is further increased. The *uukhai* is an ancient song or cry (or ‘melodic call’ according to Pegg 2003), which originated with the need to convey a message when shooting distances were very much longer than today (up to two hundred meters). The *uukhai* carried across the steppe better than a shout and was a faster way to report the result than a runner⁵¹. The *uukhai* is accompanied by arm gestures that indicate how far off the mark the shot is, ranging from hands positioned close together with flat palms facing each other, to arms widely stretched to the side.

There are several different types of *uukhai* that are determined according to the stage in the archer’s contest. When the archer prepares to aim, ‘beckoning gestures’ (circular arm movements) are used to invite the arrow and to bring luck, and at the same time a low humming sound is issued. The first cry is to support the archer and, if successful, the cry increases in volume. When the arrow hits the target, the umpires and supporters raise their arms and make a high singing tone. The person recording the result deciphers the *uukhai* sound and responds with a *sambaryn* sound – a similar cry but of a different tone.

The traditional Mongolian long song, a high-pitched singing form with ‘long’ vowel sounds (in a similar octave to western soprano), is performed in the intervals between archery rounds. The songs have titles such as “*Bayan Tsaagan Nutag*” (Rich White Homeland) and “*Gurvan Zugtei Santai*” (With *San* Offerings in Three Directions) (to the sky, fire and earth) (Pegg 2001:225).

The local newspapers reported the archery contests with detailed accounts of the number of archers in each section, how many arrows were used and information on the winner’s former success. For example: “In the Buriat section there were 100 archers - 80 men and 20 women, shooting at 45 and 30 metres, using 64 arrows in

⁵¹ ‘Mongolian Naadam’. www.mongolia800mn. Accessed 10 June 2007).

total. In the Urianghai: 60 people participated, 1st person from Bayanhongor Province with 22 points” (Mongol Messenger, July 2006).

Traditionally, the Naadam archery tournament is commenced by an archer born in the Year of the Tiger – symbolic of strength and marksmanship. A person born in the Year of the Dragon, a symbol of eloquence, performs the *magtaal*, a song of praise in honour of the archers. Arrows were gathered by people born in the Year of the Mouse (symbolic of diligence and industriousness), and the scores were recorded by men born in the year of the Monkey (representing cleverness) (Pegg 2001:223).

A brief history of Archery

Archery has a long tradition in Mongolia, evidenced by cave drawings from the Mesolithic era (12,000 – 7,000 years ago) (Mongolian Academy of Sciences MPR 1990:88). References to legends and myths concerning archery abound in Mongolia. A great leader, Erekhé Mergen, is reputed to have saved his people from a drought by shooting down six suns (Munkhtsetseg 2000:5). Alan Goa, the legendary maternal figure in the descent myth of Chinggis Khan, is said to have taught her many sons to co-operate and work together, by using the analogy of breaking one arrow on its own but being unable to break a fletch of arrows.

Chronicles of the Chinese Tang Dynasty stated with admiration that the "...steppe inhabitants can hit at full tilt a running hare with a single arrow" (Storey 1997). The bow was lighter and more powerful than its European counterpart, and became widespread in mediaeval Mongolia. It was considered the world's best in terms of design and combat effectiveness; it could pierce thick shields and armour, and reportedly had a range of up to half a kilometer (Storey 1997).

The traditional image of Mongols as a nation of archers is embedded in the national consciousness as their expertise has been widely acknowledged in history, literature,

and myth. A national website claims that Mongolians are “...born with archery skills, an integral part of the nomads’ lifestyle... the qualities of perfect eyesight, measurement, patience and strength”⁵². The Mongols’ skill in mounted archery was acknowledged in Europe as one of the foremost attributes, enabling their military conquests in the thirteenth century. In 1241, Emperor Frederick II informed the King of England that:

... the Mongols were ‘incomparable archers’ and more proficient with the bow than any other people. They carried bows that could shoot accurately 2-300 metres, with a drawing strength of 116 pounds (Onon 2001:xiv).

It is recorded that Munkh Khan (Chinggis’ grandson) gave a massive black bow with two arrows to King Louis IX of France; one arrow was decorated with silver and symbolized peace, the other a combat whistling arrow symbolizing war. The gift was a warning to the French to ‘live in friendship with the Mongols – or be warned’ (Storey 2002:2)

Archery competitions had already become associated with feasts and celebrations by the thirteenth century, verified by a stone stele discovered by a Russian archeological expedition in the Orkhon valley, purportedly dated 1226 and known as “The Stone of Chinggis Khan”⁵³. The inscription reads:

While Chinggis Khan was holding an assembly of Mongolian dignitaries, after his conquest of the Sartuul in Buga Socigai, [East Turkestan], Esunkhei Mengen shot a target at 335 alds [502metres]

(The National Museum, Ulaanbaatar 2006).

According to some sources, archery was proscribed at some time during the Manchu period to prevent insurrection, as a result of the prohibition archery was practiced secretly inside the *ger* with miniature toy crossbows (Munkhtsetseg 2000:2). After

⁵² Mongolia Naadam, from www.mongolia800.mn. Retrieved 10 June 2007.

⁵³ It is now housed in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, and is thought to be the earliest monument dedicated to achievement in the sport of archery in the world. A replica stone has been installed in the Mongolian National Museum in Ulaanbaatar.

breaking away from Manchu domination, archery was reinstated in Naadam after 1912 and training was actively encouraged to regain the Mongol tradition. According to documents issued by the War Ministry of Autonomous Mongolia, all *aimags* (provinces) were required to send 336 men annually to Urga (now Ulaanbaatar) for training at archery school, and regular competitions were held. According to I.M. Maisky, a Russian ethnographer:

An archery festival is truly gorgeous – hundreds of white gers and multicoloured, embroidered tents spread all across a huge meadow at the foot of the Bogd Khan Mountain range immediately south of the city: visiting archers lived there (cited in Storey 1997).

It would appear that this elaborate reinstatement of the sport of archery was a deliberate attempt by the new independent government to publicly demonstrate that Mongolians, who had the authority to reinstate an important symbol of Mongolian identity that had been denied them during Chinese suzerainty, now governed Mongolia.

According to Oyuntuya, Secretary of the Archery Federation, since 1991 interest in the sport of archery has been growing and becoming increasingly popular with women and young people. It was a way to reclaim and maintain their unique Mongolian identity, and perhaps intensified because it had been considered a symbol of insurrection.

At one time, some of the archery contests were on horseback when the target was a stretched sheepskin on a wooden frame; this style is now frequently enacted for ‘show’ performances. Another type of competition was archery ‘on the turn’: ‘During the third round, shooting was done on the turn. The archer took his stand with his back to the target, swung around and shot without pausing’ (Montague 1956:152). I do not know if this technique is practiced widely today, I did observe this once during my time in Mongolia but it was as a demonstration rather than a contest.

Archery and the Spiritual Realm

A proficient archer raised the prestige of the group he represented. He not only destroyed evil but helped good to prevail; he had the ability to influence the fate of the people by putting things right and ‘having an effect on Nature and helping it at the same time to set everything in order’ (Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991:104). It was also believed that when an arrow successfully reached its target, raising the arms and crying the *uukhai* would awaken the spirits so they will bestow fertility and rain.

Bows and arrows have been used in shamanic rituals for centuries to dispel evil spirits and were used during *OVVOO* ceremonies to dispel illness (Bawden 1968:37). Kabzinska-Stawarz found that even in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries arrows were shot at mounds of leather-covered cylinders ‘stacked to the height of a man’ to cure a range of illnesses (Pegg 2001:222). Bows and arrows symbolize fertility and life force and were used during weddings and funerals (Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991:103). Thus, it could be argued that archery stands for the health, fertility and wellbeing of the nation when performed at Naadam.

Shagaii harvah

The President made a brief visit to the *Shagaii harvah* marquee. *Shagaii harvah* literally means ‘to shoot at *shagaii* bones’. *Shagaii* are the anklebones of sheep, and serve as game pieces but are also tokens of both divination and friendship. *Shagaii harvah* has in recent years become a popular addition to Naadam, although not considered one of the ‘three games’. It is played inside a large tent, where teams of up to ten people take turns to flick, by the thumb and middle finger, small anklebones across to a target (another anklebone) on small wooden tray approximately ten feet away. This is a very noisy affair by both team members and spectators, with much ritual chanting, cheering and singing. *Shagaii* have tremendous spiritual significance and are involved in many shamanic practices; the game has similar spiritual qualities to archery, and is a popular game to play in winter inside the *ger*. It has traditionally been associated with *Tsaagan sar* (White Moon ceremony, or Lunar New Year) the other important holiday celebration in Mongolia.

The *shagaii harvah* contestants each use their own small stool, similar in size and shape to those used for milking yaks and cows. As they prepare to ‘shoot’ their *shagaii*, fellow team members, lining the shooting area in front of the spectators, utter the *uukhai*, a cross between a song and a cheer, as in archery contests. As in archery, they also ‘beckon good fortune for the shot by extending their arms toward Heaven, palms up and circling them in a clockwise direction’ (Pegg 2001:226). An informant advised me that in earlier times it was not the Mongolian way to clap hands in congratulations, and this form of recognition was the usual way of expressing appreciation or respect, in all sports and not confined to ankle bone shooting⁵⁴.

Pegg (2001:226) suggests that there has been a decline in archery competition, and that *shagaii harvah* has increased in popularity, and is now included in many Naadams as an unofficial fourth sport. Some informants thought that *shagaii harvah* (anklebone shooting) became popular as a replacement game; it was also a popular game played by older people in the city parks in the summer evenings⁵⁵. Many of the rituals, terminologies and the symbolism of archery and anklebone shooting are similar, both involved the ‘shooting’ of an object to a target.

3.9 Horseracing

On the second day of Naadam, I attended the *Soyolon*, the race for five-year old geldings. It took place in the hills fourteen kilometers northwest of Ulaanbaatar. The Soyolon is considered a very special race as the dust thrown up by the horses as they thunder past the crowds lining the track brings good luck for the following year. These horses are ‘coming of age’ as their next race (the following year) will be the prestigious *Ikh Nas* for six year olds. Although none of my Mongolian companions could explain the origin of this notion (of dust for good luck) with regard to horseracing, there are references to the earth relating to wrestling. Kabzinska Stawarz asserts that it is a Mongolian belief that the earth has magic powers and acts as a

⁵⁴ Tseren, October 2006, Ulaanbaatar, personal communication

⁵⁵ Munkhtsegtsseg, September 2006, Ulaanbaatar. Personal communication.

‘protector of flourishing life’. She reports that (in former times) in the Derbert province of Western Mongolia, wrestling competitors would throw handfuls of sand at each other before a bout; Kalmyk competitors rubbed their hands in the dirt before throwing it in the air; other wrestlers would ‘wash their hands’ in the sand before a bout. They did so ‘to gain strength from the earth’ (Molodykh, Kulakov cited in Kabzinska Stawartz 1991:87).

We arrived after the advertised start time for the race due to traffic congestion; the only road to and from the racing area was closed for one-way traffic before and after a race. However, we did not miss the start as it was delayed due to a controversy in the previous race. This was the *Ikhe Nas*, the most prestigious race which was embroiled in controversy and allegations of cheating; many of the first horses across the finish line allegedly did not complete the full course. This was not the first time this had happened, but was particularly contentious this year as the 800th Anniversary Naadam was the focus of national attention. There were allegations of cheating as 75 horses (out of a field of 300) came across the finish line three to four kilometers ahead of the field. It transpired that with the out-and-back type of race, some of the outgoing horses (at the back of the field) had turned around before their official turning point – so they were fresher and faster having not gone the full distance. It turned out that this was not always intentional – the children could not always control their horses when the leading horses went past. After long consultation, the horse racing commission finally determined all horses in the leading group would be disqualified.

Despite the late start, the riders and horses ambled slowly to the starting point, about half a kilometer from the finish area, where there was a collection of tents for dignitaries, owners, and the large Presidential tent with a distinctive emblem on its roof. The horses’ tails and manes were tied with red ribbons with their forelock tied up in a ‘topknot’, a decorative (and practical) tradition which has not changed since (at least) 1899; it was described by a foreign visitor: “...manes were decorated with strips of coloured silk, the long tails were bound in the middle by half a dozen red cords...” (Campbell 1902:136).

Due to the rain there was no good-luck dust during the race for five-year-olds; however good luck can also be achieved by touching the sweat of the first five winning horses as they finish the race. At the end of every horserace, spectators throng to the finishing area.

There are seven different categories of horse races during the three days of the National Naadam festival according to age grouping, each of which competes over varying distances on an undulating course, with no jumps or hurdles. There are no entry restrictions in the State Naadam, and no limit on the number of horses in each race. The distances are based on the traditional measurement of one *urtuu*, equal to nearly 30 kilometers; this was the distance between two stations in days of the horse relay postal system (Corff 1992). The categories are:

2 year olds (daaga) 15 kilometers;

3yrs (shulden) 20 Kms

4yrs (hizaalan) 25 Kms

5yrs (soyolon) 28 Kms

6-7yrs (Ikh Nas) 32 Kms

Stallions (over 5 yrs) 28 Kms.

The longest and most prestigious race is the *Ikh Nas* (adult horses six years and over). The winner of this race is considered the overall winner of Naadam races, and receives the title *Tumenii ekh* (Leader of ten thousand). This title dates back to the Naadam of 1697, after the popular win by an unknown horse owned and trained by a poor herder (Montage 1956:148).

The riders each wear a number, on brightly coloured tunics and trousers; some still wear the traditional conical fabric hat although by law they should wear hard hats. Each trainer or owner has their own colour combination, which is a personal choice and does not appear to carry any other significance, such as province of origin, tribe or ethnic group. Traditionally their hats were adorned with embroidered emblems,

such as a butterfly for lightness, a bird for swiftness or three bright circles representing good luck (Montague 1956:154).



The riders are young children, both boys and girls. Although Montague (1956) argues that this is a ‘modern’ innovation, an account by Campbell (1902) mentions the young age of the riders over a hundred years ago ‘...the jockeys were the smallest boys capable of riding the distance...’ (1899:136). The reference book ‘Information Mongolia’ states that adults used to ride the racehorses, but this was because horses were originally raced unbroken (Academy of Sciences MPR 1990:260). It does not record when the change to juvenile

Figure 18. Young rider finishing Karakorum Naadam 2006. D Rhode

riders was made. As the purpose of the race was to determine the best-trained and fastest horse, the ideal rider was as light as possible and not strong enough to manipulate the horse. However in recent years this is becoming more controversial as children’s rights advocates are questioning the safety and ‘use’ of young children riding in these races, as it can be dangerous; serious injuries are not uncommon and there are occasional deaths. In 2006, forty children fell from their horses and twenty horses died⁵⁶. Some changes have been introduced, and saddles and safety helmets are now required; children must be insured and the minimum age was raised to seven. However, despite the legislation and awareness of safety issues (see Appendix V) the regulations are not enforced. Although the owners should provide saddles and hard hats, I noticed that some riders did not have either.

As the riders gathered at the starting area, they walked their horses slowly around the tethering line and ‘sang’ the *gingoo* - a ritual performed by child riders before or after a race. The *gingoo* is not a song with words but a gentle humming or ‘cooing’ sound; the sound is also used to encourage horses to race well. Before the *gingoo*, a prayer is said to protect both the horse and rider from misfortune; the prayer is in the Tibetan language and was written by Zanabaazar, the first Mongolian Living

⁵⁶ Tsetseg, August 2007, email communication.

Buddha. When all riders are assembled, they peel off from the circle and begin to walk to the starting point following an official with a flag. Four-wheel drive cars, jeeps and an ambulance follow the horses. The horses gradually increase in speed from a walk to a trot, and then break into a gallop as they get to the starting post.

Watching the horse races was a ‘day out in the countryside’ with friends and family, as people spread out over the vast area with tents, folding chairs, rugs and picnics. There were tents selling refreshments, cool drinks, soup and the traditional Naadam meat pasty (*khoshuur*). The entertainment during the afternoon included watching many different styles of parachute demonstrations, flying kites and riding on horse carts. (My older respondents commented that during the communist era there were many parachute demonstrations in the Naadam Stadium itself).

About an hour and a half after the start of the race, the first horses came into view in the distance and the crowds moved towards the barriers to watch as they galloped along the final straight, flanked by vehicles and adult riders on the inside of the straight. There were many spectators on horseback that enjoyed the superior view. The first five horses home were escorted across the finishing line by an adult rider galloping by their side. They carried aloft a stick with a place number and tied with flowing *khutags* (silk scarves), often blue and green symbolizing horses running between earth and sky, but also other colours – white symbolizing purity, yellow symbolizing Buddhist teaching, and red symbolizing fire. Titles are given to the first five horses, known collectively as the *airag turuii* (*airag* five), as they are anointed with mare’s milk (*airag*) on their success. This used to take place immediately after the completion of the race, but for the National Naadam the official prize giving takes place in the Stadium on the last day of Naadam.

Early in the morning of the third day of Naadam, the two-year old horse race was held in the rolling hills outside Ulaanbaatar. This race is for the youngest horses and it is their first race, known as the ‘teething race’ of the racehorses of the future.



Figure 19. Display of horsemanship, Karakorum August 2006. Photo D. Rhode

Because of its special status, there are certain rituals and traditions associated with the race: according to one of my informants, at dawn on the first day of Naadam the trainers will look at the colours of the sunrise to ‘see’ which horse will win the two-year old race⁵⁷.

In this race the last-placed horse is given special acknowledgement. As it approaches the finishing line a song is sung in its honour for the next Naadam,

‘the horse’s fame will rise like the sun to glitter like gold’

Yunden, Zorig and Erdene 1991.

The song is known as *bayon hodood*, the literal translation being ‘rich stomach’; in other words, the horse was too fat to go fast. An informant advised me that it was also to encourage the horse (and no doubt the rider) and acknowledge that taking part in Naadam was an important tradition. This informant also advised me that the colour of the horse in last place in this race will predict the weather conditions of the following winter, whether it will be ‘light’ or ‘dark’⁵⁸. Horses in Mongolia do not have ‘personal’ names (they are not ‘pets’) but are known by their colour, markings and characteristics (e.g. ‘fast grey’, ‘sleek bay’); in competition this descriptive is preceded by their owner’s name. These descriptions are extensive; there is an almost limitless number of colour/marking/characteristic adjectival phrases in the Mongolian language. A herdsman can know each horse in his herd by this adjectival combination.

⁵⁷ Bolor, March 2008, Christchurch, New Zealand, personal communication

⁵⁸ Bolor, March 2008, Christchurch, New Zealand, personal communication.

The Horse and Mongolian National Identity

Horses have been intrinsic to the lifestyle of the nomadic people of the Central Asian steppe for millennia, and were considered an essential component in the foundation of the Mongolian State. According to one historian: “The Mongols built their empire on the horse, just as the British 700 years later built theirs on ships” (Onon 2001:xiv). Chinggis Khan is credited with creating the *orto*, a horse relay system that operated throughout the territory of the Empire, and forerunner to the ‘pony express’ of the American West. Fresh horses were stationed at pre-arranged depots across the country, 40 kilometers apart, and messengers could ride up to 300 kilometers a day. As they approached town they sounded a horn to signal the need for a fresh horse, so the changeover was speedy; an imperial decree took 40 days to cover about 6000 kilometers (Stewart 2000:92).

Mares are used for breeding and milking only, they are never raced; the idea of racing mares was so incomprehensible that many respondents were genuinely surprised to learn that mares compete equally with geldings in many parts of the world. In the Mongolian language the direct translation of ‘horse race’ is ‘fast gelding race’; stallions compete in a separate category.

Mare’s milk is today a staple of the Mongol nomadic diet, in the form of butter, cream, yoghurt and cheese. When fermented, mare’s milk is turned into a slightly alcoholic beverage known as *airag*, which is highly prized for its health benefits and consumed in copious quantities throughout the summer months, by both urban and rural Mongolians. It is associated with the spiritual realm and is used in sacred ceremonies in both Buddhist and shamanic rituals.

The symbolic significance of the horse was demonstrated in the annual tribute of the Khans of the Khalka aimags to the Emperor in Peking during the Qing era, which comprised of eight white horses and a white camel (‘the nine whites’) (Curtain 1908:12). The horse has been a recurrent symbol of Mongolian identity as an icon on

State emblems in 1940 and 1961; a new emblem (without a rider) was adopted by the new democratic state in 1991 (Bulag 1998:224–258, and Emblems). This iconography is perhaps related to the protective deities, particularly those worshipped in the form of armed heroes on horseback; “...their task is to defend men, to keep them from misfortune and to increase their possessions”, which Heissig (1970) argues is of pre-Buddhist origin and associated with the worship of the *Geser Khan* and *Sulde Tengri* (1970:84).



1940 State Emblem



1960 State Emblem



1992 State Emblem

The association of the horse with the spiritual realm is a frequent theme in Mongolian mythology and history. In the fourteenth century, Ibn Battuta noted that horse races were organised in connection with the burial ceremony of Mongolian rulers; however this practice was not confined to the Mongolian culture, as it was also found among Turks and other Asian peoples. It was a sign of the prestige of the deceased person and the esteem in which he was held. After death, a person is said to ascend to heaven on horseback (Hyer 1979:144). Kabzinska-Stawarz finds that in ceremonial situations the horse is a symbol of change (1991:93), which is perhaps related to the idea of ascending to heaven – symbolically transferring to another realm.

Carole Pegg suggests that horseracing was originally linked to ‘aspersion or libation rituals known as *julag* which offered the *primutae* or first-milk, to Heaven and consecration of the mares’ which were then released to run free (2001:214). In a temple Naadam, the winning horse was presented to the monastery where it ran free

for the remainder of its life (1941:247). In 1902 Campbell noted that the successful horses at Naadam were presented to the Bogd Khan ‘who maintains them for the rest of their lives in honourable idleness’ (Campbell 2000:132). Lattimore (1941) argued that horses were raced for ‘conspicuous waste’ as the winning horse was consecrated with airag, and then given away. However this suggests to me (see page that the horserace was a symbolic sacrificial act, the victory was *for* the high lama or *for* the Bogd Khan and giving away the winning horse was the ultimate offering (sacrifice).

The Horse Trainer (*uyach*)



The trainer has traditionally been the most important person associated with Naadam races, the honour of the winning title traditionally went to the trainer - rather than the owner or rider. A good trainer requires patience, knowledge and respect for the horse, qualities that are valued in Mongolia. The Mongolian name for horse-trainer is *uyach*, which comes from the name of the rope strung between two poles to tether a horse (*uyaa*). Horses are tethered to stop them from over-eating.

Figure 21. Winning Horse and Trainer⁵⁹

The role of the trainer is also to keep the horse in good condition and underweight; the word *uyach* (trainer) literally means ‘to prevent from eating’ – the implication meaning that a horse who eats too much cannot win. There is a taboo on selling the rope used to lead a horse (the bridle and halter do not have any such restriction) (Hyer 1979:153). I was unable to find the significance of this practice.

⁵⁹ Photo of horse and trainer from ‘Horses of Mongolia’, Sh. Gankhuyag, Published Ulaanbaatar 2009. Reprinted with permission of author.

Status of horse ownership

Ownership of successful Naadam horses has once again become a status symbol for the newly rich in Ulaanbaatar, as it was for the nobility of earlier times in Mongolia. During the communist era (1921-1990) ownership of all animals was strictly controlled and it varied in different areas of the country; for example, herders living in Henteii province were allowed to own 100 animals, in the Gobi 125 animals. People living in urban areas were prohibited from owning livestock, so it was only the herders from the countryside who owned and trained horses, and many horses were owned by the collective farms (*negdel*).

A current issue that is of concern to many is the introduction of non-Mongolian horses in the horse races. Arabian horses are faster and are expensive, thereby disadvantaging the ‘everyday herder’ – and returning Naadam horseracing to an event for the elite. One horse trainer that I spoke to felt this was not a good thing for the ‘spirit of Naadam’ or for the future of Mongolian horseracing. He felt that it would eventually result in the elimination of Mongolian horses in races, and would restrict the ownership of racehorses to ‘executives and corporations’ rather than horse breeders and ordinary herders. He felt it was not only changing the focus of racing from trainer to owner, but devaluing the horse in Mongolian imagery, mythology and iconography⁶⁰. According to Kabzinska-Stawarz, racing horses out of season also showed a lack of respect for the deities (1991:116), an argument that was validated by Professor Dulam (personal conversation 2006).

3.10 Summary

I have endeavoured to show how the Naadam Games are more than just sport, as they are closely identified with mythological and spiritual aspects of the Mongolian worldview, and have an ancient connection to the Mongolian people by way of folklore, cultural traditions and also the environment.

⁶⁰ S. Gankhuyag, September 2006, personal communication.

The rituals embedded in the Games are uniquely Mongolian and a source of pride and identity. The ceremonial movements of the wrestlers before and after a bout (*devich*) is performed to show pride and prowess; the *uukhai* and *sambaryn*, the ceremonial cry and arm gestures of the archery officials, all recall ancient practices that remind the Mongolian people of their shared identity and connection to their past. By utilizing traditional wrestling techniques attributed to ancient hunting practices, maintaining the centuries-old design of bows and arrows of ancient warriors and engaging in long distance horse-races that simulate hunting and raiding practices across the Steppe, the participants in the Naadam Games are reflecting and embodying a strong bond with the past which is being continually etched on the minds of the people as they watch the Games.

The Games became the Mongol mode of divine offering, I suggest, because they evolved from essential features of everyday life on the Central Asian steppe, and were compatible with the environmental conditions. Each of the Naadam games contain references of communication with the spirit world, and are imbued with rituals to ensure that these are carried out, and passed on, to the acceptance of the deities. The concept that the Naadam Games, as with many ancient games festivals, may have been associated with elements of sacrifice can be seen in the former practice of giving up the winning horse to ‘run free’. It is made relevant today by the preservation of the tradition of touching the sweat of successful horses and wrestlers (the by-product of the sacrifice of energy) for gaining luck and good fortune.

Callois builds on the notion of the ‘civilising’ effect of games as they have rules which encourage respect, discipline and co-operation. Sansone also argues that the concept of ‘fair play’ can also be attributed to ancient rituals where sportsmanship and fair play was important, and victory was not the only goal. The wrestlers’ rites both before and after a contest are heavily imbued with shamanic ritual and symbolism, the ‘innate sacredness’ which the wrestler takes to the contest.

Falassi argues that sports competitions are an important way for society to reinforce its own moral codes, which resonates with the Durkheimian argument that societies worship themselves. In the past, in a society based on meritocracy, games demonstrated the creation of hierarchy from equality (Huizinga 1938); wrestlers were epic heroes and ‘personified the strength, skill and courage of the ideal man’. Success at Naadam games not only selected the best warriors, it incurred great status so became a route to positions of leadership. A successful archer raised the status of the group he represented. Today, a Naadam title still carries considerable status and a Naadam champion is considered an elite member of society. Guttmann (1998) suggests that winning and gaining titles is ‘a uniquely modern form of immortality’ in much the same way as competing to appease the deities (cited in Dyck 200:18).

Connerton proposes that the social memory that is inherent in commemorative performances is displayed in the use of the body: he argues that ‘performity cannot be thought without a concept of habit, and habit cannot be thought without a notion of bodily automatisms’ (1989:5). The moves and rituals that are embodied in the wrestler and the archer are now performed as habits, but they are physical examples of ‘cultural traditions’ that are demonstrated, remembered and understood. The rituals ‘remind the performers of systems of classification which the group holds to be important; it requires also the exercise of habit-memory’ (1898:88). A discussion on the purpose of rituals to bring a sense of unity is discussed more fully in the next chapter.

Today, a successful wrestler symbolically personifies the ‘model Mongolian Man’ in stature, strength and courage. A good wrestler must not only embody strength and agility, but also intelligence and honour. Although many of the ritual moves and stances of the wrestler are codified, they allow for some individual interpretation so the wrestler is also judged on his agility and grace, such as in the moves of the *devich*. As in ancient Greece, the ‘body’ of the athlete is, in itself, an important aspect of the ritual performance, as Bourdieu (1990) proposes ‘some things we understand only with our bodies, outside conscious awareness, without being able to put our understanding into words... (S)porting practices are practices in which

understanding is bodily. Very often, all you can say: ‘Look, do what I’m doing’” (Bourdieu 1990:166 cited in Dyck 2000:24). The embodied nature of the Naadam games would, I suggest, be an interesting topic for further study.

I propose that the Naadam Games remain popular and relevant today as they are ancient enactments of shared and valued cultural traditions played out in a modern context, a means by which Mongolians can link modernity and tradition: they can assert their modernity while maintaining their traditional culture and values, and maintain commonality with their fellow citizens both rural and urban, nomadic and settled (Schein 1999). To contextualize the modern Naadam festival and to locate its central importance in the Mongolian worldview, the next chapter will trace the evolution of the festival from its ancient origins prior to the establishment of the Mongol Nation, and trace its adaptation and evolution into a Ceremony of State in the early twentieth century.

4. THE GENESIS OF THE NAADAM FESTIVAL



Figure 22. "Naadam feast" painted by L. Dar'suren, 1967 ⁶¹

... the festival roots can be traced in the culture to such Central Asian nomadic tribes as Huns, Scythians and Turks. As early as 3000BC the holiday became a regular event when all the nomad tribes would come together to show the best of their physical strength, riding and shooting skills, qualities vital for the survival of the nomadic herders Mongol Naadam⁶²

While a lack of empirical evidence prevents scholastic verification of the above statement, it nevertheless serves to demonstrate the romantic claim that the Mongolian people make to their ancient festival of Naadam and their identity as descendents of the steppe nomads. The origins of Naadam are steeped in history and in all probability had a slow evolution from simple rituals essential to life, to that of extensive Games Festivals to prepare for war.

⁶¹ From K Petrie 2006:

⁶² Mongol Naadam, from www.mongolia800.mn, retrieved 10 June 2007.

Turner (1986) suggests that ‘some see drama as coming out of story-telling round the old campfire where hunting or raiding achievements were vividly and dramatically retold with miming of the events and roles’ (Turner 1986:27). This scenario appeals very directly to the ‘evolution’ of Naadam from a religious votive ritual associated with hunting, to a contemporary performance celebrating Mongolia’s National Day. Although the word ‘Naadam’ was not used for these early ceremonies, it was from these early games festivals that many of the present rituals originated.

In this thesis I suggest that the traditions and rituals performed in the Naadam Festival, during both the Opening Ceremony and the Games, have importance and meaning today as they have become intrinsically embedded into the spiritual and social consciousness of the Mongolian people over the centuries. To understand why the Naadam festival holds such iconic and symbolic significance today, it is necessary to explore the sources of these traditions and discuss why they have become important and relevant in the Mongolian worldview. As Turner points out, performance is always in process and linked to social factors which change and evolve; it is therefore useful to examine the performative history of Naadam in the social context of the nomadic lifestyle of the Central Asian Steppe tribes. To gain a fuller understanding of a contemporary performance, its links with earlier performances of the same type need to be examined (Turner 1986:27).

This Chapter examines the origins of the Naadam festival by relating the many and varied occasions at which the three games were performed in association with religious rituals and folk festivals, and link them to the social, political and religious factors in the wider society. The early festivals were likely a response to environmental, spiritual or shamanic influences to attract the attentions of and appease the deities, rather than to assert power over other individuals as became the case in later years. Rituals to depict and reinforce power structures were not essential aspects of egalitarian hunting societies, although regular communal activities to promote social harmony would have been important. King (2006) suggests that an important facet of games was to facilitate communal relations as members of aboriginal clans needed to gather regularly and ‘affirm their special bond of unity to each other

ecstatically; in order to exist, the maintenance of group affinity had to be practiced repeatedly' (King 2006:251). I propose that the practice and performance of this games festival, although they were manifestly performed for spiritual purposes, served an important social function in creating a communal bond.

In his study of traditional societies, Robertson-Smith (1889) proposes that the rituals involved in primitive religions had primacy over beliefs, as it was the group action of performing the rituals that brought people together: "Religion did not exist for the saving of souls but for the preservation and welfare of society" (cited in Morris 1987:113). It was therefore essential for the welfare of the group that an existing state of community or solidarity be acted out and reinforced for it to be maintained.

A communal activity that draws on collective emotion to create a sense of unity and solidarity has been well recognized by anthropologists in the analysis of public ritual performances (Turner 1984; Kertzer 1988; Connerton 1989, Penrose 1993). The sharing and mutual understanding of the rituals attached to the games could promote a state of well-being and harmony, defined by Turner as 'communitas'. Communitas is the state of positive emotion in being 'at one' with others in a group, derived from a common understanding of symbols and meanings and a shared identity. I suggest that this aspect of the Naadam festival was as important hundreds of years ago as it is today. Cohen (1985) adds that such occasions promote social unity as '...it unites them in their opposition, both to each other and to those outside. It thereby constitutes, and gives reality to, the community's boundaries' (Cohen 1985:21). This will be discussed more fully in Chapter Six in relation to cultural boundaries and the symbolic role of Naadam in cultural and national identity.

Why have wrestling, horseracing and archery become so emblematic of Mongolian life? I suggest that it was a combination of environmental, physical and pragmatic factors, and that the spiritual and 'magic' rituals associated with them evolved in response to a communal need to understand and create order in their world. According to an anthropological study into the games of chance, skill and strategy (Roberts, Arth & Bush 1959) found that one of the determining factors for the predominance of a

particular type of games chosen by groups of people (or nations) were environmental conditions. I believe this study sheds light on the particular choice of games that are now part of the Mongolian sporting repertoire, as reflecting both their ecological and social circumstances. In their study, the authors concluded that ‘games of strategy may be associated with mastery of the social system; games of chance may be related to responsibility and achievement, *and games of physical skill with mastery of both the self and of the environment*’ (my italics) (ibid). The Naadam games of wrestling, archery and horseracing are each a test of physical skill requiring ‘mastery of both the self and the environment’ to be carried out successfully, as ‘similar skills were required for the maintenance of everyday life the nomadic tribes of the nation came together to display their physical strength, riding and shooting skills; qualities which were vital for the survival of nomadic herders and hunters’ (Toonstra, A. 2005).

I suggest that in their beginnings, the games festivals were important in Mongolian society as physical and symbolic enactments of communal ‘rites of passage’ (van Gennep 1907) and that this is why they have been maintained throughout the centuries as an important form of celebration. Significant events of the community in marking transitions, such as military victories, seasonal changes, thanksgiving rites, elevations of the Living Buddha and the transitions of political regimes, were all enacted with a ceremony and festival of games.

A rite of passage, according to van Gennep, is the transition from one status to another, either personally or communally, through a ritual that can be identified as having three stages: separation, margin or *limen*, and reaggregation. In the separation stage, the individual or society is either physically moved to another place, or an area is significantly marked off or consecrated for the ceremony. Naadam Festivals always take place in a separate and specially defined area; if a Naadam Stadium is not available, the ground will be sanctified in a ceremony performed by a lama. In the liminal phase the individual or society is removed (literally and metaphorically) from normal societal restraints, allowing for a feeling of ‘communitas’ or oneness with others. In the final stage the participants return to ‘everyday life’ but in a changed state. The early games festivals associated with seasonal changes, mountain and *ovoo* worship ceremonies could be understood as rites of passage, as they are performed to

enact change. For example, rain for good graze, an increase in herds or a mild winter may eventuate if the deities are successfully appeased.

4.1 The Ancient Summer Festivals: rites of worship

It is generally accepted that the present-day Naadam Festival emerged from hunting and warfare practices (Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991, Damdin 2002, Attwood 2004) that were later transformed into skills for peaceful purposes and became instrumental in worship ceremonies. It is not known exactly when the three sports of archery, wrestling and horse-racing were first performed together as a unique trio of games in the same temporal and spatial sphere, but all three games have ancient origins individually. Dr. Dulam refers to Chinese sources which mention camel and horse races during the time of the Hsiung-nu Empire; however, two other sources suggest that horseracing was the latter addition to Naadam (Croner 2006; Montague 1956). The practice of archery has ancient origins dating to the Mesolithic era, but it is recorded that formal archery contests were not performed until the eleventh century (Dashdondov 2005). Wrestling is thought to be the original Naadam sport, emerging from demonstrations of bear wrestling (as mentioned in Chapter Three). Hunting with birds (falcons and eagles) was an important aspect of the nomadic lifestyle; wrestling was also associated with hunting which is demonstrated in the ritual of the *devich* or 'eagle dance' preceding and following a wrestling bout.

A belief in the sky as the Supreme Being was the essential spiritual concept of Central Asian nomadic people. Prior to the (re)introduction⁶³ of Buddhism into Mongolia in the sixteenth century, the political, economic and spiritual life of the people was dominated by shamanism, and the power of *Tengrii*, the sky god of 'The Eternal Blue Heaven':

The Shamanist respected and worshipped the Heavens and said that everything including happiness and sufferings derived from the Heavens. In this sense, there was an inseparable relationship between the Heavens and human beings. (Onon 2001:xvii)

⁶³Buddhism (Red sect, Sakya) had been practiced for limited periods in Mongolia in the 8th and 13th centuries.

To understand the importance of the spiritual aspects of the rituals and symbols in the Games, it is helpful to have an understanding of Mongolian shamanism and the origin myths of the Mongol people; these are intertwined with the origin myth of the family of Chinggis Khan and the ancestral gods centered on Father Heaven and Mother Earth. A summary of the origin myth of the Mongols can be found in Appendix VI.

4.2 Ovoo Worship and Seasonal Marker

Dr. Dulam, Professor of Folklore Studies at the National University of Mongolia, proposes that the origins of Naadam are located in the spiritual realm, and connected to local folk festivals performed at sacred cairns (*ovoo*):

In ancient times Mongolians made the ceremony at the beginning of the summer, at the end of the spring (in thanks) for the rain and the good graze for their animals. They made this ceremony to the sky and the heaven and the master of the lands (Lord of Nature) at the *ovoo*. I think this is the origin of Naadam.

An *ovoo* is a cairn, a conically shaped pile of stones (sometimes sticks)



positioned at geographic locations which mark spiritual and spatial boundaries – the top of a hill, a border between two jurisdictions, along a road at certain auspicious sites; they are considered sacred spaces and the location of certain spirits, and special rituals are performed when passing one.

Figure 23. An *Ovoo* or cairn. Photo D. Rhode

There are many suggestions as to the ‘meaning’ of the *ovoo*. According to Viktorova (1980) Ovoo are the resting places of the spirits of deceased rulers who subsequently became spirit-lords of the area they previously ruled, while Dasheva (1984) argues that the worship of spirit-lords preceded the *ovoo*.

Other researchers link *ovoo* worship with protective magic (cited in Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991:63).

Despite the lack of concord as to the exact origin of the *ovoo*, it is generally accepted that the spirits of the *ovoo* offered protection to the people. It is customary today when approaching an *ovoo* to walk around it clockwise three times, on each round tossing a stone onto the pile. Offerings are also placed on the *ovoo* which range in content from money, vodka bottles, crutches, prayer flags and personal mementoes, presumably in accord with the individual donor's request or gratitude to the spirits. The *ovoo* ceremonies predate Buddhism, but were later adopted into the Buddhist pantheon and *ovoo* ceremonies began to be presided over by a lama (Podzdeev 1978:521). If the *ovoo* belonged to a temple, the honoured seat in the temple would be taken by the 'Living Buddha' or Khutuktu; the seating for the others guests was along strictly prescribed, formal lines following the traditional Mongolian observance of spatial hierarchy.

In her research on shepherds' games in Mongolia, Kabzinska-Stawarz found that games were performed according to the seasons. There were inside games in spring, which was still cold, and outside games in summer/autumn when nature was bountiful, in winter games were not played. The timing was not only pragmatic (in winter it was too cold for unnecessary outside activities and energy should be preserved); the games, in themselves, marked the changing of the season (1991:10). She found that summer games not only marked the change of season, but the nature of games themselves changed:

With the coming of summer they become more dynamic, the players go out from yurts (gers) and move freely in the outside... (I)n summer games the whole body is involved. One has to go to a different place, run, look for hidden objects, and sometimes to grapple with one's opponent in a fight that is won by the stronger of the two (1991:63).

In Mongolian mythology, the beginning of summertime was marked by the Lord of Nature (*lus sabdag*) descending from heaven to earth, and residing on earth until the sixteenth or seventeenth day of the mid-autumn month when he returned to the sky.

The shepherds asked for blessings and offered sacrifices to the *ovoo* which included coloured sand, rice and corn. The arrival and departure of the Lord of Nature was also honoured by organizing games (Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991:58).

For nomadic herders and shepherds, the advent of summer was the most important time of the year to give thanks to the deities. The dangers of winter were over and the return of the sun gave renewed life to the earth, giving warmth and wellbeing, providing good pasture, an abundance of milk and an increase in the herds. According to Kabzinska-Stawarz, the shepherds offered sacrifices of a ram and milk products at the *ovoo* to the guardian spirits and to the Lord of Nature. The offering in summertime was to ensure good pasture, fat and healthy animals and an increase in the herds; the autumn offering was to invoke the deities for a mild winter and survival of the animals. These ceremonies were always completed by games: 'After the ending of the sacrifice ceremony, the races, the wrestling and archers' competitions were arranged' (Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991:62).

4.3 Mountain Worship Ceremonies

Games festivals were also associated with mountain worship ceremonies, which were followed by archery and wrestling contests but not always horse racing. Mountain worship has a very long history in Mongolia and is related to the worship of deities in nature - the rivers, the trees, the grassland - but particularly high places (Heissig 1970:105).

Since 1991 the *ovoo tahligh* (mountain worship) has been reinstated with ceremonies incorporating the unique symbiosis of shamanism and Buddhism. Four mountains are considered particularly sacred in Mongolia (Sukhbaatar 2001) and the rituals at them are now attended by State dignitaries and broadcast across the nation⁶⁴. A ceremony now takes place at one of the four sacred mountains annually, rotating each year so it is held in the same place every four years, and followed by a small Naadam. Burkhan

⁶⁴ Mongolian National Television, Channel 1, August 2006; see also Pegg 2001:211.

Khaldun⁶⁵ is considered the most sacred mountain as it is the burial place of many of the Great Khans and reputed to be the burial place of Chinggis Khan, but in accordance with his wishes, the exact place is secret. Reportedly after he was buried horses trampled the entire area to eradicate all traces of a grave.

Another mountain worship ceremony was attended by one of my informants, Erdenetsetseg. She is of the Dariganga ethnic group and grew up within sight of the mountain. She recalls the event which takes place every four years at Altan Ovoo, located in the far eastern *aimag* (province) of Sukhbaatar in Dariganga *soum* (area). This sacred mountain is also known as the Golden Mound, referring to the golden-topped *stupa*⁶⁶ built on its summit. She recalled the day thus:

It was very colourful. There were so many people coming from many parts of the country. There were tents everywhere; the land is flat so the ground was covered with tents. People came with tents and gers and everything. The ceremony lasted three days. The lamas went up the mountain early morning to pray and meditate. The men went up; they took rice, tea, milk products as offerings.

The women were not allowed to go up the mountain. They walk around it. It was about four or five kilometres around. The first day they walk around it once, on the second day twice and after three days, three times.

The Naadam events take place in the stadium (in the nearby town). At the opening ceremony the President made a speech, and also the 'first Monk of Mongolia'[spoke]. There is traditional singing and other entertainments. Some of the best singers in Mongolia come; they do *khoomi*⁶⁷, *longsong*⁶⁸ and *shortsong*⁶⁹. The best wrestlers and archers and the best horses come. They have a good business. They can be a jeep, or horses or money did before 2003 when laws were made, now they cannot get a title, they get a prize.

4.4 Milk aspersion ceremonies

⁶⁵ Also now known as Kenteii Nuruu

⁶⁶ A stupa is a domed structure, and a place of worship if it contains relics

⁶⁷ *Khoomi* is also known as 'throat-singing', a deep resonant sound, traditional to northwest Mongolia

⁶⁸ *Longsong* means the words are elongated and seemingly joined together in a continuous melodic sound;

⁶⁹ *shortsong* is 'normal' singing when the individual words can be identified.

Games were also performed after ‘milk aspersion ceremonies’ (also called *koumiss* or *airag* ceremonies) which were carried out to ensure prosperity for the people and nature and ‘to multiply all the goods given to people by heaven’ (Serruys 1974). In the countryside, the first milking of the mares after the winter was a special celebration. Milk was scattered to the sky, to the earth and to the four cardinal points, symbolically including the guardian-spirits, the gods and the ancestors⁷⁰ (Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991:58).

Milk and milk products have long played a central role in all aspects of Mongolian spiritual life and appear to hold symbolic importance as a metaphor for purity and goodness, cleanliness and new life. According to Kabzinska-Stawarz, the sprinkling of *gers* with *airag* survived until the first half of the twentieth century although it ‘may be individually observed nowadays’. This is indeed the case, which I observed on several occasions when a *ger* was either put up or taken down.

The use and distribution of milk and milk products in a celebratory sphere is still used today during the prize-giving ceremony after the Naadam horse races, as described earlier, when the five winning horses are anointed with *airag*. Formerly, the winning wrestlers were given small pieces of dried curds (*arguul*) which they tossed to the crowd after their victory, in symbolic sharing of their triumph. *Airag* (fermented mare’s milk) is an important staple of the nomadic diet in summertime. It is a slightly alcoholic and is highly prized for its health benefits; it is reputed to have cleansing, healing and nutritional properties and consumed in copious quantities throughout the summer months, by both urban and rural Mongolians.

Today, in the summertime Mongolians flock to the countryside to buy *airag*, which is also brought in to the streets of Ulaanbaatar. Vendors bring supplies into the city in the early morning in wheeled milk churns or homemade carts; they call out as they walk through the lanes and people come out to collect it with plastic bottles and cans.

⁷⁰Using the third finger and thumb of the right hand, milk is ‘flicked’ - from a small bowl - to the four cardinal points, to the earth and to the sky.

It is reported that during the summer months people can live on mare's milk alone, drinking ten to twenty pints a day. It is reputed to contain all the essential food groups and considered 'detoxifying'. (Meat was considered to be mildly toxic in summer) (Bulag 2004:263). Milk products are considered a source of strength and were thought to replenish a wrestler's energy after a contest, as explained in Chapter Three. A milk-products only diet is also practiced during periods of religious (Buddhist) meditation, and is identified as a specific category of diet, known as *tsaatan idée* (white food), which can also include rice, white flour and sometime eggs. *Tsaatan idee* is known as 'pure' food.

4.5 Naadam: Holiday, Happiness and Feasting

The fundamental characteristic of Naadam has always been a time of festivity and enjoyment. Dr. Dulam asserts that, according to mythology, when the Lord of Nature came down to the earth in the summertime, he 'wanted people to be happy' so from its very beginnings Naadam has been identified as a time of happiness and joy. The political and religious (Buddhist) associations came later.

After the ceremony at the *OVVOO*, the horse racing took place. This was a good omen for the Lord of Nature; I think the Master of Lands was pleased to see that the people were happy because he liked people to enjoy themselves. This is the representation of mythology and shamanism also - *the exchanging of happiness of the Lord of Nature and the people* (my emphasis)⁷¹.

In Mongolian mythology, the happiness of the people pleased the deities, and therefore ensured successful hunting; the games were pleasing to the gods because they were enjoyed by the people. This circular argument can also be found in Greek mythology, "...the people thought what gave them pleasure would be equally gratifying to the gods" (Harris 1988:16). The notion that an ancient hunting festival was enshrined with a specific notion of 'happiness' has also been identified by Falassi (1987) who gives an example of the Point Hope Whale festival:

The festival is related to a traditional conception of hunting and a magic-ritual relationship between hunter and prey...in traditional Eskimo culture the hunt is a magic-ritual operation: the captain is a 'hunter of souls' and

⁷¹ Professor Dulam, September 2006, Ulaanbaatar. Personal communication

competes with the animals in magical knowledge. He must have the power to draw the whale to himself. The whale gives itself to the hunter, and the hunter then gives it to the people. That is why the festival stresses the point of making people happy, and people appearing happy; it must be shown to the soul of the whale that the gift is appreciated and that nothing is wasted. (Falassi 1987:262).

In the past, the Naadam festival was an occasion noted for the abundance of food and drink: 'Everybody could eat and drink to one's fill and eating and drinking itself was for the Mongols a kind of feast' (Shishmarev cited in Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991:58). People wore their best clothes, visited relatives and neighbours, and exchanged gifts of vodka and milk products. In many reports of the summer *airag* ceremonies, references are made to the large amounts of milk consumed by individuals. Koslov (1947) described similar behaviour expressed in a speech to celebrate the milk ceremony: 'the wish of their constant drinking in order to secure abundance for the people, drinking for them and for their offspring' (cited in Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991:61).

While small settlements grew up around monasteries after the introduction of Buddhism, the majority of the people remained nomadic in small family groups until the twentieth century. The Naadam celebrations in the outdoors in the warmth of the summer sun would have been occasions of great joy and an opportunity for socialisation with people outside the kin group, many of whom would travel for several days to attend. For the Mongol nomads, who lived in relative isolation and whose lives were directed by the change of seasons and the movement of the sun, the summer festivals would have held tremendous social and spiritual importance.

The isolated life of the nomadic people was not confined to antiquity. In the latter half of the nineteenth century James Gilmour (1888), an English missionary, noted the importance of Naadam as a relatively rare opportunity for social interaction:

This festival is a great meeting time for the women. Occasionally during the year Mongol women frequent marriage festivals and other ceremonies, but this mid-summer gathering is the only opportunity during the whole twelve

months that the women of the tribe have of meeting each other in one great assembly. It is only too probable that this day is the solitary holiday that many of them have all the year round. It is not to be wondered at then that considerations of worship and piety form only part of the occasion, and that it is not strange that the interchange of friendly conversation should draw away the attention of many from beholding the performance of the religious dance. With a few exceptions Mongol women are soft-hearted, and some of them, on seeing each other at this annual reunion, break down altogether, and for a time are unable to express their feelings except by sobbing and tears (Gilmour 1888:332/3).

Today, the National Naadam is a festival of celebration that takes place during summertime; it is a three-day national holiday from work which facilitates family reunions across the country and is the highlight of the summer period. Summertime is traditionally an important time for celebration, psychologically and practically. In a country where the climate is inhospitable for much of the year, it was a time to give thanks to the deities for surviving the winter⁷². The inhospitable climate and the harsh lifestyle of the nomadic people has been a major factor in the formation of much folklore and votive rituals at the end of winter, the ‘dangerous time’ for both animals and humans.

The importance of Naadam as an occasion of joy, a celebration and an instrument of hope was underscored by the following interviews coconducted by a journalist in 1992. Life was very hard for many people in Ulaanbaatar, the withdrawal of the Soviet Union had left economic and social hardship for many people:

Naadam is everything to us, said Batbulik, a student in Ulan Bator. After all the years with Russia, everything is gone, the food, the vodka, sometimes it seems, even the fun. But Naadam has been ours forever. Nobody can take Naadam from Mongolia (cited in Gluckman 1992:4).

Naadam was crucial for its ability to provide a sense of hope and joy, albeit temporarily, to the Mongolian people by being a symbol of constancy and continuity, and perhaps an opportunity for moments of *communitas* and *camaraderie*. Gluckman suggests that the celebration of Naadam increased in importance as a symbol of hope

⁷² Even today, although climatic conditions are not a matter of life or death (in urban areas which are serviced with electricity and heat) winter is still considered a ‘dark’ time.

and stability as the nation faced rationing of essential foods, economic insecurity and unemployment, which had been unknown for the past seventy years of communist rule (1992:3):

The hard times only underline the precious qualities of Naadam and the Mongols joy for it ... if anything, the ancient celebration of Naadam has grown vastly more important in a nation facing rationing of everything... Outside the barkers advertise handmade games of chance, sometimes only a dime store dartboard nailed to a tree, or a game wheel consisting of a piece of wire on a board (Gluckman 1992:3).

4.6 The festival of games becomes ‘Eriin Gurvan Naadam’

Before the introduction of Buddhism into Mongolia, the ‘festival of games’ had been an integral part of shamanic worship festivals, as discussed earlier in this chapter. It was in the seventeenth century that the *Eriin Gurvan Naadam*, the Three Games of Men, became a codified religious and political celebration and an explicitly Mongolian cultural representation.

Two significant but politically different Naadam Festivals took place in the seventeenth century which indicated a new utilization of the ancient festival, firstly in a Buddhist inauguration ceremony and later in a national/political context. Thus began the process, over the next three centuries, of the evolution of Naadam as a uniquely Mongolian Festival and the establishment of the modern National Day celebration.

One of the pretexts for introducing Buddhism into Mongolia in the fifteenth century was to unite the Mongolian nation which had become increasingly factionalized. In the fourteenth century, the Mongol Empire disintegrated and the Mongol people were subject to numerous independent entities under the leadership of princely khans; tribal factions reappeared as there was no single popular leader and no focal point of governance (Heissig 1970:83-197). Buddhism was introduced into eastern Mongolia by the Mongol princes, sometimes forcibly forbidding shamanic practices (Akiner

1991). Altan Khan, a southern Mongolian prince of the Tumet tribe, invited the Tibetan High Lama to Mongolia, and subsequently gave him the title of Dalai Lama⁷³.

On a later visit to Mongolia, the Dalai Lama bestowed the title of Khan on Abadai, who then founded his own Khanate, the Tushetu, near the old city of Karakorum. This information is relevant as it relates directly to the future of Naadam; it was the Naadam of a later Tushetu Khan that evolved into the National Day celebration of the Mongolian State three hundred years later. Abdai Khan founded the great monastery of Erdene Zuu in 1586. It was some time later that the first indigenous Mongolian reincarnation of a Tibetan Master was announced. This was Zanabaazar⁷⁴, the son of the Tushetu Khan, who was born in 1635 (Heissig 1970:105). As he was the son of nobility and a descendent of Chinggis Khan, he became the *Chakravartin* ruler embodying both the spiritual and the ruling elite.

To encourage acceptance of Buddhism and the new spiritual leadership, the nobles and high lamas of the Khalka tribes of eastern Mongolia orchestrated a Buddhist religious ceremony that incorporated some shamanic rituals, followed by celebratory feasts and the three traditional sports of wrestling, archery and horseracing (Croner 2006:14). This *danshig* (tribute) Naadam is considered by some researchers as the ‘blueprint’ for the Naadam festival today. The literal translation of the Tibetan word *danshig* is ‘the ritual for making an offering for strong life’ (Petrie 2006:28).

⁷³ Dalai means ‘oceanic’ or ‘wide’. He became the Third Dalai Lama, the previous two incarnations were created posthumously. He saw himself as the reincarnation of Phagspa Lama, the spiritual adviser of Kubilai Khan, grandson of Chinggis Khan

⁷⁴ Zanabazar was considered a reincarnation of Taranatha, a Tibetan Master who died the year Zanabazar was born. His monastic name was *Jnanavajra*, translated as ‘thunderbolt of wisdom’ (Croner 2006:10). The following two reincarnations were Mongolian, but as they became identified with anti-Manchu feeling, the Manchu dictated that all future reincarnations were to be Tibetans from impoverished backgrounds. The Eighth reincarnation, who died after the Soviets gained influence in Mongolia, was the last; as the Soviets considered the power of the church detrimental to the welfare of the people, any future reincarnation was disallowed.

This first *danshig* Naadam was staged in 1639 when at age four Zanabaazar was introduced to the eastern (Khalka) Mongols as their new spiritual leader, and elevated as the Living Buddha (Khutuktu), or ‘Bogd Geegan’⁷⁵. The Khutuktu was the third most important position in the Gelugpa (Yellow Sect) hierarchy, behind the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama (Bawden 1968:11).

...when the Seven Banners (provinces) of Khalkha got together ... and raised Öndör Gegeen [another name for the Living Buddha] to the throne at the place called Shireet Tsagaan Nuur they offered him a Danshig and so they called this the Seven Banner Danshig. From then they began to offer the Danshig to the succeeding Holy Ones (Bawden 1997b:18 cited in Petrie 2006:28).

The following year another great celebration was organised at Yesol Zuul for the people of all *aimags* (provinces) of Khalka Mongolia. Other Naadam festivals that have been recorded in this era were the occasion of Zanabaazar nineteenth birthday celebration at Erdene Zuu in 1653. In 1657 when Zanabaazar returned from religious instruction in Tibet and introduced new religious ceremonies into a *danshig* Naadam held at Erdene Zuu, the largest and most important monastery in Mongolia. It was on this occasion that he introduced the *Maitreya* ritual into Mongolia for the first time (Croner 2006:14). In the Tibetan Buddhist teaching introduced into Mongolia, the pathway to enlightenment was enacted by offering tribute and receiving teachings and blessings from an ‘enlightened being’. The *danshig* Naadam ceremony therefore was a means by which the lay people and lamas could offer prayers for the life of the Living Buddha (khutuktu) to be strengthened and extended, and also to receive blessings.

Although shamanism was proscribed, it was never eliminated and many of the symbols and rituals of shamanism were creatively synthesised into Tibetan Buddhism in an effort to gain acceptance. Lamas rewrote Buddhist prayers and created Buddhist lineages for the spirits of rivers, mountains and animals, and introduced Buddhist prayers to the spirits of the *ovoo*. In the words of Patricia Berger, ‘Mongolian ritual life was tibetanised and Tibetan Buddhism was mongolised’ (1995:149), as the

⁷⁵ He was also known as Jebtsundampa Khutuktu, being the sixteenth reincarnation, and in Tibetan the ‘blo bzand bstan pa’ tgyal mtshan’. He was also known as the Ondor Geegan.

traditional black clothes of the shaman were replaced by 'yellow-robed Buddhist shamans'. The Gelugpa (Yellow) sect became established as the 'national' religion after Zanabazar returned from another visit to Tibet, and had been converted to this tradition (Croner 2006).

Mongolia thus developed a uniquely eclectic form of Buddhism, the practice of which varied across the land under several incarnate lamas; in the east, the Jibsundamba Khutuktu held religious authority only over the Khalka Mongols (Heissig 1970:3&106). The introduction of Buddhism marked a change in social interaction as some of the nomadic people began to settle. Monasteries started to change the landscape as temples and stupas were built across the land forming small settlements, the static structures became locations of focus for the nomadic herders and sites of worship festivals. The sites chosen for monasteries were often places that already held considerable spiritual significance in the shamanist realm. They were also chosen for their geographical importance as they were often on caravan crossroads, so the lamas could remain static and the people came to them (Moses 1977:114). In this way Buddhism became a uniting force in Mongolia, and as their wealth increased, the monasteries became the location of power and a more dominant force than the khans (ibid:108).

4.7 Buddhist Temple Worship: Maitraya and Tsam ceremonies

The previously reported *danshig* Naadam to honour and pay tribute to the Living Buddha, became a large ceremonial occasion for all of eastern (Khalka) Mongolia. However, smaller local Naadam festivals also began to flourish after the introduction of Buddhism as temple worship ceremonies were incorporated into the repertoire of summer festivals held throughout the territory. The *Tsam*, the most important festival in the repertoire of Mongolian Buddhism, was a dance performance by lamas wearing outsize papier-mâché masks depicting various characters of animals, monsters and mythological characters, to the accompaniment of music and chants. There are various types of *tsam*: one is a celebration of the victory of the forces of good over the evil Tibetan king, Lang-dhama, who attempted to suppress Buddhism in favour of the traditional Tibetan shamanist *bon* beliefs (Cheney 1968:81). After the official

ceremony, the temple provided food for the people and organized Naadam games (Petrie 2006:28).

These events lasted for three days and were social as well as religious occasions which attracted people from adjacent territories: 'Local residents, dressed in their best clothes, assembled at the *Maitraya* as at a ball, to see people and to be seen' (Maiskii 1921 cited in Cheney 1968:81). The *Maitraya* Festival also lasted three days. To honour *Maitraya*, (believed to be a future reincarnation of Buddha) his image was carried either on a cart or sedan chair in a circumambulation of the temple, followed by lamas carrying volumes of the Kanjur and Tanjur (Cheney 1968:80). The people knelt as the procession passed, so the image could 'pass over them' bringing hope and blessings for the future. The performance portrays the 'Buddha of the Future' ushering a new order of peace (Hyer 1979:122/3). Games festivals followed these ceremonies.

4.8 Manchu suzerainty

The Manchu subjugated the eastern Mongols at the end of the seventeenth century, as a result of civil war between the (eastern) Khalka Mongols and the (western) Oirat Mongols vying for supremacy in northern Mongolia; as the more powerful Oirat seized their lands, the Khalka fled into southern (Inner) Mongolia. The Manchu, who had already subjugated Inner Mongolia, offered military assistance to the Khalka in return for their submission.

At the Conference of Dolon Nuur (Dolonur) in 1691 the Manchu issued their seals to Mongolian nobility; the Emperor appointed thirty four members of the Borgijid clan (the lineage of Chinggis Khan) as governing princes and conferred on each a Banner (local area of jurisdiction). Although subjects of the Manchu Emperor, the people retained their ethnic identity as they were ruled by their own Princes and thus preserved their traditional institutions of governance. Heads of temples, both secular and religious, were given authority to manage the areas surrounding their temples.

Mongolian princes were accountable to the Manchu Emperor, but the people were spiritually led by the Living Buddhas (Khutuktu), the reincarnations of Zanabaazar.

The first time Naadam was used as a celebration of liberation was in 1696 as the Khalka tribes returned to their homelands in eastern Mongolia, after the defeat of the Oirats with the assistance of the Manchu, and it became important in the imagination of unity for the Khalka Mongols. Magsarjav *Khurts* (1960), an historian whose professional life as a scribe and author began during the late Qing era, described it thus:

In ...1696 the lamas and nobles of the Khalkha Mongols came back to their old nomadizing lands, and... the nobility of the seven banners of the Khalkha held a celebration, where they offered the *danshig* (a ritual having the symbolism of making a long life firm for the Öndör Bogd), and carried out *naadam* games such as horse racing, wrestling, and archery shot at sheepskin targets (Magsarjav *Khurts* 1960, cited in Petrie 2006:29).

Many of the rituals and titles of the wrestlers, and praise-singing of the horses (*morinii tsoi*) enacted at Naadam today are believed to emanate from this Naadam. This is evidenced by the following description by a Magsarjav *Khurts* (1960), as he describes the origins of the praise-singing. He also explains the origins of the animal imagery for the titles and epithets of the archers and wrestlers:

The horse which *donir bonghor* had trained on his own came in first, winning the race, and then the title *tümnii ekh* was given [to the horse], and from the composition of the wise words in the chanting of the title came the rules to chant the title for the first horse, and to call the leaders in the wrestling's feats of strength *lion* and *elephant*, and the awarding of titles to wrestlers who wrestled with good deftness, each one of the powerful and deft birds, such as kestrel falcon, peregrine falcon, eagle, and hawk: research has revealed the origin of these pleasurable odd words to be from the Mongols of the era when they still went hunting wild beasts (Magsarjav *Khurts* cited in Petrie 2006:21/2).

It became known as the 'Seven Banners Danshig Naadam' (Doloon Khoshuuny danshig Naadam), which referred to the original seven banners of the Khalka Mongols, which was now represented by the four aimags of the Tusheet Khan,

Tsetsen Khan, Zasagt Khan and Sain Noyon Khan; it became a unifying event for the Khalka Mongols under Buddhism. It was performed once every three years as it was an expensive and extravagant affair for which people travelled great distances.

Whereas the previous *danshig* Naadams had been solely to honour and venerate the Living Buddha (*Khutuktu*), after 1696 Naadam incorporated the political involvement of the Manchu emperor. It was at Naadam that the dualistic role of church and state, under the ultimate authority of the divine power of the Manchu Emperor, was publicly enacted; it also marked the establishment of Naadam being utilised as a vehicle for a public demonstration of 'the order of governance'. This could be understood as a change from a ritual performance through the agency of the people, to a spectacle orchestrated by the state bureaucracy (Handleman 1990). Handleman argues that a spectacle is controlled by the bureaucracy, when agency is contained within or by the bureaucracy and not the individual. For the Mongolian herders who did not use a written language, performance was also an important and effective avenue for the transmission of information and to make public the political hierarchy.

Throughout the summer months, smaller local Naadams also took place at monasteries for lay patrons to present a Mandala to incarnate lamas (Atwood 2004:396) and also at *ovoo* and mountains spirit worship ceremonies. Secular Naadam festivals were held by princes to mark important occasions, such as a marriage or affirmation of rights of inheritance; also popular were lengthy 'war games' that were contests of archers and wrestlers held at the headquarters of a prince, and sometimes at a monastery. According to Maiskii (1921) archery contests comprised the best archers from the *khoshun* (administrative district) who competed in forty-five day contests in Urga (now Ulaanbaatar), (cited in Cheney 1986:81).

The *danshig* Naadam remained an important festive occasion for Mongols throughout the Manchu era (1691-1911); it made public the order of governance as well as being an important social occasion for the nomadic people. In feudal Mongolia, society was

significantly polarized; high-ranking lamas and nobles maintained a considerable class difference from commoners (herders) and low ranking lamas. Munkh-Erdene (2004) asserts that during Qing suzerainty the Manchu and Mongol nobles had more in common, socially and economically, than that between Mongol herders (*arats*) and Mongol nobles (Munkh Erdene 2004). The Mongol nobility adopted many of the social mores of the Qing court, and the higher classes adopted many of the manners of the Manchu. Some of these Manchu customs were synthesized into the Mongol cultural repertoire and became ‘naturalized’, although initially only among the elite, and can be seen today in some of the rituals in the official ceremony of Naadam.

In 1778 a special edict was issued by the Manchurian Emperor, which ‘defined the situations in which the Mongols could organize their games called ‘*Naadam*’ and stipulated the ceremonial content for the Naadam festival as an official civic celebration. Local festivals were not subject to regulations, such as *OVOO* and mountain worship, or for the presentations of gifts, offerings and sacrifices to the head of the Lamaist church, or religious feasts of the secular and liege lords to celebrate the conferment of their titles (Kabzinska-Stawartz 1991:62). This remains the same today; the National Naadam on 11th July must be organized in accordance with national government legislation; however private or local Naadam festivals are not prescribed and can be organized for any occasion, such as weddings, anniversaries or birthdays and by any individual or organisation.

The Qing Emperor continued the Mongolian tradition of recognizing and rewarding successful wrestlers; their ranks were raised when they visited foreign countries, and the Manchu also gave them numerical ranks. Records show that in 1723 wrestlers were invited to Dolanuur (now Inner Mongolia) and Peking to demonstrate Mongolian wrestling techniques (Damdin 1960). During the Manchu period there was no ‘national’ Naadam festival as we know it today, as each banner (area of command) organised its own festivals within that jurisdiction. The *danshig* Naadam was performed every three years until after the reincarnation of the 8th Bogd Khan in 1874, when it was held annually. It remained a Khalka cultural and religious celebration during Manchu suzerainty, and although it was an occasion when the Mongolian

nobility were able to meet, it was sanctioned by the Manchu as they considered it a religious rather than civic occasion, and so not a threat to their authority. However towards the end of the nineteenth century the Naadam in the Tusheet Khan's Banner (which took place in the capital city, later Ulaanbaatar) did enable all the nobles to meet regularly, which was perhaps important in the planning for the declaration of independence in 1911. This is discussed more fully in the next chapter.

Although at this point it is conjecture (and perhaps worthy of future study), I suggest that during the Qing era the wrestling contests could also have been a metaphorical contest and forum for negotiating hostilities between the elite⁷⁶; a public enactment of the relationship between the church and state without direct or open confrontation depicting a rivalry that could not be openly expressed (Geertz 1983:60). The wrestlers were sponsored by the nobles and high lamas, portraying the dual role each played in the governance of the Mongol khanates under the Qing Emperor. According to Carruthers (1914:225) the church was most often successful (the lamas being accorded higher honour than the nobles). Montague reports that later, 'the games became corrupted – it was forbidden to defeat the wrestlers of the great princes and lamas' (Montague 1956:148). Even after socialism was introduced, the tensions remained: Pegg records that 'wrestling contestants represented their patrons in bouts that sometimes resulted in death' (Pegg 2001:211), and Atwood (2004) reports that 'the rivalry between the clerical and lay estates continued and became more dangerous; after a lama won the 1939 wrestling competition in the midst of the antireligious campaign, he was arrested and sentenced to 15 years in prison' (Atwood 2004:396).

There is conflicting opinion regarding the impact of Manchu suzerainty on Naadam in the early nineteenth century. According to Jagchid (1988), Emperor Jen-tsung issued a

⁷⁶The monasteries began to accumulate wealth and also became sources of education, which brought them into opposition with the nobles, who had previously been the only land-owners and also controllers of literacy (Heissig 1970:34).

decree warning Mongols not to give up their old traditions, and later Emperor Hsuan-tsung (1828) issued an edict emphasizing that:

...the Mongol tradition was to practice archery and horsemanship and to follow a simple way of life without luxuries. He noted that Chinese customs were wasteful nonsense. He advised the Mongols to “keep their good traditions and refine their techniques in archery and horsemanship” (Jagchid 1988:200).

However, Mongolia was also an important physical barrier between China and Russia, it was therefore in the Chinese interest to keep the Mongols in a state of military readiness, should they be necessary for defence purposes.

Summary

In this Chapter I have endeavoured to show how a ubiquitous games festival was adopted into the Mongolian cultural repertoire to become a symbol of Mongolian identity. This has been achieved, I argue, due to its continual adaptation and transformation, building on what has been before and adopting new features and rituals according to changing circumstances. From a form of sacrifice and a gift to the deities, it developed in to a shamanistic folk worship festival related to hunting. It was adopted as a military victory celebration under Chinggis Khan and later incorporated into a Buddhist tribute festival to pay respect to the Living Buddha.

After the submission of the Mongols to the Manchu, this Buddhist tribute festival, the *danshig* Naadam, became an important and highly visual medium by which the political order was made known, as the princes and nobility paid respects to the Living Buddha, but under the ultimate spiritual authority of the Qing Emperor. By using ritual as a collective text to provide ‘the official version of the political structure’, the Mongolian people were presented with (and by their attendance, invited to confirm) changes in political power relations through the public performance of Naadam (Connerton 1989:50).

The ubiquitous nature of the Naadam games as I have outlined in this chapter, confirms that they are more than ‘mere sport’ and must contain intrinsic value as an important and valued cultural manifestation. The rituals, rules and regulations have made each of the games uniquely Mongolian and can be seen to have emanated from a nomadic heritage, from which the Mongolian people identify. I argue that it is due to the longevity of the rituals in the Mongolian cultural repertoire, and that they have been enacted and re-enacted over generations that they have become part of the ‘habitual memory’ of the Mongolian people (Connerton 1989).

The next chapter will examine the transitions of Naadam in the twentieth century, when the Festival underwent its most comprehensive and encompassing transformations. At the turn of the century Mongolia was nearing the end of its tenure as a suzerain of China, and the Naadam Festival in the capital city was a religious tribute festival of the Khalka nobles and princes, to honour and pay respects to the Living Buddha. The chapter will describe how four significant changes of political regime were enacted and made public through changes and substitutions of place, position and symbols in the official ceremony of Naadam, while maintaining the traditional ritual configuration.

5. NAADAM IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Figure 24. The state seals of the MPR and USSR in Naadam Parade (Petrie 2006:203; Tsend et al.)

World political events beyond the boundaries of Mongolia, as well as a groundswell of internal unrest, resulted in dramatic and far-reaching changes in the political and social landscape of Mongolia in the early years of the twentieth century. The Japanese confrontation with Russia (which saw Mongolia as a useful ally), the independence claims of Tibet (which made China anxious about Mongolia's succession from the Empire), the civil war in China and events leading to the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, all had an impact on the future of Mongolia (Balstrode 1920:x). Internally, both the nobles and the herdsmen were beginning to rebel under the weight of Qing suzerainty. Mongolia underwent three significant

political and social transformations, in 1911, 1921 and 1991, and those in power actively engaged in reconstructing the country's identity and focus.

This chapter briefly reconstructs and analyses the transformations of the power structure in twentieth century Mongolia from the cessation of suzerainty under the Qing dynasty, followed by ten years of political turmoil and uncertainty, to the emergence of an 'independent' Mongolia in 1921. Many of these societal, religious and political changes were effected in the transformations and substitutions that took place in the Naadam Festival, as it was progressively transformed from a festival of religious tribute to a celebration of military honour and a new national identity. By carefully orchestrated choreography in the spatial relations of the official audience and political enactments within the formal ceremony, the gradual transference of power from that of religion to that of the state, represented by the military, was conveyed. This took place over several years as the Naadam festival remained a central performance in the political and social repertoire of the Mongolian people. Changes can be made acceptable, Cohen argues, when done within an already established ritual framework, as 'the appearance of continuity is so compelling that it obscures people's recognition that the form itself has changed' (Cohen 1985:91).

I will now outline some of the important events that contributed to the declaration of an independent Mongolia, as it is useful to be conversant with the crucial role played by the Russians, and later the Soviets, in this outcome.

5.1 Mongolia declares independence

Unrest between Mongolia and the Qing Empire started at the end of the nineteenth century when the previous Manchu policy of non intervention gave way to the Chinese 'New Policies' programme of settlement in Mongolia, which began to adversely affect all strata of society - religious, rural and urban (Bawden 1968:189). The nobles had become increasingly indebted to Chinese merchants as trade was almost completely in the hands of Chinese bankers; debts often resulted in herds and

flocks being confiscated for repayment. Chinese farmers were officially encouraged to settle border lands to use for cultivation, encroaching on pastoral lands of the nomads thereby depriving the Mongolian herders of their means of production. The power of the nobles had also diminished as the wealth and authority of the lamas of the Buddhist church increased (Heissig 1970). The ruling princes of the Khalka Mongols felt they no longer had an alliance with the Manchu (to whom they submitted in 1691), and that Mongolia was being actively colonized by the Han Chinese (Bulstrode 1920: xi; Carruthers 1913:309).

The Mongol nobles and influential lamas determined that their terms of submission to the Qing Empire had been violated; however overt insurrection was difficult to organize in a colonized land with no central authority. The Naadam festivals held in Ulaanbaatar in the early years of the twentieth century may have been occasions for the Khalka nobles and their Spiritual Leader, the Living Buddha (Khutuktu), to meet and discuss the prospect of independence. The Manchu had placed travel restrictions on the position of the Living Buddha in 1691, no doubt to avoid possible uprising (Moses 1977:106). However they had sanctioned the annual assembly of nobles and lamas at Naadam which they had perceived as a purely religious ceremony, therefore Naadam had become an arena in which the Mongolian nobility and high lamas could meet for many days in a 'liminal' setting away from the usual structures of everyday life (Turner 1982) without attracting undue notice from the Chinese authorities.

The liminality of Naadam could have facilitated this process as the princes, nobles and high lamas would have had the opportunity to 'imagine' a new form of governance for Mongolia. The declaration of independence was declared before the Qing Empire officially disintegrated; it was related but not the exclusive cause. A united group of Khalka nobles and influential lamas formally declared Mongolia's independence from China on December 1, 1911.

"Because our Mongolia was originally an independent country, we have now discussed and decided to establish a new independent state, based on our old tradition, without the interference of others in our own rights". (Cited in Kotkin 1999:52)

The Qing Governor was expelled from Outer Mongolia and a provisional government was established in Ikh Khuree (Ulaanbaatar), with five state Ministries. The break with China was also symbolically and practically marked by ‘resetting time’ and Mongolia reverted to the Buddhist lunar calendar⁷⁷. It was announced that the spiritual leader, the Living Buddha (Khutuktu) would be elevated in status and known as the *Bogd Khan* (Holy Ruler), becoming head of both secular and religious estates. The five government ministers⁷⁸ of the new independent Mongolian government were all Khalka Mongols; thus the Khalka customs and traditions increasingly became hegemonic nation-wide. The Western territories of Khobdo and Uliasutai had not been under the authority of the Khutuktu but ruled directly from Peking through an *amban* (representative). They also submitted to the Bogd Khan and their Qing governor was replaced by a Khalka military governor, although their nobles were not represented in government (Petrie 2006:115).

5.2 The First Naadam of Independent Mongolia

It was after Mongolia declared independence from China that the Naadam Festival began to take on a new and significant role in the Mongols’ imagination of their new State. In 1912, a Naadam was organized for the first time by a member of the central government, thus becoming an official ceremony of State (Petrie 2006). It was renamed ‘The Great Games’ (*Ikh Naadam*) and declared to be the Naadam for all Mongols, and appears to have been a state-building gesture by the fledgling autonomous government as competitors and spectators were invited from all over the country. It was the first time that all Mongols had attended a ‘nation-wide’ *danshig* Naadam, to express devotion and pay tribute to the new head of state (Atwood 2004:396).

It was at this Naadam that the new order of governance for autonomous Mongolia was publically demonstrated. The newly elevated *Bogd Khan* (Holy Ruler) was given

⁷⁷ During submission to the Qing, the year was marked as the year of the Qing Emperor’s reign (Petrie 2006:87)

² Ministries of Finance, War, Justice, Internal Affairs and Foreign Affairs

jurisdiction of all Mongolia, not just the Khalka banners. The Naadam was orchestrated to celebrate the independent status of ‘Outer Mongolia’, and formally and symbolically represent a centralized all-Mongolian governance for the first time since the *quriltai* (tribal meetings) under Kubilai Khan.

Mongolia had not been a single, autonomous political entity since the dissolution of the Mongol Empire in the fourteenth century, but had consisted of many tribal units ruled by numerous princes and khans. After submission to the Manchu in 1691, Outer Mongolia was governed under the Banner system⁷⁹ of the Qing Empire, and during this time Naadam festivals had been regional and organized by the princes (*noyens*) of the Mongolian nobility. The *noyens* had jurisdiction of their Banner but were ultimately under the authority of the Manchu Emperor. Naadam festivals were also organized by the lamas of the larger monasteries.

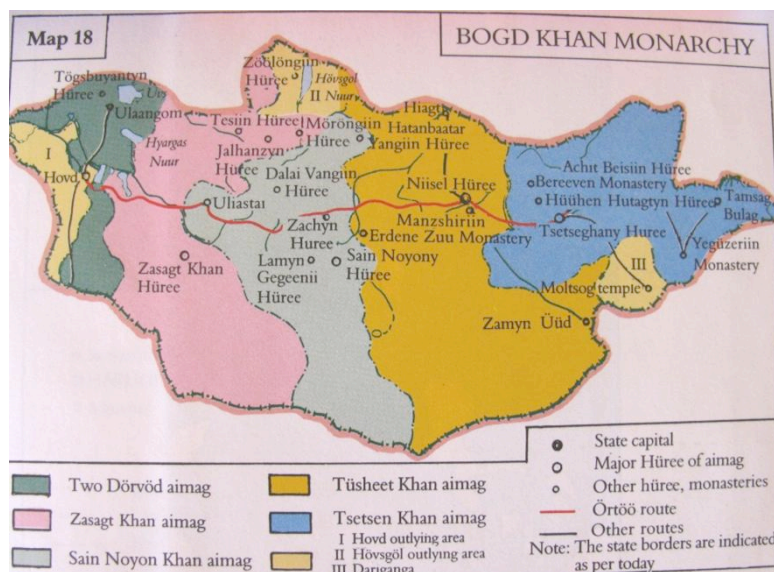


Figure 25. Map showing political organization of Mongolia at the beginning of the Twentieth century.

The areas in light brown and the large green area were not part of Khalka Mongolia, and not under the jurisdiction of the Bogd Khan. (Map from Mongolian Academy of Sciences 1990)

⁷⁹ The Banner system was a division of administrative areas, such as a province but with military implications.

Until 1911, the organization and execution of the *danshig* Naadam Festivals had been exclusively in the domain of the Khalka nobility and lamas. The strongest unifying bond of the Khalka was located in the Buddhist tradition, headed by reincarnations of the Living Buddha who were nominally, though not in reality, held to be descendents of Chinggis Khan⁸⁰; thus the identification of the Khalka Mongol people with that of Chinggis Khan was retained. Although the Western provinces of Mongolia celebrated Naadam as a traditional form of Mongolian folk custom, they did not have a formal *danshig* (tribute) Naadam, as the Living Buddha (Khutuktu) had been Spiritual Leader of the Khalka tribes only.

After independence, the Khutuktu became spiritual and secular leader of *all* Mongolia. When he was ‘elevated’ to the status of Bogd Khan at the first Naadam of the autonomous era in 1912, he became both Head of State and Head of the Buddhist Church. The traditional Mongolian dualistic form of power sharing in governance between state and religion, under a divine authority, was thus condensed into a single form, and this new political structure was publicly played out, spatially and temporarily, in formal official practices and rituals of the Naadam ceremony. It was the annual Naadam Festival that took place in the Tusheet Khan’s Banner, in the capital city Ikh Khuree (Ulaanbaatar) that was ‘reconfigured’ to become the national Naadam.

The seating in the Official Pavilions was visible to all at Naadam, so clearly demonstrated and validated the changes in the power models. The government ministerial offices had been directly appropriated from the Qing *ambans* (Emperor’s representatives), and subsequently their official seating positions at Naadam were correspondingly represented in the spatial hierarchy. The army was also conspicuous, publically demonstrating their loyalty to the new Mongolian sovereign, and ensuring that the public behaved in a respectful manner and knelt at the passing of the emperor. The procession ensured that all ‘the people’ could observe and be cognizant

⁸⁰ Although all Living Buddha’s were considered to be reincarnations of Tananatha, the fact that the first Mongolian Living Buddha, Zanabazar, was of the Chinggisid lineage, gave spiritual, if not literal, authority to the Khutuktu.

of the transition of power and the new order of governance in the carefully choreographed drama that the occasion presented (Petrie 2006:98). As the majority of ordinary (non-noble lay people) at this time were non-literate, visual and oral representations were the most successful method of communication. The first Naadam festival after the declaration of independence was the site for this display of this 'new' order of governance.

The officials were distinguished by formal dress and position of seating, which displayed their position of power within the culturally constructed 'right order' of the Mongolian social and political world. However while the spatial order was traditionally Mongolian, the Manchu regulation concerning the dress and hat code was adapted, demonstrating how 'traditions' change as new ideas are adopted and adapted, when they give weight or intensified meaning to a situation.

Fine degrees of religious and secular status were expressed during the Qing era in the shape of hats, the shapes, colors and imagery of rank buttons and badges, and the colors and patterns of dress which were required for ceremonial occasions. During the first years of the theocratic state, the Mongols adapted these regulations (Petrie 2006: 371).

During the first year of the Autonomous period the rituals and symbolic behaviours that had previously served to display submission of the Mongolian princes to the Manchu Emperor, were carefully and purposely crafted to show respect to the Bogd Khan instead – thus equating the status of the newly elected Bogd Khan with that of the Qing Emperor. The Naadam thus facilitated the public recognition of a 'new' Mongolian monarchy within already defined parameters. Ritual assists in the implementation of change as it gives the image of stability and timelessness, and it is this stability, according to Kertzer (1988), which connects ritual to strongly held emotion.

5.3 Mongolian Notions of Appropriate Spatial Order

The concept of the Two Principles of State Management was developed under the authority of Kubilai Khan in the thirteenth century, to ‘govern the State by establishing a close union of Church and State, between clerical and secular powers’ (Academy of Sciences MPR 1990:446). The two spheres had equal authority, but in subordination to a supreme authority (Heissig 1970:78/79). He established this dualistic power-sharing when he introduced Buddhism into Mongolia to appease the feudal princes who feared that Buddhism would become too dominant and would reduce the authority of the nobility.

In a further move to encourage the acceptance of Buddhism by the nobles, the Tibetan monk, Phags-pa Lama, (the Buddhist advisor to Kubilai Khan), also raised the Mongol khans to the ranks of *Chakravartin* (ibid). A *Chakravartin* ruler, a status formerly attained only by ancient Indian and Tibetan monarchs, established and furthered conditions for his citizens in both secular and spiritual aspects of life; he maintained peace and administered justice through state policies while promoting the religious institutions (Petrie 2006:14). In this way, the royal lineage of the Borjigin tribes - Chinggis Khan and his descendents – became implicated in the Mongolian Buddhist pantheon, which recognised the divine origin of the ruling Khans (Academy of Sciences MPR 1990:446). However, the ‘Sakya’ (Red) sect of Buddhism introduced into Mongolia by Kubilai Khan did not become widespread as it remained within the ruling elite; it gradually disappeared after the demise of the Mongol (Yuan) Empire when there was no longer unified rule in Mongolia, and shamanist practices resumed.

After submission to the Manchu, the Qing Emperor became the ultimate political (and spiritual) authority over Mongolia⁸¹; however, the Two Principles of State and

⁸¹ He also acquired spiritual authority as he was considered a reincarnation of Manjushri, one of the three primary bodhisattvas. The other two were Vajripani embodied in Chinggis Khan, and Avalokiteshvara, believed to be present in the Dalai Lama of Tibet (Farquhar 1978 cited in Petrie 2006).

Religion remained the form of governance for the Khalka Mongols. It was into this particular view of world order that the new government in 1911 needed to introduce the new political structure, as the dualistic rule collapsed into single form (Kaplonski 1998:44).

As outlined briefly in Chapter Two, the spatial configuration in the seating of the official audience at Naadam was a symbolic representation of the positions of authority congruent with the allocation of space inside the *ger*, the traditional round Mongolian felt tent (see Appendix VIII). They were a public manifestation of the vertical and horizontal hierarchies of power and status. In the *ger* the most important position is the centre of the northern sphere, in which is placed the seat of the head of the household and/or an altar. Men and guests are seated on his right side, the women and children on the left side. When this worldview is transferred to a political setting, the Living Buddha (Khutuktu) is seated in the centre north; the representatives of Religion are on his right and representatives of State on his left.

In a religious or spiritual setting, this concept of spatial order reflects the traditional understanding that those seated on the right are spiritual leaders external to the land and are not of the 'working' class (i.e. of the land), in the same way that an important guest is not part of the working of the household. The left-hand side represents the secular and working aspect of the household (cooking and child-raising) and belonging to the land; it is represented in the formal arena by ministers of Government and former nobles. This organization also extends to the positioning of the official marquees themselves in a north-south orientation; the official marquee accommodating state dignitaries was always situated to the north, with the tents of the sportspeople, the wrestlers and archers to the south. The northern end is the most prestigious, the southern end being of lowest status and the position of the door, or entranceway (Petrie 2006).

This hierarchical spatial format is recognized throughout Mongolia for all public or ceremonial occasions, from the positioning of tents and pavilions in the countryside

and the specific seating arrangements within each tent, to the city plan of governmental offices and entertainment areas⁸². Carole Pegg relates an interview with one of her informants in recalling a Naadam in a small town at the beginning of the century:

There were always three large state marquees of light or dark blue with yellow and white appliqué designs. In the central marquee sat the prince (*noyen*) and his entourage, with Buddhist leaders to his right and respected elders to his left. The best musicians were summoned and, positioned on the prince's right, performed facing him (Borjigin in Pegg 2001:211/2).

As a publicly visible spatial representation of governance, the Right/Left North/South orientation played out before the people in the Naadam ceremony, underwent significant changes as Mongolia's political leaders gradually shifted the balance of power. In a move to reduce the feudal power of the nobility, the number of secular state representatives in the official audience for the Naadam games was greatly increased. The five government ministers and the Russian envoy sat in the area formerly occupied by the Qing *ambans* (representative of the Emperor) (Petrie 2001).

This arrangement demonstrated, enacted, and confirmed the political importance awarded the Russian envoy, as he also represented the 'foreign power' that was essential for the international recognition of the independent Mongolian State. The decision to locate government ministers in the area of the 'State' indicated the authority given to the ministers over that of the nobles. Although some state ministers were also nobles, their political roles took precedence over their aristocratic position; the ministers' wives and children also sat in a more northerly tent (of higher importance) to that of the nobles' wives and children. To demonstrate the importance of the new relationship with Russia, a new tent was installed to seat a Russian delegation on the left-hand side of the Ministers tent, denoting their importance to the State, but subordinate to Mongolia's own ministers (Petrie 2006:111). These

⁸² In Ulaanbaatar, the Parliament Building is located at the northern end of Sukhbaatar Square, with the local government administrative offices and (former) foreign dignitaries' hotel situated on its right hand side, and the Cultural Centre and Drama Theatre on its left.

important changes in ‘ritual space’ of the official dignitaries of Naadam demonstrates Kertzer’s argument that ritual can also be used to enact change against the status quo, as ‘ritual symbols can be the symbols of change, indeed of revolution; they need not be symbols of stability’ (1988:39).

5.4 Naadam Reflects Political Turmoil

Petrie (2006:106/7) records that from 1915 to 1921 Naadam was organized by the Bogd Khan’s younger brother, the Oracle Lama, rather than a minister of government which was in turmoil. This perhaps indicates that the Bogd Khan ‘needed’ the Festival for its unifying qualities and impression of state control. At this time there was much disagreement within the new government as the leaders became divided; some wanted to return to feudal authority under Chinese suzerainty, others wanted autonomy. They were turbulent years for the new government, which briefly returned to Chinese suzerainty in 1919 when the Chinese army invaded Mongolia, but were ousted by Mongolian and Russian forces two years later.

The ‘stabilizing’ effect (for the people) of Naadam is given credence in a report from a visitor to Mongolia in 1920, at a time when the country was in much political disarray. The large and extravagant Naadam festivals in Ikh Khuree (Ulaanbaatar) were ‘great spectacles of pomp and ceremony’ according to Bulstrode (1920), the wife of a British diplomat; she described in detail the lavish uniforms of the bodyguard ‘...royal blue damask coats with black velvet facings outlined with silver braid, prune coloured waistcoats and pale yellow cummerbunds” (1920:179).

Kertzer (1988) proposes that ritual enactment conveys a message through a ‘complex symbolic performance’, which creates ‘an emotional state that makes the message incontestable’. Using cognitive behaviour theory, Kertzer argues that spectacular performances succeed in communicating a message as people are more narrowly focused when emotionally aroused, and are more easily influenced (1988:82/3). Despite the fact that the monarch was losing the support of those in government,

compounded by political struggles for power involving Russia and China, the Naadam festival in 1919 appeared to be a ‘public demonstration of the authority of the Bogd Khan’ according to Bulstrode:

Our visit to Urga had been most fortunately timed, and we were delighted to hear within a few days of reaching the capital that the great semi-religious, semi-athletic festival of the Tsam Haren, or sacred dance, was to take place during the second week of July. Proceedings including the presentation of tribute to the Hut’ukt’u, followed by an archery competition, continued with the dance of the gods, a great wrestling tourney, and wound up with a race meeting. (Bulstrode 1920:175).

The festival lasted up to two weeks; Naadam began with several days of religious ceremonies and rites, including the *Tsam* ceremony⁸³, and was followed by the three Naadam games (Pegg 2001:211). The Naadam games were held at different locations near the city; the wrestling took place in an arena west of the centre, the archery at a more distant location and the horseracing on the outskirts of the city. At each location large marquees or pavilions (*toriin asar*) were erected to accommodate the dignitaries, royalty and the sportsmen, and always positioned according to established Mongolian spatial hierarchy.

This spectacular public performance of the ‘authority of the Bogd Khan’ obviously succeeded in displaying the order of governance rather than its actuality – which was already beginning to become more fractured as China and Russia were vying for power, leaving the ‘autonomous’ state of Mongolia increasingly fragile. This demonstrates the multivocality of Naadam – it ‘does’ different things and means different things at different times, but remains a focus of continuity, stability and permanence. The symbolic form of Naadam remains the same, but the performance undergoes transformations that alter its meaning.

⁸³ The *Tsam* is a dance performance based on Buddhist mythology; it originated in India and was introduced into Mongolia in the 16th century. The performers wear huge papier-mâché masks designed to inspire awe and veneration for the deities; they enact ancient ritual dances and scenes from the lives of heaven-dwellers and heroes. There are three main types of Tsam, but the message is basically the victory of good over evil, which is achieved symbolically, without violence (Ts.Ayush 2006).

5.5 The first 'Peoples Naadam' envisions a new political order

China, and much of the world, did not recognize Mongolia's Statement of Independence in 1911, and the autonomy of the new state was short lived. Despite the forced return to Chinese suzerainty, the majority of the members of the Mongolian government desired independence. An ally was essential to give assistance to achieve this, politically, economically and militarily. Mongolian government representatives approached Russia for military assistance (Bawden 1968:209). It was only with Russian assistance that Mongolia finally achieved liberation from China in 1921.

The most decisive military victory, and celebrated by a 'Peoples Naadam' of the combined Mongolian and Russian forces in the struggle to regain control of their country from China was the battle at Khiyat, which became emblematic of the friendship and comradeship of the Russian and Mongolian armies. The victory at Khatiya seemed improbable because the Mongols were greatly outnumbered by the Chinese:

The most incredible victory of Sukebator's little force at Altan Bulak thus eventually brought about the entire collapse of the Chinese position in Mongolia (Bawden 1968:231).

The victory at Khiyat was important to the political and military advancement of Sukhbaatar and most significantly, for the purpose of this thesis, for his use of the forum of Naadam to enable 'the people' to imagine a new political and social order. Performance is not only enactment, it is also creative. According to Kertzer, 'Ritual provides one of the means by which people participate in such dramas and thus see themselves as playing certain roles' (Kertzer 1988:11).

This Naadam demonstrated a pivotal moment in the transition of power, not only from foreign (Chinese) intervention, but it also demonstrated the first public expression of the decline of the feudal system. Sukhbaatar called it the 'Peoples

Naadam' as it also celebrated reclaiming power from the ruling princes. It was held at an *ovoo* just outside the town:

The newly formed people's government (Peoples Party) offered thanksgiving prayers and held their first naadam. The commander in chief, Sukhbaatar said that it is our first Naadam of the Peoples Party and for Russian red army soldiers who have helped us in creating our new, great motherland, and gave their blood and life without regret (Damdin 1966).

A photograph was taken by one of the Russian soldiers; the following description was written on the back of the photograph soon after it was taken and demonstrates how the hierarchies of power and status are reflected spatially:

In the picture many Russian and Mongolian people are sitting... in centre place sitting is Chief-Commander D. Sukhbaatar dressed in white waistcoat and brown hat. On the right is the Eighth Commander of the Red Army, on the right of him is Erdene Prince Bilegsaichan ... In front of the Chief-Commander, Red Army people are sitting and in front of them wrestlers" (cited in Damdin 1966).

It is noteworthy that he mentions that the commander of the Red Army sat on Sukhbaatar's right – the position of highest honour, and next to him, two seats away, was a member of the nobility. Clearly Sukhbaatar was demonstrating that the Russian Army was to be recognized as being held in highest esteem. This transfer of status was later reflected in the official National Naadam festival in the capital city. The description on the photograph gives a firsthand account of the feelings of revolutionary fervour and excitement, while also commenting on social status:

Also one Russian boy in tattered trousers and without shoes is sitting on the grass and joyfully looking at us. He is maybe a poor servant of a rich trader who lived near Khiyat. I think he is happy to join the Red Army and tomorrow he goes to battle for honour with the others. Maybe that is why he is so happy. The new age brought the people a new destiny. The Naadam was held for the newly formed government. It was held on the hill that became known as Soldiers Hill, with Russian soldiers of the Red Army and we made deep and firm bonds of friendship (Damdin 1966).

The author is obviously knowledgeable of Mongolian history. The following is a reference to the feudal lords' 'eating and drinking' and enjoying the festivities. From the final comment (and from my informants) I understood that this Naadam was of major significance, as it was the first time 'ordinary people' could take part in a Naadam.

This Naadam is in truth a revolution of Naadam. Many hundreds of years ago in this tent (ceremonial marquee) people's masters were sitting, land lords, and they are eating and drinking and enjoying their happiness ... When the People's government was founded it brought the Naadam games and happiness to the poor people (Damdin 1966: 90-91).

From the preceding accounts, it is evident that this Naadam was a pivotal occasion for publicly portraying, acting out and ritually validating the 'new' revolutionary Mongolia – the bonds between Russian and Mongolian soldiers in their quest to end feudalism, as well as independence from China. This Naadam constituted a change in social relations as well as being a reflection of them; for the first time the audience no longer sat in ranks according to class or status, everyone sat together, Russian soldiers together with civilians (Damdin 1966). This Naadam was - for the first time - organized by the ordinary people. It is at such gatherings, according to Connerton, that people have the opportunity to imagine a new social order, 'by enabling such a collective body to coalesce, the popular-festive forms may be then said to provide the people with a symbolic representation not of present categories but of utopia, the image of a future state in which there occurs the 'victory of all the people's material abundance, freedom, equality, brotherhood (Connerton 1989:50).

After the success in this battle, Russian and Mongolian forces marched on to Niisel Khuree (Ulaanbaatar) and ousted the Chinese to formally declare independence for Mongolia.

5.6 First Military Naadam since the Chinggis Khan era

Sukhbaatar became War Minister and Commander in Chief of the Army in 1921. The idea of a 'People's Naadam' in the capital city was his and he was instrumental

in organizing the first 'socialist' Naadam. It took place in 1922 on the first anniversary of the historic moment when the Mongolian Revolutionary Army, led by Sukhbaatar and assisted by Red Army units from the Soviet Far Eastern Republic, regained control of the capital city and the Mongolian People's Republic was proclaimed (Akiner 1991:35). It was held on July 11 and officially called 'The Celebration of the Mongolian People's State' (Petrie 2006:146), but also known as the 'Soldiers Naadam' or 'Military Naadam'.

Naadam was gradually secularized by limiting the religious component and by setting a permanent, fixed date on which it was to be held. The setting of a permanent date in the Gregorian calendar was a significant departure from the past, when the day was set by the lamas according to astrological calculations. This was one of the many changes and substitutions made to Naadam by the emerging socialist government, which was heavily influenced by Russia and frequently in opposition to many of the long-standing Mongolian traditions of Naadam.

However, these changes and substitutions were synthesized with existing practices which ensured their acceptance, so overall the Naadam festival remained within the parameters of its original form. A new regime signals its superiority over its immediate predecessor, as well as establishing its own identity and legitimacy, by resurrecting older political symbols, as 'new political forms borrow legitimacy from the old by nurturing the old ritual forms, redirected to new purposes' (Kertzer 1988:39/41).

The 'new' festival was limited to three days, which was a dramatic change from the previous two week celebration, and the Games component reduced to one day. This may have been a pragmatic decision to limit the 'liminal time' of the festival as the new country was in a state of reorganization, or a move by the emerging socialist government to reduce the religious and 'folk' (traditional Mongolian) component of the festival in favour of communicating a political message. The first day comprised a procession, religious tribute rituals to the Bogd Khan, and the Naadam games; the

second day a public celebration commemorated the first anniversary of the liberation of the city and the establishment of the People's Government, followed by a parade and speeches. On the third day the joint Russian and Mongolian armies enacted a full military parade and drill exercises in the City Centre.

The components of the Naadam procession reflected and enacted an important change in political ideology: the separation of the government from the nobility. The five Ministers of Government were positioned in the front row, the princes relegated to the second row. A new constituent in the independent regime was that of the People's Army; they stepped directly into the ceremonial role established for the military during the Theocratic era (Petrie 2006:148/9).

The Naadam Festival and games that followed the procession took place at a new location for the first time, just outside the centre of the city, and all activities took place in the same area. This made it very much easier for the ordinary people to take part. The traditional spatial configurations of status marking were followed, although an important change in the power model of the religious hierarchy was demonstrated by placing all the lamas in the centre tent with the Bogd Khan, rather than their former location in the tent on his right hand.

In the centre middle of the Naadam field many multi-coloured tents had been put up in a circle like a *ger*; of the three large tents at the very northerly side in the middle tent were the abbots and reincarnate lamas of religion; in the eastern tent were the Prime Minister...in the tent to the west (right-hand) side the Commander in Chief... (Nyambuu cited in Petrie 2006:153).

Petrie suggests that the re-arrangement was required to accommodate the new Party within 'this particular representation of the right political order': while the lamas were honoured by being located in the central position, she argues that it distanced the religious hierarchy from the governance of the national state (ibid: 154).

The focus for ritual homage for the wrestlers was also changed. Sukhbaatar's battle flag replaced the position of the Bogd Khan as the central ritual object of honour. Although the Bogd Khan was still the (constitutional) monarch, his source of power was now with the Party and the Army. The location of the flag in the right hand pavilion (formerly the site of the sacred *suld tenger*) gave credence to the positioning of the Mongolian People's Party. The Party had gained power (and success in gaining liberation from China) through the People's Army and thus became the 'protectors' of the new nation. The 'protective power' of the new nation was no longer that of *suld tenger*, but embodied in the battle flag of the Commander in Chief Sukhbaatar (Petrie 2005:155). Kertzer suggests that it is the ambiguity of ritual symbols that makes ritual a useful tool to foster solidarity without consensus, and that "extending the meaning of a symbol from one referent to another is a common method politicians use to profit from ambiguity" (Kertzer 1988:70).

Two other significant rituals were inserted into the Naadam paradigm but with important changes, in some cases an inversion. The Army Parade took place as a moving spectacle in front of the viewing authorities and the people, whereas the former Procession of the Khutuktu (Living Buddha) had involved the *movement of the ruling elite* 'through' the lines of people on either side. The former address of the nobles to the Khutuktu, the centre of spiritual power, was now replaced by a speech *from* the platform of power (the People's Government), *to* the people (Petrie 2006:160). I suggest that this visibly and pragmatically demonstrates the shift from subservience to a divine power (and a worldview implying that both spiritual leader and people were mutually involved in a symbiotic act), to an assertion of temporal power backed by military authority.

5.7 Governmental factionalism played out at Naadam

The end of Chinese rule in Mongolia was cause for much celebration. However, foreign domination was not the only cause of social unrest in the country – the 'ordinary people' also wanted an end to the feudal power of the Mongolian nobles. While all were united in the quest to oust the Chinese, there was a growing divide within the new government as to the direction of the state: the Soviet-inspired model

for socialist reform or the conservative ministers of the People's Government who chose a more independent course. This dichotomy resulted in two separate, sequential Naadam celebrations in 1923 (Petrie 2006:130).

The split in government ideals was visually displayed in the two consecutive Naadam ceremonies of 1923. The 'People's Naadam', to be called the "Games of the People's Government" (*ardyn zasgiin Naadam*) was held over two days – followed immediately by a separate 'Soldiers' Naadam' (*Tsergiin Naadam*) held over five days (Petrie 2006:163/4). A recognized format was used to locate each celebration within the culturally understood paradigm of Naadam – but with two distinct messages being conveyed to the people. This left the way open for further changes in the future, emphasizing either one model or the other, but both embodying the legitimacy of the government.

The two celebrations were very different. The Soldiers Naadam was dedicated to the soldiers who gave their lives in the fight for independence; the message portrayed was also of an imagined new socialist state. The Soldiers Naadam also provided a platform to display the nation's military prowess and training, as the contestants were the armed forces. The games were opened by Sukhbaatar with a display of trick riding; he was apparently a 'great master of horse acrobatics' (Montague 1956:151). It represented a return to the time when the Naadam Festival was a celebration of military success during the era of the Great Khans. As in the time of Chinggis Khan, the soldiers were the most important and essential members of the community and successful soldiers were held in high esteem. The 1923 Military Naadam took place southeast of the city at Bayanzurkh Mountain; sacrifices to the army flags took place, reminiscent of the mountain worship ceremonies, followed by the 'offering' of a Naadam. The games were voluntary and members of the public were invited to take part (Nyambuu, cited in Petrie 2006:164).

By appropriating the ceremony of Naadam to a festival to honour fallen soldiers, the government was making the festival an event 'beyond reproach', as the soldiers' sacrifice had brought freedom to Mongolia. This memorialization united people

across social and class divisions. At the same time, the government reduced the power and status of both the church and the nobility by replacing them with the memory of martyrs, symbolized by the military. Kertzer discusses a similar analogy with Memorial Day in the United States, as the soldiers who are remembered "...become powerful sacred symbols which organize, direct and constantly revive the collective ideals of the community and the nation" (Kertzer 1988: 23).

This Naadam festival was instituted by the new government to confirm and establish in the eyes and minds of the people the new political status of Mongolia. The stark contrast between the formalized, prescribed Naadam of the Government and the informal and inclusive nature of the Soldiers Naadam, allowed the people – for the first time - to imagine the possibilities of social and political life in a secular and socialist framework (Petrie 2006:165), an example of Turner's reflexive stance, when a performance enables its participants to 'see' how societal change can be both understood and achieved (Turner 1986).

Thus in a few years the political nature of Mongolia dramatically changed from that of a religious and feudal alliance of provinces, to a centralised secular republic heavily influenced by the military. Substitutions and re-arrangements in the offices of state were greatly intensified as the army and the Government dramatically changed the hierarchy of power, from the joint authority of the church and state, to that of the military and the state. Thus the Soldiers Naadam not only symbolically constructed but also *constituted* the reality that it performed.

The change in political circumstances was potently demonstrated at the National Naadam Festival as it became the 'showpiece' of the new, independent status of Mongolia. It was visually demonstrated at Naadam that the authority of the nobles was curtailed and power was centralized in the ministers of state. By the reduction in the roles of the lamas, Naadam was gradually being transformed from a religious ceremony to a political ceremony (Petrie 2006:113) with parallel ideology being carried out in state policy. There was considerable Soviet influence in choosing

national symbols and new ‘traditions’ were invented and adopted, such as a National Anthem and a national flag. The Soviet Union gradually increased its political, economic and social influence and for the next seventy years suppressed many aspects of Mongolian indigenous cultural identity. While the National Naadam festival continued to be performed, many aspects of the festival were changed to reflect a secular, socialist and collective idealism.

5.8 The Sovietization of Mongolia, and Naadam

After the revolution of 1921, diplomatic and political relations increased between the Soviet Union and Mongolia. The first Constitution, based on the Soviet one, was drafted in 1921. After the death of the Bogd Khan in 1924, Mongolia was officially renamed the Mongolian People’s Republic (MPR). Fundamental changes in political ideology brought an end to feudalism and fostered the emergence of socialism. For many years, the ideological struggles within the Mongolian government were also publicly played out during Naadam as ceremonial pragmatic markers were appropriated to make a place for socialist commemorations as well. While this thesis will not deal with the intricacies of government machinations at this time⁸⁴, a brief overview will demonstrate how Naadam was the most important and public occasion by which the government ‘broadcast’ changes in ideology and policy to the people of Mongolia, but were also mindful to keep Naadam within recognised cultural parameters. Cohen argues that the need of societies to draw on their past for self-identity is particularly evident when a dramatic change of political or social direction is being taken, as ‘symbols of the past mythically infused with timelessness...attain particular effectiveness during periods of intense social change when communities have to drop their heaviest cultural anchors’ (Cohen 1985:102).

The social changes that took place in Mongolia throughout the twentieth century were considerable and far-reaching. Naadam during the Soviet era involved much political propaganda, and was devoid of references to ethnicity or religion. The games were limited to two days, the celebrations were militarised and there were

⁸⁴ For a full account of political turmoil of this period, see Petrie 2006.

changes to the oral narratives of 'praise recitations' (*tsol*) after the horse races, they became shorter, simpler and with no references to royal lineages or religion (Pegg 2001:213/5). In the late 1930s, Buddhism was officially banned; monasteries were destroyed, the poorer monks were sent to schools for literacy and trade education, some ran craft co-operatives and some were pressed into military service (Bawden 1968:370). By purposefully and publically sacking the monasteries, destroying sacred icons, burning Buddhist sutras and killing incarnate lamas, the communist authorities not only destroyed physical places of worship and its clergy, they symbolically demonstrated the official 'death of religion'. In much the same way, the public execution of Louis XVI did not just depose one particular monarch; the public enactment emphatically proclaimed the death of the monarchy (Connerton 1989:8).

One of the most enduring symbols in Naadam today is the spiritually rich *Sulde*, the State White Standards, around which the wrestlers and archers pay respect, ask for blessings and give thanks. During the Qing era this ritual symbol was the standard of *suld tenger*, which was replaced in the communist era by a circle of Red Flags. By substituting the sacred *suld tenger* with the red flags of socialism, the symbolic significance as an object of worship would also have been transferred.

The red flags of socialism, representing the state, could become in themselves objects of worship. With the abolition of Buddhism and loss of a spiritual leader, were the wrestlers, archers, and spectators at Naadam being encouraged to divert their divine adulation to their own society? Coser (1977) referring to Durkheim's (1912) thesis argues that, "...the deities which men worship together are only projections of the power of society....when men celebrate sacred things, they unwittingly celebrate the power of their society. This power so transcends their own existence that they have to give it sacred significance in order to visualize it (Coser 1977).

5.9 The Military Replaces Buddhism

The military was a permanent reminder in Mongolia of the location of the power base of the state. As the uniting force of Buddhism had been eliminated, another external power was required to fill the vacuum. At Naadam, shows of military might with displays of weapons and marching military units were predominant. 'The socialists sought to tear down the remnants of a Mongolian society based on the nobility and the Church, and create a new one, based on the nation and socialism' (Kaplonski 1998:45) and enforced by the military.

In the 1950s Mongolia was being 'opened up' not only literally within its own infrastructure, but also to outside influences by an infusion of Soviet personnel to supervise increased industrialization, and also opportunities for overseas education and work experience. There was a resurgence of construction and infrastructure, trade agreements were drawn up and Mongolia became increasingly dependent economically on the Soviet Union. A purpose-built Naadam stadium was constructed in Ulaanbaatar for the archery and wrestling contests, and also for the public ceremony. Similar (but smaller) stadiums or areas set aside for Naadam with seating banks were constructed in towns and villages throughout the country. The format for all National Naadam festivals was nationwide; beginning with a parade of marchers carrying placards portraying Soviet officials or the President of Mongolia, or representing their workplace, followed by speeches by the governor and local dignitaries, followed by some entertainment and then the 'Three Games'.

Social change in communist Mongolia was also portrayed in Naadam with the inclusion of many new 'foreign' activities, such as individual and team sports, athletics and bicycle races, soccer, volleyball, basketball, weight lifting, discus, long jump, boxing and a 100km. motorcycle race; also indoor games such as chess and draughts (1956 Naadam Program cited in Petrie 2006:273). The inclusion of additional games allowed many more people to participate because it broadened the competition, but they did not require adherence to any traditional rituals of participation which, I would argue, devalued the uniqueness of the Naadam Games

as being specifically Mongolian. The Soviet-influenced government perhaps saw the introduction of ‘modern’ sports as reflecting their vision of a ‘modern’ Mongolia.

Coinciding with the Mongolian-Russian Friendship Pact in the 1960s, and increased Russian economic investment, dramatic changes began to take place on the steppe; the herders were ‘collectivized’ and the nomadic, independent way of life severely disrupted.

Collectives controlled people, they were told where to live, how many livestock to



keep, and where to work. This conformity was paralleled in the Naadam parades. In the countryside, Naadams were organized by the farming co-operative (*negdel*) in each district and town, in accord with

Figure 26. Parade of workers carrying flags and placards in the 1940s. Photo: K. Petrie 2006. From National Archives of Mongolia (NAM-Kino, K-21743).

instruction from the Central Government, a symbolic representation of government through local agents, as Naadam focused attention on the district (*soum*) Administration. Parades replaced religious processions and attendance became compulsory, as workers and citizens participated in parades carrying portraits of Marx, Lenin and Sukhbaatar (Atwood 2004). Schoolchildren carried placards proclaiming the virtues of hard work and obedience to law and order. By 1960 the parade had become very elaborate as the communist regime was intent on creating a ‘working class’ to fully implement its political agenda. The emphasis on the primacy of the ‘working people’ was demonstrated by the order of the processions; the army led the procession followed by Partisans and honoured groups of elders, then the workers on the land – the herders and agriculturalists, followed by manual workers in

industry, handcrafts and mining (Petrie 2006:271). Academics brought up the rear⁸⁵. By way of the Naadam Parade, the government was able to display its desired social order (Mach 1992:44).

As it was mandatory to take part in the Naadam parades they were extensive involving a large proportion of the population; thus the Mongolian people were literally taking part in creating the 'official' view of their social milieu. It visually demonstrated the situation of Mongolian development – the military securing independence, the important work of the herders and agriculturalists in providing food, the expanding industrial economy and the education of youth as future workers and leaders. 'The magnitude of the crowd was important for the perception of success, for the triumph of the spectacle, to demonstrate consensus and civic solidarity' (Goheen 1993 in Kong and Yeoh 1997:222). The knowledge that a job would be lost or promotion denied by not taking part ensured that government officials could be assured of a large turnout, by social coercion without the use of force.

Many of my older informants (who were children in the 1960s) had mixed feelings about their memories of Naadam, which seemed to polarize between the Official Ceremony and the Games. They remembered the entertainment, the activities and the Three Games (although in many smaller Naadams there was no archery contest) as occasions of fun and enjoyment, meeting friends, having time off work or school, the freedom of summertime and the food. The entertainment included parachutists, athletic games, team games, dancing and singing contests. From the 1960s to the 1980s considerable government expenditure was allocated to Naadam, with extensive exhibitions of manufactured products, book sales and gymnastics displays; it was a highly organized, choreographed occasion to 'have fun' and a demonstration the success of communist ideology.

⁸⁵ Tumen, September 2006, Ulaanbaatar. Personal communication.

But many of my informants resented having to partake in parades which were of little interest, carrying placards and marching past government officials in the heat of the sun, and listening to long speeches. But the overt political agenda of the Opening Ceremony did not appear to be cause for boycotting Naadam, rather something to be tolerated. Most of my respondents did not think that it was just a political occasion – they had a sense that Naadam was an ancient festival and it was ‘theirs’. The political (communist) agenda that was being portrayed at Naadam was described to me as ‘a fact of life’ rather than an agenda to be contested.

The ‘Sovietization’ of Naadam (the displays of military hardware, the parades and placards, the authoritarianism and compulsory attendance) can be compared to the transformations made to the May Day Parade in Poland after 1946, when the workers’ solidarity celebration in Warsaw was appropriated as ‘part of the official ceremonial system of the new communist establishment and was celebrated in every town and city...carefully orchestrated by the Communist Party’ (Mach 1992:44). There were many similarities to the celebrations – the Day was declared a national holiday, both consisted of parades of people arranged according to their workplaces and carrying portraits and banners, and viewed from a high platform by the power elite. Like the socialist Naadam, the May Day parade “created the reality of a society unified under the leadership of the state ...and...the presence of national symbols served as the defining element: the boundaries of the nation were presented as identical with the boundaries of the working people” (ibid. 49).

Mach questions why the people took part in the May Day festivities in Poland when they did not agree with the ideology. He found that as the regular religious celebrations had all been abolished with the imposition of communism, “...people just participated in the entertainment offered; they did not identify with the symbolic or ideological content of the occasion” (1992:58), as the celebrations offered an occasion for social interaction outside the home. Similarly, in Mongolia festive occasions were limited after the abolition of Buddhist ceremonies, and Naadam was an opportunity for recreation, socialization and a day off work.

These scenarios reflect Handleman's theory of a performance of Naadam as a 'spectacle'. During the Soviet era in Mongolia, Naadam was not a reflection of the ideals of the people; many were actors and not necessarily willing participants in the parades, the holding of banners or pictures of political officials, or the mandatory gymnastics demonstrations⁸⁶. Compulsory participation was prescribed by the organisers (government) and the actors themselves had no agency. Thus the Naadam festivals of the latter years of socialist Mongolia began to be increasingly a 'mirror' of the social relations between the government and the people; the parade members representing the farming collectives were a demonstration of (the illusion of) the government's socialist ideals. The insistence of compulsory parades was perhaps also to encourage the formerly independent and isolated herders to 'think collectively' by walking in unison and conforming to a state programme (Rappaport 1999:40). However, while the people were able to be reflexive of their situation (Turner 1984:20), and to consider alternatives, but due to the political situation at that time they were not able to enact change in their daily lives for fear of reprisals in their personal and working life⁸⁷.



Public Recognition of the 'Ordinary People'

The political importance of Naadam during the communist era was intensified by it being an occasion for awarding Medals of Good Citizenship. Men were awarded medals for acts of courage, party loyalty and good animal husbandry, such as "Best Worker in the Five year Plan" for industriousness, or "National Hero of the Mongolian Revolutionary Party" for

Figure 27 Show of Medals

⁸⁶ Tseren, September 2006, Ulaanbaatar, personal communication

⁸⁷ Sartuul, September 1966, Ulaanbaatar, personal communication

their political activities. Women received medals for bearing many children, such as “The Order of Maternal Glory, First Grade”⁸⁸. Although these honours were Soviet-inspired and not a Mongolian tradition, they were proudly displayed even after 1991. Stewart records that in a post-soviet Naadam⁸⁹ people ‘dressed up for the occasion and medals were in abundance’ (Stewart 2000:115).

During the decade of 1961 – 1971, the number of women in the communist party doubled from 7 to 14,000; as ‘the best workers were asked to join the party’ regardless of gender. Experienced hard-working people became leaders, and these now included women (Rupen 1979:90). During the 1960s, free education and medical care were introduced, women were encouraged to enter university and offered a wider range of employment. As industrialization began they were included in the workforce in the collectives and encouraged to enter minor politics. These changes in the status of women and the division of labour were also dramatically and visually acted out in Naadam when, for the first time, women were included in the ‘Three Games of Men’ – reflecting Soviet ideology that women should take a full role in all aspects of society, inside and outside the home. The inclusion of women in the archery competitions marked one of most dramatic changes to the Games of Naadam. Oyuntuya, Secretary of the National Archery Federation, commented that this change demonstrated that women could, and should, participate in all aspects of Mongolian social and economic life.

5.10 Democracy and the Return of a Mongolian Identity to Naadam

As political events in the Soviet Union began to unfold with *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the 1980s, Soviet-inspired centralised control began to weaken in Mongolia. The Mongolian Peoples Republican Party (MPRP) instigated its own policy of ‘openness’

⁸⁸ Women with more than eight children received the Order of Maternal Glory, First Class medal and 600 tugriks per child; mothers with five or more living children received the Order of Maternal Glory, Second Class medal and an annual subsidy of 400 tugriks per child. The medals entitled the mothers to all-expenses paid annual vacations of two weeks at the hot springs spa of their choice, steep discounts in fees for child care, and other benefits. (<http://countrystudies.us/mongolia/37.htm>)

(*il tod*). However, economic reform was complicated by the fiscal collapse of the former Soviet Union. Mongolia gained full independence after the ‘democratic revolution’ of 1990 with a relatively peaceful transition of power from a Soviet dominated communist state to independence and democracy. The first President, P. Ochirbat, was appointed in May 1990 and after elections in the summer was formally inaugurated in September 1990.

The MPRP actively sought to align itself as ‘defender of Mongolian tradition’ (in contrast to other Western-oriented parties), so readily adopted ceremonial practices that associated their party with traditional Mongolian customs. The government instigated a process to restore and reinstate protocols and ceremonies reflecting the traditional history and culture of the nation (Petrie 2006). A department was instituted to advise the Government on ‘strengthening and adapting stateliness activities’ – such as creating new Ceremonies of State and adapting existing practices using traditional or historical Mongolian cultural referents. The department called on the research of scholars, including Kh. Nyambuu, to assist in the design of new ceremonies and the ‘pragmatic markers which would mediate their interpretation by the participants (performers and audience alike)’ (Petrie 2006:314). However as democratic openness was a new concept for the government of Mongolia in 1990, there was much debate as to which ‘traditions’ should be utilized to accurately reflected the new Mongolia. According to Batjaral, who took over the department responsible for implementing new practices, some ceremonies were drawn from the autonomous era (1911-1921), when Mongolia first declared its independence, complemented by observation of modern practices from foreign countries (*ibid.*).

While many of the Soviet-inspired aspects of Naadam were omitted, some have been maintained and successfully meshed with Mongolian traditions, especially when there had not been a Mongolian practice of this ritual. For example, while communal singing is a popular social activity, the singing of a national anthem was not a Mongol tradition, and the new military goosestep of the soldiers as they perform the ancient ritual of installing the *Sulde*, are successful combinations demonstrating ‘a

selective construction of the past which resonates with contemporary influences' (Cohen 1985:99).

As in previous years at times of significant change to the political regime, the performance of Naadam was to be a central factor in transmitting a new political and social order to the people. The performative force of ritual is demonstrated by the public reaction to the wearing of traditional Mongolian clothing by the President at Naadam. One of the first visual public statements that clearly demonstrated the new, independent government of Mongolia was that of the President appearing at Naadam wearing the *deel*, the traditional long dress/coat, worn by both men and women. The style is relatively standard but the fabric (ranging from leather to silk) varies according to the occasion and the social and economic status of the individual.

‘...when President Ochirbat came out for the opening ceremony of the Ikh Bayar Naadam wearing a white *deel*, he was received with congratulatory applause. Also, it was being said with approval that tradition was reviving, now that *deels* were being worn in ceremonies of state, and in the Stadium many people broke into tears when they saw this. It was visible on television; these were called ‘tears of joy’ (Batjaral cited in Petrie 2006:315).

During the Soviet years, with the increasing desire for modernity and ‘progress’ (as a Western definition) Mongolians had gradually begun to adopt western-style dress for Naadam, following an example set by the ruling elite. By the 1940s, western-style hats had become the norm on the heads of non-military leaders, wrestling competitors, and spectators (Petrie 2006:227). This public demonstration of a return to the traditional Mongolian dress by the elite was a significant and deliberate attempt to not only renounce Sovietization - under which regime traditional dress was disapproved (Rossabi 2005:19) - but also to return pride and prestige to a unique symbol of Mongolianness.

After 1991, changes to Naadam were both temporal and spatial, and demonstrated a move to ‘give Naadam back to the people’ and separate it from an authoritarian

government. The ceremony of respect to the ‘heroes of the revolution’, the wreath-laying ceremony in front of the Statue of Sukhbaatar, was moved to the day prior to Naadam, and for the first time the entire Naadam Festival took place in the Central Stadium. During the Soviet era the official ceremony of the opening speech by the President and the playing of the National Anthem had taken place immediately outside Government House, and at the auspicious site of the mausoleum of Sukhbaatar and Choibalsan (Petrie 2006).

The Great Naadam Festival (Ikh Bayar Naadam) was renamed the National Great Naadam Festival (*Udesnii Ikh Bayar Naadam*: *udesnii* translates as national or ‘of the people’), reflecting the desire of the Government that Naadam be an ethnically and culturally inclusive celebration across the nation. From 1991 to 2006, various governments increased their endeavours to demonstrate and portray a Mongolian national identity - to themselves and to the world - in the National Naadam Festival. The iconography of the Chinggis Khan era became increasingly more important in the festivities of the opening ceremony, culminating in the 2006 Anniversary Naadam when he was pronounced ‘Father of the Nation’. Thus ‘the interpretation shifted from that of cultural ancestor figure to a political actor... Chinggis Khan is now seen as giving the nation not only certain aspects of its culture, but its very existence as well’ (Kaplonski 1998:43).

5.11 Encoding Naadam in State Law

There was a significant intensification of Governmental authority over the Games in 2003 with the passing of the ‘Laws of Naadam’ by the Great Hural (Parliament). This signified a desire by the government to standardize the Naadam games, and also to add to the status of the Great National Naadam by declaring that National Titles and Awards could only be gained at the Great State Naadam in Ulaanbaatar. All other Naadams could only offer prizes⁹⁰.

⁹⁰ Prior to 2003, National Titles could be earned at provincial naadams, at the ovoo worship naadams as well as the National Naadam.

In 2003 The National Government appointed an Organizing Committee to carry out the management of the National State Naadam, and also to oversee the organization of provincial and district Naadam festivals. Their responsibility is to organize celebrations throughout the country ‘in accordance with traditional customs’. The Organizing Committee must consist of a Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Secretary, and members who form sub-committees. The Chairman is to be a member of the Government and the Vice-Chairman is to be the Mayor of the capital city (Ulaanbaatar). The Organizing Committee Chairperson for 2006 was Batbold, a Government Minister responsible for Staff Administration. The Organizing Committee is appointed annually and is an ad hoc committee responsible to the Government. The organizing committee is legally-bound to use printed official letterhead and official stamp in its correspondence.

The Organizing Committee establishes and approves sub-committees, which are responsible for the management of all the sports events, activities and cultural performances that take place as part of the Naadam Festival. These including sports contests (such as athletic and bicycle races, traditional games such as ankle-bone shooting) and artistic performances at the Stadium. They are also responsible for the organization of the public party and fireworks display in Sukhbaatar Square on the evening of the first day of Naadam. The sub-committees of the three sports contain members of each sport’s national federation, and the contests are bound by the rules and regulations of that organization.

The passing of the Laws of Naadam also gave the government more control over the individual sports bodies; although each sport has a national controlling body the Government now has overall authority during the National Naadam Festival. The State government approves and adopts the By-laws of the National Wrestling, National Archery and National Horseracing Federations, as proposed by those Federations; it approves and adopts the organization of the ceremonial procedures proposed by the Organizing Committee, and determines the prizes to be awarded to

winners of each sporting category. The Organizing Committee is responsible for submitting the proposal to confer National Titles and prizes of the successful competitors in each of the three sports to the President of Mongolia, for his approval. Prizes are financed by the Government, not the sporting bodies⁹¹.

5.12 Summary

This chapter has shown how the Naadam Festivals played a significant and important role in the public portrayal of the ‘new orders of governance’ that were carried out in the twentieth century, from the fledgling theocratic government established just before the fall of the Qing Empire, to Soviet-inspired communism and later to democracy and independence. All these significant changes in regime could be clearly recognized and understood by the changes and substitutions in the ritual enactments and the composition and official placement of the ruling elite during the Naadam Ceremony.

Turner argues that it is the ‘subjunctive’ nature of performance that facilitates reflexivity, which allows people to ‘see’ and understand how things might be different (Turner 1984:20). This aspect is graphically demonstrated in the first ‘Peoples Naadam’ after the battle of Khyatia in 1921 and also by the two consecutive Naadams carried out in 1923, one a traditional Buddhist ceremony promoting allegiance to the ruling elite and the other a more informal ‘people’s Naadam’ demonstrating a socialist worldview. For the first time, the people could ‘imagine’ a non-feudal, egalitarian state and a new form of governance for Mongolia.

Reflexivity is also demonstrated by my respondents’ comments during the parades of the Communist Naadam ceremonies. They were ‘made to hold banners’, it was ‘compulsory to cheer the speeches’, it was ‘mandatory to parade past the government

⁹¹ T. Boldsaikhan, June 2006, in his office, Ulaanbaatar.

elite and show respect'. Although Naadam portrayed an official communist 'vision of Modern Mongolia' and the people physically took part in the performance, in their hearts and minds it was not *their* identity and they did not necessarily accept the ideology. Herzfeld criticizes Handelman for not acknowledging that change can be made in 'bureaucratic state spectacles', and suggests that the individual still has free will. However, from my respondents' comments it appears that by not conforming to the state organized programme, for example by boycotting the placard-carrying parade, they would be penalized in their workplace and not offered promotion.

The individual still had freedom of thought in either accepting the ideology or not. However, it was perhaps not forgotten that even though the implementation of communism severely disrupted Mongolian cultural life, Mongolia was still a 'free' and independent country (compared to the Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia, in China). It is possible that this knowledge helps to explain the significant degree of acceptance of Soviet authority as celebrated at Naadam, as the Naadam celebrations were not challenged, or boycotted, as in Poland's National Day celebrations in the 1960s. It also attests to the fact that Naadam was originally a Mongolian festival, despite its manipulation by the current regime, and would remain essentially Mongolian.

During the period of Soviet influence in Mongolia, many new activities were incorporated into the Naadam Games which reflected changes in society; for example, women were included in the archery contests, at the same time they were being encouraged to partake in all aspects of life, such as higher education, in decision-making and in many cases full-time employment outside the home. Thus Naadam was not only portraying the changing in status of women in Mongolian society, it was constituting it, by legislating that they be included in a previously all-male sport.

The early Naadam festivals emphasised the sacrifice of the soldiers in the fight for independence, indeed for several years it was also known as the 'Soldiers Naadam'

or 'Army Naadam'. By dedicating Naadam to the soldiers' sacrifices, the official elements of the ceremony gradually and systematically replaced the religious (Buddhist) characteristics with that of the army. Thus the army (the source of power of the secular officials) became the 'protectors of the people'. I suggest that by vicariously 'sacralising' the military in this way, their presence at Naadam became an accepted part of the official ceremony and also of the parade (and, taking Turner's argument that performative events 'spill over') their presence in everyday life. While it also gave the appearance of returning Naadam to its role as a form of celebration of military victories in the days of Chinggis Khan, this was probably not the case due to the heavy foreign influence.

This chapter has examined the role of Naadam as both an agent *for* change and a mirror *of* change in the political hierarchy of Mongolia; the following chapter discusses nationalism and national identity, and the ways in which Naadam has been a medium by which cultural traditions have been generated and regenerated, to become a modern representation of a unique Mongolian cultural representation and national identity today.

6. NATIONAL IDENTITY, NATIONALISM, THE NATION AND NAADAM

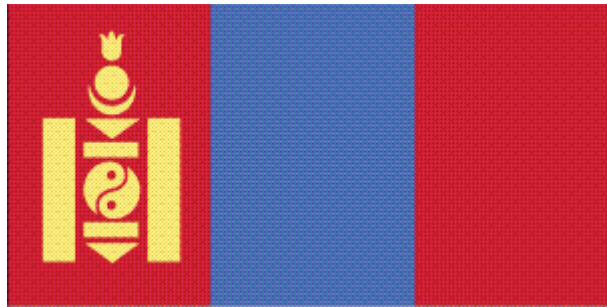


Figure 28. The Mongolian State Flag

In this Chapter I will discuss the question of how national identity is – and has been - experienced and expressed in Mongolia, and in particular how it has been articulated or manifest in the Naadam Festival. I have proposed that Naadam has been an important factor in the maintenance of unity and cohesion across the social spectrum amongst the Mongolian people over the centuries, and has been instrumental in creating and perpetuating a unique national identity. By bringing together some concepts examined in previous Chapters, I will discuss how the performance of Naadam has been utilised to facilitate nation building and nationalism. I will also examine the ways in which the Mongolian people have used the performance of Naadam as a cultural boundary marker both within and outside Mongolian borders.

The ancient hunting and worship festivals from which the Naadam games emanate, were in all probability a generic form of festive activity for all tribes and clan groups across the Central Asian steppe; however one such tribe, the Mongols, became the dominant tribe by superiority in warfare under a skilled leader who maintained loyalty and cohesion through successful military campaigns. Temujin, the leader of the Mongol tribe, took the title Chinggis Khan and began the process which led to the creation of the largest Empire known to man, a source of considerable national pride in Mongolia today.

It could be argued that Chinggis Khan established Naadam as a distinctively Mongolian festival as it ‘became Mongolian’ under his stewardship, being performed at clan meetings (*quriltai*) to settle disputes and discuss matters of leadership, pasturage, war and peace (Stewart 2000:114), and in celebration of military victories (Weatherford 2004:127). The Naadam games were also part of the crucial distribution ceremonies of plunder acquired from military campaigns as ‘the need for booty to secure loyalty was more important than the acquisition of additional territory’ (Fletcher 1968:22-23)⁹². It is from this historic era that ‘the games’ enacted at these festivals began to be recorded in historical literature solely relating to the Mongols, and they continued as a form of celebration by the Mongol people. Based on this finding, the evidence indicates that the rituals and symbols inherent in these festivals began the process of displaying a distinct ‘Mongolian identity’.

However, exploring the role of Naadam and its role in the creation of ‘national identity’ is problematic due to contested definitions as to when Mongolia, as we know it today, became a discrete and distinct nation. It is contestable not only due to the cultural history of Mongolia itself, but also the differing views of social scientists as to the origin of the idea of nation.

Despite the current glorification of Chinggis Khan as ‘Founder of the Mongolian State’ and ‘Father of the Nation’, it is claimed by some academics that Mongolia does not in fact have a long history of continuity as a nation state and therefore lacks a singular, historic and cohesive national identity (Bawden 1986; Enkhuvshin 2006). I agree that in 1206 the alliance of tribes incorporated into an entity by Chinggis Khan could not be called a ‘nation state’ in the modern sense of the word (in terms of an allegiance to national territory) (Gellner 1983, 1987; Hobsbawm 1983, 1990,

⁹² Chinggis Khan ordered that all booty, which consisted of clothes, jewellery and icons, be collected and recorded and then divided and distributed. This was a new custom, which inspired discipline in the field and kept control; the amounts awarded according to rank, special services earned special privileges, with extra booty being a reward for loyal service. He asserted that there was no notion of theft, taking booty was ‘work’ and compensation; soldiers rarely stole from each other and those who disobeyed the rules of distribution were punished. Re-distribution was a key factor in maintaining discipline and loyalty (Professor Thomas Allsen, address for the International Conference of Mongolists, held in Ulaanbaatar, August, 2006.

1992). I argue, however, that the Mongol people do have claim to a common heritage (Penrose 1993:29). They were members of an ‘ethnic community’ as defined by Smith (1986), according to his criteria of having a collective name, a common myth of descent, a shared history, a distinctive shared culture, an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity (Smith 1986:22). Smith argues that an ethnic community must demonstrate its solidarity actively and have a strong sense of belonging, which overrides factionalism and rivalry. I suggest that Naadam may have played an important role in maintaining unity.

The historic identity that Mongolians claim as their ‘national identity’ today, which was ceremoniously and spectacularly made manifest in the 800th Anniversary Naadam in 2006, emanates from the moment in 1206 when Chinggis Khan announced that the new confederation of tribes would be known as *Yeke Mongol Ulus* (Great Mongol Nation/People) (Weatherford 2004) or *Mongol undestniig negtej* (The Mongol Nation) (Kaplonski 1988:40). Chinggis Khan was declared ‘ruler of the people of the felt-walled tents’ (Onon 2005:93; Cleaves 1982:141). This is the actual wording recorded in the fourteenth century (Section 202 of the *Secret History of the Mongols*), and indicates the understanding of ‘the Mongol nation’ as a unification of people of similar culture and heritage, rather than a geographical or political entity. The term *ulus* has been translated to mean nation, but in the sense of a ‘people’, rather than a physically bounded State (Fletcher 1985; Munkh Erdene 2004; Enkhuvshin 2006). So what is often referred to in modern literature as the foundation of the Mongolian State in 1206 would perhaps more accurately be described as the establishment of a federation of united tribes with a similar heritage, under Mongol dominion. Perhaps the term *ethnie* (Smith 1986:22) is a more succinct translation of the Mongolian word *ulus*.

6.1 The evolution of the ‘Mongol Nation’

I now turn to the development of the Mongol nation/people as a discrete group, and how Mongol hegemony became implicit on the Central Asian steppe. It was after the unification of the Central Asian tribes under Chinggis Khan that the Naadam Festival became a form of celebration for the Mongol people, so a short explanation as to

how he arrived at this point is useful for an understanding of the esteem in which he was held, and the dynasty that he founded. It is the memory of this era which is being resurrected and perpetuated in the Naadam festival today.

For thousands of years the Central Asian landmass was inhabited by numerous nomadic tribes engaged in persistent tribal warfare vying for overall power. The Hsiang-nu (Hunnu, Xongnu, or Hun)⁹³ confederation (209BC-91AD) were Turkic-speaking tribes who had migrated westward out of China during the Han Dynasty. The Hsiung-nu confederation was the first large scale social organization formed in the Central Asian steppe (Worldmark Yearbook 2001) and it is feasible that it was during this time that 'the games' emerged as a special celebratory performance, when inter-tribal conflict was reduced allowing for peaceful social and economic interaction. This notion has been recorded in a children's story:

Urambai, the son of a Mongolian king's horseman, follows his dream to become a hero by practicing horseback riding, archery and wrestling every day. As a result of his hard work, his horse, named Nogoolin, wins the race at the Hunnu Empire Festival and Urambai's dream comes true (Baasansuren 2005). The Xianbei, a tribe within the Hsiung nu, are considered to be proto-Mongol (Berger 1995:8). The 'Mongols' were first identified (by outsiders) as a tribe during the Tang dynasty. The Tang referred to the tribes on their northern border as the Mong-ku, and the Kitans (who followed the Tang) called them Mong-ku-li (Curtin 1908:2).

After the Hsiung-nu state collapsed the steppe tribes of Central Asia returned to a state of almost constant warfare. The tribes had shifting loyalties as conquered tribes joined their conquerors; the three predominant ethnic groups in the area, the Tungus, Turks and Mongols, successively established their own states up until 1200 AD. Other tribes in a similar linguistic group to the Mongols were the Tatars, the Onggirad, the Kereyid, the Naimans, the Tayichiud and the Merkid, who were all later to become 'Mongols' as they were conquered by or accepted alliance with the Mongol tribe.

⁹³ The name derives from Hun = man, and Nu = sun: 'People of the Sun' (Weatherford 2004)

It was Chinggis Khan's unique military and political strategy to unite the people by organizing his army into 'tumens' (units of ten thousand) under the leadership of commanders loyal to him, based on meritocracy and not heredity. These units cut across tribal boundaries thereby reducing the risk of insurrection as tribal affiliation (and potential insurgency) was greatly diminished. Loyalty was paramount in Mongolian society during Chinggis Khan's era, and he set an 'important precedent of paternalistic concern for his subordinates and followers' (Hyer 1979:147). In time, the various tribes of the steppe eventually acquired the mantle 'Mongol'.

6.2 Mongol Expansionism and Identity

During the era of the Mongol Empire, there was a distinction between the land conquered by the Mongols, and the Mongol *Ulus* (nation/people). While the 'Mongolian Empire' was under Mongol control, the geographical area did not reflect the extent of the area considered 'land of the Mongols'. The dramatic and quick expansion of the Empire created, in reality, not so much a State but a loosely constructed realm of many non-Mongol societies.

The Mongols frequently left administrative and religious structures intact when they conquered new lands, which proved a more efficient method by which to extract tribute - often one of their prime motives for invasion. The 'core' of the Mongol Empire and the basis of what could be termed ancient Mongolia was the central homeland that, in accordance with Mongolian tradition, was ruled by the youngest son of the Grand Khan. This 'core' is the location of the Mongolian State and source of national identity today. When the Mongol empire declined, most Mongols returned to this homeland. Of those who did not return, some have maintained their Mongol heritage, and - when political conditions allow - are 'performing' their ethnicity again today in the form of annual Naadam festivals.

After the death of Chinggis Khan, Mongolia was ruled by his direct descendents according to his established administrative format. The system of meritocracy instigated by Chinggis Khan required that all male siblings and sons be present at the

quriltai after the death of a leader, to challenge the position of Great Khan⁹⁴. Chinggis Khan's four sons by his first wife – Jochi, Chagatai, Ogodai and Tolui - divided the empire between them; his third son, Ogodai, succeeded him to become Great Khan. As the Chinggisid clan became larger, this system invited considerable dissention which was largely responsible for the ultimate disintegration of the Mongol Empire (Baabar 2005:41) and the lack of unified rule after the dissolution of the Yuan Empire.



Figure 29. The extent of the Empire and movement of the Mongols in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries. Photo D. Rhode from Wall Calendar, Stupa Café, Ulaanbaatar, September 2006

The Mongol Empire reached its height after Chinggis Khan's grandson Khubilai Khan succeeded in subjugating all of China, and founded the Yuan Empire; he relocated the capital city from Karakoram in Mongolia to Shangdu, (near present day Beijing). While this was a pragmatic decision by which to rule China, it ultimately resulted in the loss of an administrative centre in Mongolia itself; this contributed to the lack of unity after the Mongols returned home after they were expelled from China following the demise of the Yuan Dynasty.

⁹⁴It has been suggested that the invasion of Europe was halted for the *quriltai* following the death of Chinggis Khan's son, Ogodei (Chambers 1979:168).

By the fourteenth century, the Mongol Empire began to crumble as the western lands were also seeking freedom from Mongol rule. Lacking a strong leader, the Mongol 'nation' began to lose cohesiveness and lapsed into a confederation of numerous, relatively autonomous princely Khanates for almost two hundred years and inter-tribal warfare became prevalent. It is recorded that Festivals comprising wrestling, archery and horseracing were staged 'at which men tried their strength and their steed's ability' (Dashdondov 2005:20). Horses were raced as an incentive to selectively breed and train them for endurance and speed; the games also facilitated regular competitions to test wrestling and archery skills and expertise (Zorig cited in Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991:82).

There are few literary references available specifically documenting Naadam festivals from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries due to the constancy of war, resulting in the destruction of many indigenous sources of information (Bira 2002). However, as humans are naturally social creatures and there would have been occasions when they gathered for spiritual and social purposes. Moses (1977) records that the herders, 'had a specific route, were not random travelers and always returned to the same place for religious or social events' (Moses 1977:113); so although they were nomadic, the herders did have knowledge of areas where socialization could take place. With the increasing threat of civil war from the western Oirat tribes, links of commonality of the eastern Khalka Khanates resurfaced. I propose that these links of commonality were maintained through the regular performances of 'games festivals', as described in Chapter Four.

6.3 Mongolian 'Khalka' Identity

The Khalka Mongols are the predominant ethnic group in Mongolia today, and it is from their heritage that the majority of the traditions and practices of today emanate. Their political and cultural structures have become hegemonic so what is generally referred to as a Mongolian national identity would more accurately be 'the Khalka identity which has become the national'.

The relevance of this today is that the Khalka were the ruling elite which negotiated with the Soviets at the time of Independence in 1921, when a ‘new’ Mongolian identity was being constructed; therefore, the Khalka traditions became the first ‘national’ traditions and the standard for the Naadam games. Seventy years later, after 1991, the democratic government once again began the process of establishing – or reviving – a Mongolian national identity for the newly independent State, which entailed selecting new nation-state symbols, writing a new Constitution and designing a new state flag and national emblem. Enshrining new national insignia in a Constitution is, according to Hayden (1992) ‘Constitutional Nationalism’.

By this, he means that one particular ethnic group becomes hegemonic and its practices, and sometimes language, are appropriated as ‘the norm’. The practices of that particular ethnic group become the ‘national identity’ as its symbols, traditions and sometimes dialects are written into the legal constitution of the nation; by this criteria, the ‘legal’ identity of Mongolians are therefore those of the Khalka (Bulag 1998:215). This is evident in the prevalence of Khalka-style practices in the Naadam games, such as the outfits, rules and style of *devich* associated with the wrestling (Kabzinska Stawarz 1991:87). The majority of archers compete in Khalka-style archery, although since 1991 Buriat and Uriankhai archery competitions are now also included at Naadam.

While modern maps, when referring to an historic era, delineate the area of the present country as ‘Mongolia’, some maps that were printed in the nineteenth century refer to the eastern areas as the ‘Khalka territories’; a Chinese atlas depicting the ‘Manchu Empire’ era in 1697, marked their northern territory as “Outer Mongolia, Khalka” (Herrmann 1966). A Chinese map of 1234 denotes ‘countries conquered by the Mongols’ but also notes the tribal areas of the many tribes which had become ‘Mongol’; one such area was the location of the ‘Greater Mongols’. By 1290 the conquered parts of China that became part of the Mongol Empire, were referred to as ‘Empire of the Great Khan’. By 1760 the area to the north of China beyond the Great Wall (the location of the present Mongolia and Inner Mongolia) was designated ‘Mongols’ with the four main Khanates individually marked (Herrmann, A.1966),

see Appendix IX. I believe that these references attest to the notion that the Mongol people were clearly a separately identified group, at least since 1141 and probably earlier (see later this chapter).

The Khalka (from the Mongol word *Qa/ga*, meaning shield) came to be known under that designation during the time of Batu-Mongke Dayan Khan (1460-1543); he has since been called the last true pan-Mongol Khan of the Eastern Mongols. At his death, his land - and its people - was divided amongst his sons. His ninth son, Geresenje, inherited the 'Seven Khalka tribes of the Rear', which later became condensed into the Four Khalka *aimags* (provinces). These tribal territories constitute most of present day Mongolia.

Until the sixteenth century, the elite Khalka Mongols drew their identity from Chinggis Khan, not only through direct lineage but also the Great Khan inherited the Chakravartin mantle. When Buddhism was introduced to Mongolia, the Eastern Mongols (the Khalka) elevated the son of one of Chinggis Khan's descendants to be their spiritual leader (Living Buddha). From that point the Living Buddha – throughout his many reincarnations (and after the second, they were from Tibet), also inherited the mantle of Chakravartin ruler. Thus, Chinggis Khan became synthesised into the Mongolian Buddhist pantheon, and remained a powerful source of identity for the Khalka people.

The Khalka became the dominant tribe in Mongolia after the civil war in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Tribal animosity resulted in a divisive war between the eastern Mongols (Khalka) and the western Mongol tribes (Oirat). In the seventeenth century the Khalka lands were invaded by the Oirats; the Khalka would not submit so fled south to what is now Inner Mongolia, which had already been conquered by the Manchu. Rather than be banished from their homeland forever, the Khalka tribes submitted to the Manchu in return for assistance to regain their lost lands in the north. Although the Oirat were Mongols (as opposed to the Manchu), they were not of the Chinggisid lineage and it would have been unacceptable for the

Khalka Mongols to submit to them; traditionally they had been the ‘bride givers’ and the Khalka the ‘bride takers’.

This military assistance came at a price; for the next three hundred years Outer Mongolia was under the suzerainty of the Manchu, and absorbed into the Qing Empire. The Oirats later submitted to the Manchu and remained in the western part of Outer Mongolia, although considerably reduced in numbers. The southern tribes were incorporated into the Qing Empire and more extensively colonized, becoming the province of Inner Mongolia. After the Convention of Dolannur in 1691, the Manchu divided the Outer Mongolian territories into thirty-four districts (Banners); this effectively exercised control over the nomadic Mongols, further dividing them over the next two centuries (Moses and Halcovic 1985).

I propose that the elite Khalka Mongols did maintain a common identity as a people through their identification, and alliances, with the Chinggisid lineage⁹⁵. I further suggest that the nomadic herders, through their allegiance to a Mongol Khan would also have been aware of a ‘Mongol identity’ and of belonging to a wider group of fellow clansmen. Fletcher (1985) argues that supratribal alliances were often unstable and frequently lapsed into periods when the largest effective unit was the tribe. However, even during these times, ‘...tribesmen (sic) thought of themselves as belonging to a nation (*ulus*) that had existed in the past and might at any time be reconstructed under a new or an old name ...even though such a nation might be nothing more than an idea in people’s minds’ (Fletcher 1986:20-21).

The traditions and customs (but not the rituals of shamanic or Buddhist origin), in Mongolia’s Naadam festival today are almost exclusively that of the Khalka identity, with imported influence from the Manchu. The Khalka nobles, as descendents of Chinggis Khan, were the feudal lords and princely rulers of the Banners throughout the territory during Manchu suzerainty.

⁹⁵ Chinggis Khan’s ancestors were the Borjigin clan of the Kiyad group of the Mongol tribe (Onon 2001: xi),

As discussed in Chapter Five the present National Naadam festival has its origins in the *danshig* Naadams of the Qing era (after Manchu subjugation). The *danshig* Naadam ceremonies were only performed in the Khalka Mongolian territories, and at that time there would have been little concept of a wider territorial ‘Mongolian national identity’ (as explained by ancient maps). However, when this Khalka Naadam was transformed into the ‘National Naadam’ in 1912 after independence from Manchu suzerainty, it became a unifying event for all Mongols of all tribal affiliations. Its commonalities of a pan-Mongol history and cultural practices ensured that all Mongols could identify with the symbolic representations, and unite them despite their differences. Cohen suggests that it is when an understanding of symbols is shared, unity and community is created, even if individuals do not all have the same emotional experience: ‘It continuously transforms the reality of difference to the appearance of similarity with such efficacy that people can still invest the ‘community’ with ideological integrity. It unites them in their opposition, both to each other and to those outside. It thereby constitutes, and gives reality to, the community’s boundaries’ (Cohen 1985:21).

6.4 Building Nationalism: Naadam as a unifying force

The concept of a National Day was not indigenous to Mongolia but introduced by the Soviet-inspired government in 1924, to begin the process of nation-building through socialism, as explained in Chapter Four. While the Mongol people had shared a common identity for centuries, they had not formed a single political unit since the days of Kubilai Khan, until the end of Qing suzerainty. Kaplonski (1998) proposes that the socialist government ‘created’ nationalism in the twentieth century, when the Mongolian People’s Republic became a united entity under its own central governance as a ‘modern state’ (1998:35).

The emphasis on unity, loyalty and identity with the historic ‘Great Mongol Nation’ of the Chinggisid era was the focal point of the procession and the pageantry played out in the 800th Anniversary National Naadam festival. One of Chinggis Khan’s greatest strengths was his ability to unite and maintain the loyalty of the tribes of the Central Asian steppe. By re-enacting the era of Chinggis Khan when Mongolians

were (as their history portrays) a great and powerful people, the latent message to the people was to work together in unity to once again become a proud and successful nation. People find their identity and ‘tell themselves who they are’ by referring to their history, they import current themes into narratives of their past to legitimate the circumstances of the present. Halbwachs (1992) finds that ‘through participation in commemorative meetings with group members of the current generation we can recreate through imaginatively re-enacting a past that would otherwise slowly disappear in the haze of time’ (1992:24).

The President’s speech at the Opening Ceremony of Naadam in 2006 (Chapter Two) challenged the people to work together for the future prosperity of the nation. Lack of unity has been cited a deterrent to Mongolia’s progress as a nation (Enkhuvshin 2006) which has been explained as stemming from times of tribal animosity (Bulag 1998, Bawden 1968) and also, according to personal interviews, from ‘nomadic individualism and independence’ (Otgo, Batmonke, Ulaanbaatar 2006). It could also be apathy as a result of years of centralized control and authoritarianism during the Soviet era, when two generations of Mongolians lived under communism with state involvement in almost every aspect of everyday life.

Cohen (1985) suggests that although people may appear to behave in a similar manner, they do not necessarily share the same meaning for that behaviour; however the variety of behaviours still have enough commonality to be contained within the cultural boundary. I found this to be consistent with my respondents’ opinions as to their personal interpretation of the Naadam festival. Having read some aspects of Mongolian history (for example Chinggis Khans artillery techniques) I found I had understood this dramatized performance in the Opening Ceremony in 2006 more clearly than some Mongolian friends. However the performance was ‘Mongolian’ in many other ways that they recognized and understood – the colours of the actor’s outfits, the numerical significance, the subtle movements of dance, for example, so it was meaningful and inclusive as far as they were concerned. Similarly, the rituals inherent in the wrestling, archery and horseracing may not be understood to their full (historical and mythological) extent by all spectators, but their symbolic significance

is known in Mongolian myth and folklore, so there are enough commonalities for them to be felt to be inclusive (Cohen 1985:21).

A nation can be unified without being culturally or socially homogeneous... performances can make connections on individual and collective levels on different occasions in diverse ways. Through the power of performance, identities and relationships, societies and cultures may not only be reflected but created, consolidated, or contested (Pegg 2001:198).

6.5 Naadam as National Day Festival

The National Naadam festival on 11 July 1924 became the central event of Mongolia's first 'National Day' celebration. For the next seventy years, it was maintained as a National Day festival to celebrate independence and liberation from Chinese domination, with the implicit understanding that this had been achieved with the help of the Soviet military.

The government today is 'rebranding' the National Day celebration to that of a commemoration of the Foundation of the Mongolian State. However, my interviews overwhelmingly found that most people still thought that the National Day Naadam celebrated independence. I found this surprising as the publicity surrounding the '800th Anniversary' celebrations was considerable; I can only deduce that it is because this is a relatively new focus and not yet lodged in people's minds. It seemed less important to my interviewees what Naadam specifically celebrated, other than that it was a three-day holiday and a uniquely Mongolian celebration of which they were proud.

Naadam 'works' successfully as a National Day celebration (despite various understandings of its representation) as it serves to engender unity and a notion of national pride in its symbolic manifestations. The rituals of the opening ceremony and symbolic entertainment pieces invoke a collective memory. There is no doubt that the spectacular staging of Chinggis Khan's entourage engendered a sense of pride and nostalgia of 'Mongolia's glorious past', although the audience members

may have differing personal viewpoints. Many of the rituals (such as the unique form of greeting in ‘beckoning richness’ described in Chapter Two), would have been understood and shared by all Mongolians present.

Today, Naadam acts as a unifying force as it is a time when all citizens participate in a celebration that affirms their shared history and commonality, overriding their differences. Naadam means different things to different people and across the generations: some enjoyed the wrestling, some went for the sense of occasion and ceremony, some for the entertainment, some cherished the holiday and time to be with friends, while others enjoyed a family reunion meal at home while watching the events on television (and the special movies that are always shown at the time of Naadam). Yet my respondents all agreed that partaking in Naadam activities does represent a mutual sense of ‘Mongolian-ness’, and a sharing of something of significance. Kertzer asserts that “...ritual builds solidarity without requiring the sharing of beliefs. Solidarity is produced by people *acting* together, not by people thinking together” (my emphasis) (1988:76).

6.6 Mongol identity outside Mongolia

Naadam is unique to Mongolia, to Mongolians and to Mongol diasporic communities across the globe. It is a demonstration, symbolically enacted, of what it means to be part of the Mongolian ‘community’. The sense of community is located in the minds of its members, according to Anthony Cohen (1985) but not in geographical terms; he argues that community is not a structure but a symbolic construct, ‘the reality of their boundaries similarly lies in the mind, in the meanings which people attach to them, not in their structural forms’ (1985:98).

Outside Mongolia, Naadam is performed on an auspicious day (often but not always coinciding with Mongolia’s National Day, but usually a significant day in their community’s memory) in areas where Mongolian people have settled in communities around the world. These are areas that were originally part of greater Mongolia that have since been politically annexed, such as Buryat Siberia (Russia) and Inner

Mongolia (China), and former parts of the Empire when there were remnants of Mongol communities. I have found no evidence to suggest that Naadam was performed by non-Mongol people in the territories that were conquered by the Mongols. This suggests that its importance remained within the cultural repertoire of the Mongol people, and was not adopted by (or shared with) conquered nations.

In recent years there has been a growing interest globally for minority communities to assert pride in their ethnicity, and an increasing tolerance of ethnic diversity in former dictatorial countries (for example China and Russia). In Mongolia, the Convention of World Mongols was convened for the first time in 2006, to foster communication, education and the development of relations between diasporic Mongol communities and Mongolia⁹⁶. This significant event attracted representatives from over twenty countries and also created much interest in exploring educational and cultural exchanges between the diasporic communities themselves. By the end of the Convention there was a shared goal to further these relationships and interaction, to meet on an annual basis, and to assist the communities in maintaining their Mongolian culture and traditions.

Cohen (1985) argues that past myths and traditions can be employed to reassert a sense of community when either a literal boundary change (as with the Buryat Mongols) or an imposed one (when Soviet communism was introduced into Mongolia) threatens a society's culture. During the three hundred year period of submission to the Chinese (Qing) Empire, the Mongol people maintained a separate identity from their overlords; Naadam was not performed by the Manchu in China, although Manchu representatives of the Emperor (in Mongolia) were part of the official Naadam audience.

Cohen gives an ethnographic example in the Buryat Mongol community in Siberia, who continue to maintain their sense of unique identity and 'Buryat-ness'

⁹⁶ Personal attendance, August 2006, Ulaanbaatar.

(Mongolness) despite years under Soviet control. Although they were originally comprised of different tribal, religious and linguistic groups, their desire to mark their Mongol ethnic boundaries has resulted in a strong and integrated sense of community. Although this identity was frequently challenged by the hegemonic power, ‘...unacknowledged, and often opposed by the Soviet authorities, the ritual of Buryat folk culture has continued everywhere’ (Humphrey cited in Cohen 1985:93).

I argued earlier that the Mongolian word *ulus* could more accurately be interpreted as *ethnie*. Anthony Smith (1977) proposes that an *ethnie* can have a ‘symbolic geographical centre (but)... they do not cease to be *ethnie* when they are dispersed. They share common myths, memories, values, and symbols, not necessarily material or political power’ (Smith 1977:28). He argues that it is not language, politics or dominant culture that unites; it is the link with the past – a common ancestry and history. Today, more Mongols live outside its borders than inside (Kaplonski 1998:44), and there is a growing desire for Mongolians on both sides of the border to celebrate their shared identity, traditions and history.

I propose that this link with the past is demonstrated in the staging of Naadam. Naadam is performed in some variation or other (horseracing is not always present), in many communities outside the physical boundaries of the Mongolian State by the millions of people who claim a Mongol heritage. Clearly, Naadam has become an important symbol of ‘Mongolness’ and is enacted as a representation and boundary marker by people wanting to express their unique identity, both inside and outside Mongolia. In Ulan Ude, Buryatia, a festival is celebrated on 6th July every year comprising wrestling and archery; a Naadam is performed in Inner Mongolia in northern China and in the Yunnan area of southern China, in Tanna Tuva, in Washington DC and in London. Their ceremonial content changes according to circumstances (for example the London Naadam officially marks the start of a London-Mongolia Charity Car Rally and the Washington Naadam takes place in a city park). However, staging a Naadam is first and foremost ‘the way Mongolians celebrate’ – by sharing their collective memories, performing their rituals and honouring their traditions, at home or overseas.

These examples of diasporic Mongols around the world today choosing to enact their identity through the performance of Naadam, suggests to me that the shared common heritage and links with the past, has kept their Mongolian identity alive. Belonging to a community 'is largely in the mind. As a mental construct, it condenses symbolically, and adeptly, its bearers' social theories of similarity and difference. It becomes an eloquent and collective emblem of their social selves' (Cohen 1985:114). The people of Mongolian heritage, whether in Mongolia or overseas, locate their sense of community as Mongolians, and perform their identity in the uniquely Mongolian festival of Naadam.

6.7 Summary

In this chapter I have endeavoured to demonstrate how the Naadam festival, as a performative event, has over the centuries been adopted and adapted into the cultural, political and religious worldview of the Mongol people, to become a unique manifestation of 'Mongolianness'. From this basis it then became an important tool in nation-building in the twentieth century to engender unity, national identity and a sense of nationalism, culminating in its manifestation as Mongolia's National Day Festival.

As the Mongols became hegemonic on the Central Asian steppe, tribal distinctions of subjugated tribes gradually merged to form what would be later referred to as a 'Mongol identity'. Whether it could be described as a national identity in a modern context is debatable, although the people united under Chinggis Khan (as the Mongol *ulus* or nation) did share enough commonality of features to be described by Smith (1986) as a distinct ethnic group, or *ethnie*.

The Naadam Festival *became* uniquely Mongolian by its continued performance in a Mongolian context since the formation of the 'Mongol Nation' in 1206. When it was adopted by the court of Chinggis Khan as a festival of celebration it would have, by association, become more than a folk festival, and perhaps became connected with

the power of the sky god Tengrii, from which Chinggis Khan received his power to rule.

When the games became codified into a celebratory festival with the establishment of the Buddhist *dashig* Naadam Festival, it was a celebration of the Khalka tribes only, and would have facilitated unity between the Khalka tribes by their mutual involvement in rituals. After the civil war the Khalka Mongols became dominant and ultimately led the move towards independence from Chinese suzerainty; thus the Khalka identity became the national. It was the Khalka *dashig* Naadam that became the ‘blueprint’ for the National Day ceremony today.

Since independence in 1991, the new democratic government set about returning Naadam to a Mongolian cultural manifestation, as a source of national pride and identity. Naadam is unique to Mongolia, to Mongolians and to Mongol diasporic communities across the globe. Clearly, Naadam has become an important symbol of ‘Mongolness’ and is enacted as a representation and boundary marker by Mongolians to express their unique identity, both inside and outside the political and geographical borders of the Mongolia State.

7. CONCLUSION



Figure 30. Former State Emblem

This thesis has explored the significant role that Naadam has played, and continues to play, in the creation and maintenance of a Mongolian national identity, both within and outside the boundaries of Mongolia. Turner draws on Durkheim's assertion that social systems are dynamic and need to be activated to remain alive, as without it social life would be inert (1990:9). By regularly performing the Naadam festival, the Mongolian people are continually constructing and reconstructing their culture, customs, traditions, values and identity – both to themselves and to the world beyond.

A cultural performance such as a National Day festival is meta-communicative, it contains 'messages' in symbolic form (Turner 1974:55). During the Opening Ceremony of the Naadam festival, the symbolic placement of the *Sulde* (Nine White Standards), the seating of official dignitaries, the dress and formality surrounding the President and the choreography of the entertainment component, all contain symbolic messages that are communicated to the audience. Cultural performances are continuously evolving in meaning and in form; they are linked to wider social processes and informed by the political and social events that precede them. The performance of Naadam is ever-changing, it is not a static display but adjusting and adapting to the circumstances of the present (Turner 1986:27). An example is the 'militarization' of Naadam after independence from China in the 1920s, in the massive displays of military hardware in the parade and the substitution of army personnel in the formerly 'sacred space' of the official audience. The spiritual

protection of Buddhism was visibly replaced by the power of the army, clearly demonstrating that the Soviet 'big brother' was the new guardian of the Mongolian people. The military thus became literally and metaphorically the new 'protector' of Mongolia.

Since the departure of Soviet influence and the move to democracy in 1991, the Mongolian government has actively worked to return Naadam to a manifestation of Mongolian identity. There has been a steady re-introduction (and perhaps re-invention) of Mongolian traditions drawn from Naadam festivals before the communist era (albeit now without any religious component); these have been gradually re-introduced into the repertoire of the Naadam Opening Ceremony, and into many of the Games rituals. However, some of the Soviet-era rituals have also been maintained, such as the military arm-swinging goose-step adopted by the Honour Guard as they perform the rituals surrounding the installation of the *Sulde*, demonstrating how new symbols and rituals can be incorporated while maintaining the traditional integrity of the performance.

As described in Chapter Two, the reimagining of Naadam to commemorate the 'Founding of the Mongolian Nation' replacing the theme of Liberation, was clearly evident in the entertainment in comparison to the previous year. In 2005 the entertainment demonstrated Mongolia's westernisation and modernity, with performances of European opera, classical (ballroom) dancing, rock singers and break dancers, military exercises and classical (European) ballet; and also its ethnic diversity with parades of diverse national costumes and floats representing different areas of the country. In 2006 the emphasis was on demonstrating Mongolia's traditions, history and unity, a pride in the past and establishing Mongolia's own cultural genre in its own right. This was expressed by the 800 morin players and 800 Longsong singers instead of opera and rock musicians, the displays of Mongolian trick riding and historically-rich dance choreography replacing the military and 'western' dancing routines. By connecting the past to the present, a potentially new vision is created which can be reflected upon and can open up the possibility for change with the acceptance of a new way of thinking (Turner 1990:24). The 'new'

performances thus invited the audience to re-look at their cultural heritage and what it means to be Mongolian in 2006, perhaps demonstrating that Mongolia's own musical and performative traditions were significant and vital, were inclusive and held their own on centre stage in their own right.

UNITY

The President's speech during the 2006 Anniversary Naadam called for unity and co-operation for the future success of the nation. There has been a growing financial and social inequality in Mongolia since the end of communism (*Human Development Report Mongolia 1997*)⁹⁷, due in great part to the rapid deployment of a market economy without consideration of the social costs in health, education and welfare (Rossabi 2005). The dramatization of Chinggis Khan as a unifying public figure, recalled by means of performance the early days of the Mongolian state when he united the many tribes to create a strong, loyal, disciplined and successful 'nation'. I suggest that the unifying qualities intrinsic in the memory of Chinggis Khan are being purposefully endorsed and dramatically demonstrated at Naadam, to restore a sense of national unity and cooperation; the freedom of democracy is more fragile than dictatorship or autocracy and without the authoritarianism of communism or the divine cohesion of Buddhism, a new mechanism is needed to inspire unity and sense of community. Recalling the image of Chinggis Khan to promote unity of purpose and strength has a precedent; Rossabi (2005) records that songs praising Chinggis Khan were sung in Sukhbaatar Square in 1990 as a rallying call by demonstrators calling for democratic reform in government (Rossabi 2005:16).

POWER

The formal ceremony of Naadam has always been imbued with the manifestation of power; it has been religious, military or political power and frequently a combination of all those aspects. In its ancient origins, Naadam was first performed under the power of the Sky God Tengrii. Naadam became implicated with the power of the

⁹⁷ <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/41411802>

ruling elite during the time of Chinggis Khan as the festival was part of military victory celebrations and *quiriltai*, important occasions of state. From the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, Naadam was regularly organised by the ruling princes of the banners (areas of jurisdiction) or monasteries, and sanctioned by the Manchu *ambans* (representatives) of the Emperor. During the Soviet era it became a public performance to construct and mirror a united and integrated communist workforce, losing all of its religious significance and many original Mongolian traditions. Today, although it remains a secular event, the democratic government is actively restoring many of these important cultural markers thus actively demonstrating democracy by giving Naadam back to the people.

Performance not only enables those in power, the ‘organizers’, to portray their version of the order of the world, but to do so dramatically. The colourful and impressive re-enactment of the court of Chinggis Khan was more powerful and memorable to some of my respondents than the President’s speech, confirming Rappaport’s observation that “physical display indicates more, more clearly ... what words are able to communicate (1999:140).

I suggest that the Ceremony of Naadam has been used very effectively as a public performance for political communication since the seventeenth century, when it was performed to ‘elevate’ the reincarnated Living Buddha (*Khutuktu*). Such an important occasion could not have occurred in seclusion; the recognition of the divine status of the young Zanabazar would not have acquired authority had his inauguration not occurred in a public ceremony with witnesses. Furthermore, for the ceremony to be successful and gain acceptance it was essential that it was readily identifiable to the Mongol people as being local and ‘Mongolian’. At the time, Buddhism was considered a Tibetan religion, so it was necessary for it to be seen as a Mongol construct. I suggest that it was the incorporation of the traditional and spiritually rich ‘Three Games’ into the official inauguration that ensured that the new festival was presented to the people as ‘their’ festival. By performing these ancient and essentially Mongolian games, the new Living Buddha was successfully presented to the people and inaugurated as their spiritual leader.

At the end of the seventeenth century, this established festival was again reworked as a celebratory festival to display the 'new world order' for the Mongols when their ruling khans became suzerains of the Qing Emperor. To a non-literate populous, a public performance was the most efficient way to communicate a change in political or religious status. As Kertzer (1988:2) argues, ritual symbolism is often used to create a certain political reality, and through participating people are 'given a way to understand what is going on in the world'.

THE GAMES

Despite the pageantry of the Opening Ceremony and public entertainment, it is the Naadam games that are the essence of the Naadam festival. By combining the symbolism and ritual of the Three Games to a public or civic ceremony, the ceremony is 'sanctioned' as a uniquely Mongolian event that has been 'properly celebrated' according to tradition. Each of the three sports are very different, yet complement each other as a separate and unique third of a trio. The three games facilitate unity as the diverse nature of each sport attracts different supporters, yet they all come together for the occasion of Naadam. However, the three sports do have commonalities in form, they are all non-aggressive, individualistic but competitive, and all observe a code of honour and ancient rituals.

I propose that the ritualistic aspects of the Three Games enable the Mongolian people to connect to their nomadic past. The rituals and symbolic actions performed during the games are specifically Mongolian, which come from the distinctive and particular environmental conditions, infused with folk and shamanic religious rituals of ancient Mongolia. Almost all my respondents felt that the nomadic identity was one of the strongest identifying symbols of what it means to be Mongolian, perhaps reinforced in an increasingly homogeneous world.

BOUNDARY MARKING.

I find that Naadam is central to Mongolian identity as it enacts an important and significant point of difference and cultural boundary, although I suggest that this is a relatively recent reflexive understanding as Mongolia has developed into an open global society. Cohen (1985) proposes that when a people or their culture comes under threat, it can result in a resurgence of pride and self-awareness (1985:79). Today more Mongols live outside the borders of Mongolia than within (Bawden 1968:1), and as was demonstrated by the First Convention of World Mongols in 2006, there is a growing interest by Mongolian people around the world to reassert their heritage and restore commonality in an expanded version of Anderson's 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983:15). I suggest that Naadam is important for the national and international Mongolian community as 'the reality of community lies in its members' perception of the vitality of its culture. People construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning and a referent of their identity' (Cohen 1985:118).

A recurring response in my interviews and conversations about Naadam was that it was 'a time of happiness'; it is the highlight of the summer period, a three-day holiday from work and a time for family reunions across the country. Many 'folk festivals' do not survive the passing of time and changing social practices, unless they are adopted by the elite. However Naadam is unique in that it remained a folk festival whilst *also* being adopted by the elite. It became an important performative symbol in the Mongolian cultural repertoire when it was adopted by the ruling Khans and lamas to mark significant political and religious events, but at the same time also remained a celebratory event in the shamanic and folk tradition. For centuries, Naadam has been a social and spiritual festive celebration enjoyed by *all* Mongol people, across the social sphere, settled and nomadic, urban and rural, which I propose is why it has remained such a central form of cultural expression for so many years.

Naadam unites the nation symbolically as a National Day celebration as the National Naadam Festival is performed at the same time in every city, town and village across the State. Mongolians take part in Naadam celebrations within similar spatial and

temporal parameters, thus tying the local communities to the national and creating what Anderson (1991) would call an ‘imagined community’, when ‘the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’ (Anderson 1983:15).

This thesis has examined the many and varied occasions on which the Naadam festival has been performed in the past and to the present, demonstrating its centrality in the Mongolian cultural repertoire. The National Naadam festival today is the most visibly important public celebration in Mongolian social, political and cultural life. My research finds that over the centuries - prior to modern notions of nationalism - Naadam has arguably been the most significant occasion when the Mongol people gathered to ritually express and reinforce their cultural identity. I suggest that the enduring nature of the Naadam festival also reveals the ‘longevity’ of the Mongols as a people. By drawing an analogy to Rappaport’s proposal that ‘the continued existence of a 1000 old cathedral does more than speak of the endurance of a liturgical order...It demonstrates it’ (1999:144); I argue that it is the historicity and continuity of Naadam today that *demonstrates* that the Mongol people have a long history of communal identity.

A shared history binds people in a sense of community especially when they remember together in a group, as rituals maintain a sense of belonging when they are reinforced by collective activity. Rituals strengthen group unity by reinforcing the shared values of society. Ritual also gives us a sense of confidence and permanence that the world is the same today as it was yesterday and will be in the future; ‘by stating enduring and underlying patterns, ritual connects past, present and future, abrogating time and history’ (Myerhoff cited in Kertzer 1988:10). Today the ancient rituals and traditional symbols inherent in the Naadam Festival not only serve to engender unity, they demonstrate a unique cultural heritage in an increasingly homogenized world. Naadam has become a forum for Mongolians at home and across the globe to assert their commonality and identity, by performing and reforming their unique and ancient cultural traditions.

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Many (many) decades later, circumstances offered me a new direction in life, and I became a 'mature student'. By this time, Mongolia was an open, democratic state and travel and study was possible. Mongolia was no longer far-away or strange, but still a fascinating country with an interesting history, a unique culture, and (as I found out) wonderfully friendly welcoming people. Their help was invaluable in assisting with translations, arranging interviews, being interviewed, finding facts and giving me so many informal insights into their lives; they made my fieldwork not only more thorough but a very enjoyable experience.

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APPENDIX I

Rules of Wrestling

Titles and Epithets

A wrestler who wins five consecutive rounds is proclaimed an *Ulsyn nachin* (ulsen = national, nachin = a type of bird, generally thought to be the mythical garuda). One who wins six rounds is *Ulsyn hartsaga*, seven rounds *Ulsyn zaan* (elephant), eight rounds *Ulsyn gar'd*, and nine or more rounds *Ulsyn arslan*. The overall winner of the tournament is given the title *Ulysen avarga* (giant snake). The current eight titles have been in use since ancient times.

In the smaller *aimag* (provincial) Naadam festivals, the title reflects the regional status of the competition; the overall winner is proclaimed *aimagiin zaan*, and the second place title *aimagiin arslan*. In the *soum* (district) Naadam festivals, titles are awarded to the first (*sumyn zaan*) and second place (*sumyn nachin*).

Excerpt from 'laws of mongolia' 2003. Naadam. 'rules of wrestling'

(Translated by L. Munkh-Erdene 2006)

Duration

5.1. The duration of wrestling shall be as follows:

5.1.1. 10 minutes for each first, second, third and fourth round;

5.1.2. 15 minutes for each fifth, sixth, and seventh round;

5.1.3. 30 minutes for each eighth, ninth, and up round;

5.2. If two wrestlers do not win each others, the referee shall stop the wrestling and make them to draw lots. The wrestler taken the lots shall start the holding grip in order to continue the wrestling. If due wrestler does not win the other in the time, he shall hand his right to his competitor. In this case, the text wrestling grip shall be managed and like this, the wrestling shall be continued until one's win.

5.3. If two wrestlers both to not win, they shall re-draw lots and the wrestler who win the lots shall hold the back side of zodog-wrestling upper clothe like skirt or bra by

his one hand and make his second hand to hold the shuudag-wrestling clothe like underwear in order to continue the wrestling proceeding. If both sides do not win in this case, it shall be continued until one's win, giving the above stated chance.

Responsibilities

7.1. The wrestler shall be released from wrestling competition due to the competition commission decision based on referee's opinion in the below cases.

7.1.1. If he offends National Wrestling regulatory items;

7.1.2. If he does not fulfill the requirement, asked from referees or zasuul-the wrestling trainee during wrestling proceed;

7.1.3. If he changes his chosen wrestler, if he allows the low-level-wrestler to choose his wrestler before himself or required him to choose and also, if he requires someone to choose the wrestler he wants;

7.1.4. If he refuses to hold re-wrestling grip, to give his grip to his competitor or if he looses the zodog and shuudag ties during due re-wrestling grip.

The Wrestling Federation was established in 1990. It is independent of the Government and is self-financed. The President and Board Members are selected by a committee of 67 members, the literal translation being "Committee of Wise Men". The staff are salaried by the Federation, from income generated by wrestling competitions. The first by-laws were made in 1921 and amendments have been made on regular basis since. The Mongolian government initiated laws for wrestling in Naadam independent of the association in 2003⁹⁸.

⁹⁸L. Munkh Erdene, July 2006, Ulaanbaatar. Personal communication.

APPENDIX II

The Ideal Wrestler

The Body

- a. They are calm on the surface but have quick movement and intelligence.
- b. A large body is not essential, but can be preferable.
- c. A thin waist with buttocks (hips) and chest of the same size, with good firm muscle definition.
- d. Firm and well toned muscles from all angles
- e. Fluid retention after a long wrestling bout
- f. Individual ribs should not be visible.

The Head

- a. The neck should be thick and should be similar size to the head.
- b. The cheekbones should be big giving the face a square appearance.
- c. The feet should be big and the teeth well-attached to the gums.
- d. They should have a low hair line (with little forehead).
- e. Wrestlers can be identified by their earlobes; they have small, flat ears with thick earlobes.
- f. Small eyes and an aquiline nose.

The Chest

- a. The chest should be thick and square.
- b. They should have well defined breasts (chest).
- c. The shoulders should be broad with a slightly humped back – sloping shoulders.
- d. The arms should be long, and level with the knee (because their shoulders are sloping forward) with thick wrists; the metacarpals are thin and knuckles big.

The Buttocks and Legs

- a. The hips should be wide and thick, with large thighbones.
- b. They should be slightly bowlegged, as the kneejoints should be tight and rounded.
- c. The leg muscles should be well formed.
- d. You should be able to see a small hole behind the knee (showing large muscles)
- e. Large and big feet, and look like a giant walking.

Source: Damdin 1966: A History of Mongolian Wrestling. Ulaanbaatar

APPENDIX III

Construction of Archery Equipment

Bow Construction

This composite bow is usually constructed from birch or bamboo wood, ibex horns and animal tendons bound together with an adhesive made from animal hide and fish bladder. A wrapper of birch bark helped to protect it mechanically and from moisture. Less traditionally leather was used with ash or yew wood. Decorations were engraved or with falcon or eagle feathers. The backbone of the bow is a wooden frame, typically birch because it was resilient and easily available. The total length of the frame was typically 150-160 cm, unstrung. It appears as a semi-circle, but when strung its limbs are bent inward.

After the point of string attachment, the ends are bent away from the archer thereby forming a double curve. This double curve delivers extra acceleration and velocity to arrows. Between these bends the frame is covered with long and flat pieces of horn or bone. This adds power to the "snap" of the frame because these materials have high compression strength. These hard layers cover the whole area called "the belly" (the side of the bow facing towards the archer) from grip to the limbs. A layer of specially prepared birch bark was applied to protect the bow against moisture. Tendon, typically taken from deer, moose or other game animals), provides additional tensile strength to the "back" of the bow (the side of the bow facing away from the archer). Domestic animal tendons were also used, but materials taken from wild animals like deer, moose and mountain sheep were considered strongest and best. A layer of ungulate horn is used on the belly of the bow. Sinew stores energy well when stretched, as does horn when compressed.

The traditional substance used for the curing of both leather and bows was fish glue. Fish glue, used for moisture protection, was readily extracted from the bladders of freshwater fish, by soaking in hot water to remove the protein, and then boiling the resultant soup for an extended time. The usual procedure employed in the production of a traditional Mongolian bow is as follows:



1. The wooden frame is cured,
2. The horns and/or bone to be used are boiled to soften them then attached to the frame.
3. The tendons have to be dried, and then crushed to form a mass of loose fibers.
4. The fibres are soaked with fish glue and applied to the back of the bow. The thickness and amount of sinew, applied is done in a multi-stage process with some days in between. Too thin a layer makes the bow weaker, and too thick makes it stiff.

The layer of sinew could be as thick as a human finger before drying. 5. All parts are secured in place with fish glue. The horns and wooden sections that are glued together are first grooved with a toothed tool to increase the gluing surface and the strength of the bond. 6. The final step is the application of protective birch bark layers, which are first boiled until soft, to ensuring a proper fit before being glued to the finished bow. 7. The bow is then wrapped tightly in ropes and placed to dry and harden in room temperature for one year or more for strength and durability. The bow is usually stored in a leather case for protection when not in use.

TheBowStrings

The bow strings are made from animal hide. The fat is removed and the hide is stretched out and twisted. As a result of this it will not stretch any further, but remain taut. While the skin of many fur-bearing animals could be used, horse skin is the preferred choice for its suppleness in the low winter temperatures of Central Asia. Intestines of animals as string material could also be used but such strings are not water resistant and thus only suited for use in dry and hot weather. Silk and cotton, and mixes of these, have also been used.

To string the bow, the archer could sit, and using both feet to press against the bow bend the limbs to attach the string. Another technique while standing upright is to keep the bow bent under one leg while the other leg holds the outer end. On horseback, the Mongol archer routinely strung the bow by placing one end of the bow between the foot and the stirrup while the arms pressed against the bow.

Arrows

Arrows are typically constructed of birch wood. The normal length of an arrow is between 80 and 100 cm, and the shaft's diameter is around 10 mm. For fletching arrows, crane's tail feathers are favoured, but tail feathers of other birds are usable as well. Eagle feathers make a particularly unusual arrow, but eagles are rare. Feathers taken from the wings are said to flow less smoothly through the air, so if given the choice tail feathers are picked. The Mongols characteristically paid close attention to the smallest of details. The placement of the fletchings in relation to their size, and what part of the bird they were taken from, is of great importance for correct rotation and good balance in the air. Consequently these factors are painstakingly considered when making arrows after the Old Mongol standard.

The arrowheads, or points, can vary depending on the purpose. Wide metal blades are used for hunting big game and were used in war, while bone and wooden points are preferred for hunting birds and small animals. The high impact of this bow ensures that even a small bone point can be lethal when hitting the body of a smaller animal or a bird.

In addition to these kinds of arrows, whistling arrows are useful during hunting, because the effect on animals of an arrow whistling away high above the ground is

often to make it stop, curious to see what is in the air. This gives the hunter time to launch a second arrow, this time with a game head to kill the animal. The whistling arrows are made by inserting an arrowhead of bone in which air channels have been created. When shot, such arrowheads make a very audible sound as they travel through the air. Asian bows, such as the Mongol bow and especially the Turkish bow had the longest range for ranged weapons until the invention of the modern breach-loading firearms in the early 20th Century. Estimates for the Mongol bow give it a draw force comparable to the English longbow (90-180 lbs / 41-81 kg) of about 100 to 160 lbs. (45 to 70 kg). However, due to a better design, the mongol bow has a range of 320 to 350 yards (290 to 320 m) or more, a range longer than that of the longbow (250 yards / 225 m). A more contemporary review by Hildinger suggests that it was only accurate at up to 80 yards (75 m) when shot from horseback, but "shooting in arcade" (at 45 degrees) allowed for much greater ranges. It is important to note that modern champion archers maintain that you cannot 'guarantee' a hit on an individual target at more than 80 yards with any bow whatsoever, but could always hit an army of thousands of individuals.

The technique used for shooting is known as the "Mongolian release." The Mongols, if right-handed, keep their bow in the left hand, pushing it forward as the right arm pulled the string all the way back to behind the ear. With the left arm fully extended, they prepare to release. However, because of the power and draw force required of the bow, a special technique to hold the string is used. During the drawing of the bow and before the arrow is released the string is held by the thumb, since this is the strongest finger and the thumb is supported by the index finger curling around atop the outermost joint, at the base of the nail. The other fingers are also curled, forming a fist. The thumb is usually protected by a thumb ring of leather, agate, jade, metal, bone, or other material.

Mongolian soldiers trained to shoot while riding on horseback, and with deadly accuracy. This was done by skilfully timing the shots to the moment when the hooves of the horse were in mid-air, so as to avoid disturbing the aim when they hit the ground. The bows were routinely employed by Mongol horse archers. They would typically carry two, one for long-range and the other for closer targets. These were complemented by the archer carrying two quivers carrying different types of arrows - armour-piercing heavy arrowheads of tempered steel, incendiary arrows, whistling arrows for signalling as well as ordinary arrows with adjusted arrowheads and shaft lengths for more typical ranges.

The principal difference between the Mongol bow and the Hungarian bow is the presence of a "string run" (or "string bridge") - an attachment of horn or wood used to hold the string a little further apart from the bow's limbs. This attachment aids the archer by increasing the draw weight in the early stages of the draw, thus slightly increasing the total energy stored by the draw and available to the arrow. String bridges are not attested at the time of the Mongol empire, appearing in Chinese art

during the later Manchu Qing dynasty. The armies of Genghis Khan would have used the composite bows typical of their various nationalities at the time.

<http://www.huntingsociety.org/MongolArchery.html>

Accessed 19.10.2008.

APPENDIX IV

Archery Divisions and Rules

Khalka: This category is the tradition of the people of central Mongolia. 75metres (or 50 bow-lengths). There are ten rounds of four shots; the first 20 shots aimed towards a piece of red cloth at back of target area, measurement being 4m x 3m. the arrow must land in this area. The next 20 shots are to 30 small cylinder-shaped targets situated on the ground (*surs*), these are made of animal hide, usually cow or camel. The four centre ones are painted red, the point being to knock them all over.

Buriat: The Buriat tradition originated with the people from the north east (Buryatia), now in eastern Siberia. The target length is at 35 metres, aimed towards *surs* 12-15cms. in diameter. The target had to be hit and projected for at least two metres

Urianghai: Urianghia category was originally from the western areas, and female archers are not permitted to enter the Urianghai contests. The target is 45 metres, to a piece of leather from horse's hobble.

All categories are now united by the Mongolian Archers Association, formed in 1959. Each tradition has a special style of singing (ukhail) which is used by the scorer for each competitor.

There are two classes of target shooting: 'Khana' and 'Khasaa.' First, 20 arrows are shot towards the Khana target, which is four metres long and 48 cm high. Then a futher 20 arrows are shot to the Khasaa target, which contains 30 cylinders. A scorer stands near the target and calls out the results of each shot in a the traditional melody: overshoot, fall short, go wide or bounce before the target and pass over it. An arrow which passes between to cylinders still scores.

The last contest of the year, called 'otgoo' is held in September. After that time the bows are loosened and stored. Archery contests do not take place in winter as bows become stiff with the cold and are too inflexible to pull.

Compiled from information in: Mongolian National Archery Federation Handbook, 2006. Ulaanbaatar, and The Archery Tradition in Mongolia, www.atarn.org/mongolian/mn_nat_arch/messenger.htm Accessed 14 August 2007.

APPENDIX V

Mongolian Child Jockeys - Balancing Cultural Safety with Heritage

Horse races with child jockeys are part of Mongolia's cultural heritage, but the growing number of races and serious, sometimes fatal accidents have drawn increasing public attention. The issue was discussed for the first time at a recent national forum which was supported by the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). N. Mongolmaa, IPEC's National Project Manager, and B. Bayasgalan, ILO Programme Officer, report from Mongolia .

ULAN BATOR, Mongolia (ILO Online) – There is a popular saying: "Mongols are born in the saddle". It is impossible to imagine Mongols without a horse. Children learn to ride at the age of four or five. Since ancient times horses have been part of the traditional nomadic way of life and no celebration is complete without a horse race. Horse racing is one of the three games of Naadam festival, organized every July to celebrate the People's Revolution. Young children are the masters of the Mongolian horse race. Horses race from 12 to 28 kilometres across the steppe, the distance depending on the horse's age. In preparing for Naadam, children take part in repeated practice races and help the trainers take care of the race horses.

In the last few years a new trend has emerged, an increasing number of races in the period after the Lunar New Year in January or February. Sub-zero temperatures at this time bring much higher risks of injuries and other health problems. These races are commercial, organized by horse training associations or wealthy individual horse owners. The changing nature of such racing, from traditional entertainment into business promotion for the wealthy, has gradually drawn public criticism. Injuries and fatalities among child jockeys have also drawn increasing attention. In May 2006, for the first time, the issue of child jockeys was discussed at the National Forum of Child Jockeys organized jointly by the National Department for Children, National Human Rights Commission and National Sports Committee of Mongolia with financial and technical support of ILO's International Programme to Eliminate Child Labour (IPEC).

The Forum brought together more than 100 child jockeys from all 21 aimags (provinces) in Mongolia , as well as horse trainers and representatives of sports organizations to discuss ways to ensure the safety and protection of child jockeys.

According to the Law on National Grand Naadam, children must be seven years or older to participate in horse races. The 2005 decree of the Deputy Prime Minister requires them to wear protective helmets, knee and elbow pads. However, lack of both enforcement and approved standards means not all children wear the gear or use clothing which meets protection needs

"It is estimated that 150,000-180,000 horses compete in 500 races each year in which more than 30,000 child jockeys are engaged", says Mr. Jadamba Dashdorj, Commissioner, Human Rights Commission of Mongolia (NHRCM).

In preparation for the National Forum, the NHRCM collected information, with IPEC support, on injuries and fatalities in the last three years. The findings were alarming. The study revealed a substantial number of cases of child jockeys receiving serious, sometimes fatal injuries from falls. "Horse racing is increasingly becoming an issue of violating children's rights", said Dashdorj.

At the National Forum the young jockeys were able to talk about their pride in being jockeys, as well as the many challenges they face, such as poor conditions, attitude of police, race organizers, poor medical services and difficulties in keeping up with their education." Child jockeys learn essential life skills, good discipline, endurance and great tolerance of hardship. But horse racing is a very risky job. I always feel relieved when both horse and the child return safely to the finish line", says Ms. Purevkhuu, a horse trainer from Huvsgul aimag.

With due respect to cultural tradition, the hazardous situation of children in horse racing was debated extensively during discussions. Topics addressed included the need to improve legal protection of child jockeys, imposing and enforcing safety standards, insurance schemes, pre-race medical examinations and a reward system for child jockeys. Agreement was also reached to suggest to the authorities that races in sub-zero degree temperatures be prohibited and the age of child jockeys in commercial racing be raised.

The Forum agreed to a Memorandum of Cooperation for three years between the National Sports Committee, National Department for Children, Human Rights Commission and three major horse trainers' associations. The parties agreed to improve laws on organizing horse races, ensure legal protection of child jockeys, collect and analyse information on injuries, and monitor the implementation of relevant laws. This has set a starting point for finding solutions to a daunting task of preserving heritage while protecting the rights of child jockeys.

The Forum's recommendations were presented to the National Council for Children, headed by the Prime Minister of Mongolia on 30 May 2006. Amendments to the Regulation for Horse Races of National Grand Naadam are underway.

http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/inf/features/06/mongolia_childjockey.htm

Retrieved 30 September 2007.

APPENDIX VI

Origin Myths Of The Mongol People

The origin myth of the Mongol people is inexplicably tied to the foundation myth of the ancestors of Chinggis Khan. The Mongolian ancestral myth found in *The Secret History* is a blend of symbolism and actual historic fact, and gives insight into the beliefs and spiritual foundations of Chinggis Khan himself.

There came into the world a blue-gray wolf whose destiny was Heaven's will.
His wife was a fallow deer.

They travelled across the inland sea and when they were camped near the source of the Onon River in sight of Mount Burkhan Khaldun their first son was born, named Batachikan.

The seventh generation after Batachikan was Kharchu. Kharchu's son was named Borjigidai the Clever, and Mongoljin the Fair was his wife.

Their grandsons were the two brothers, Duua the one-eyed and Dobun the Clever.

In the middle of Duua's forehead there was one great eye. With this eye Duua could see a place so far away it could take three days to reach it.

The *Secret History of the Mongols*, opened with these verses, which demonstrates the importance that they are held by the Mongols themselves in perpetuating their origin myth. The portrayal of the wolf and the deer as friends, conveys a symbolic union between the masculine and the feminine. The male wolf representing strength, courage and power; the female deer symbolizing softness, sensitivity and intuition. Oestmoen (2002) asserts that the wolf is regarded as the most important force in Mongolian ancestry:

An extraordinarily significant message of the utmost subtlety is given to us in this Mongolian creation myth: Even though the wolf and the deer are the factual and archetypal predator and prey respectively, they here mate with each other. This is an unequivocal message to the world that the complexity of the relations of Universe and their meanings are much greater than what is visible at the surfaces. Our notions on "good" and "evil" and other similar categories need revision.

The wolf, though it plays the masculine role in the union described above, has many distinctively feminine qualities, and in Siberian and Inner Asian shamanist belief it is believed to be an intrinsically feminine animal as it originates in the Siberian north, the 'dark, feminine side'. However the wolf shares many qualities with the deer.

It should be understood that the deer is of no less importance than the wolf, the reddish-brown deer stands for the principles of Mother Earth, without which no fertilization, growth or birth of new things can take place. Those principles are receptive and less active, hence when it comes to active endeavour in history they do not command the same degree of attention as the male, active principle as represented by the wolf, and it is imperative to bear in mind that this does not imply any order of importance. Both principles are, according to the Old Mongol spiritual understanding, equally indispensable forces in Universe (Oestmoen 2002).

The reference in the fourth line to travelling across the inland seas refers to the historical fact that the early tribes migrated across Lake Baikal (the largest body of fresh water and deepest lake in the world, hence an 'inland sea'). Oestmoen understands this journey across water to be a 'symbol of transcendence and expansion of consciousness' especially as their destination was the source of the River Onon; a 'source' being a symbolic matrix, 'a place from where things are born' and an essentially feminine quality of renewal, fertility and birth. The Onon River area is considered – historically as well as symbolically – the 'birthplace' of the Mongol people.

The mountain Burkhan Khaldun (line six) also contains qualities of symbolic and historic importance to the Mongolian people.

The mountain is part of female Earth, but because it stretches itself to Heaven, it becomes a male aspect of the Earth, thus it represents highly masculine qualities...Its place in the Mongolian ancestral myth as a place where the first offspring of the wolf and the deer was born is indicative of a strong predisposition towards high endeavour and great achievements ...: All this means that the Mongols possessed a spiritual treasury wherein was contained the insight in the need for joining the qualities of the feminine and of the masculine, or to put it in another terminology: Yin and Yang.. The masculine Heaven acts upon the feminine Earth, and initiates fruitful action and change...Simultaneously the Mongols kept the feminine side of their spiritual consciousness, stemming from the period when their forebears lived in the forests of Siberia: (Oestmoen 2002).

While the majority of present-day Mongolia encompasses large tracts of desert and steppe land, the foundation myths of the Mongolian people are rooted in the ancient forest culture of the Siberian taiga, Oestmoen believes that the *ger*, the traditional round felt tent of the nomad is derived from the teepee-like pole and skin tent originating from the Siberian taiga and still used by the *tsaatan* people around Lake Hovsgol.

The Mongolian ancestral myth is based on the theory that the feminine and masculine principles and forces have to be united to fulfill their spiritual and practical potentials. According to Oestmoen (2002):

“The essential feminine qualities, stemming from the dark, cold Siberian element of their origins, gave them their extraordinary intuitive insight, adaptability and endurance. On the other hand, without masculine energies and principles, corresponding to the Southern, Turkic steppe element, it would not have been feasible to initiate their political action in the world, because this initiatory action is a main function of the developed masculine principle”.

Oestmoen asserts that over time Mongols and other Inner Asian peoples gradually changed from worshipping the essentially female earth and forest spirits/deities to worshipping masculine air and sky spirits, which he concluded “coincided with the development of aggressive energy and expansionist policies”, which he explains thus:

It is the spiritual aspect of this complex development that is handed down to us through the Mongolian ancestral myth. The Siberian element travels over the Bajkal, a transformation takes place, illustrated by the first Mongol, Batachikan, being born under the auspices of Burkhan Khaldun, thus representing the new, masculine principles while still also carrying the old, since Siberia remained the primordial source from where all began (2002).

The account above is also confirmed by the historical facts, in early Mongol history the tribes were divided into two main groups, the northern forest-dwellers from the Siberian taiga around Lake Baikal, and the southern pastoral nomads of the steppe grassland between the Altai range and the Chinese border.

The first group of people, the forest tribes of Siberia, corresponds to the Siberian wolf and deer before travelling across the sacred Bajkal, the second group, the pastoralists, live in the area where the wolf and the deer arrived; thus this people represents the transcendence and development signified by that crossing. Thus we see a geopolitical illustration of the spiritual principles described before. These two main groups of Mongolian people represented

respectively the feminine Siberian forest, and the masculine steppe element (Ostemoen 2002).

However, Oestmeon finds that: “It was the work of the genius of Chinggis Khan to combine these two worlds, so as to harness the full power of that unification”. (2002).

Oestermon, P. *Welcome to the World of the Mongols!* Retrieved 9 June 2009, from <http://www.coldsiberia.org/>

APPENDIX VII

THE TAKHI

Known as Przewalski's horse in the West and takhi in Mongolia, these dun-colored, black-maned equids are the only wild horses left in the world. The so-called wild horses that abound in Australia and North America's western plains and East Coast barrier islands are actually feral horses—that is, domestic stock that escaped from ranches and farms and returned to the wild. Takhi (*Equus caballus przewalskii*) and domestic horses (*Equus caballus*) were once thought to be separate species, but takhi are now classified as a subspecies of the domestic horse.

The horse is an integral part of Mongolian culture. During the 12th and 13th centuries, Genghis Khan and his descendants triumphantly rode horses while building the largest empire in history, a swath of land sweeping from China to Europe. Today children learn to ride when they are only four or five years old, and about half of Mongolia's 2.4 million people are semi-nomadic and support themselves primarily by breeding domestic animals. "That is their wealth and security," says Ryder. While all horses are important to the Mongolians, takhi are especially dear to them: "Takhi" means "spirit" or "spiritual" in Mongolian and the species is a symbol of their national heritage.

Distinguished from domestic horses in part by their thicker necks, shorter legs, and zebra-like erect mane, takhi were last seen in the wild during the 1960s in the Gobi, which accounts for roughly the southern third of Mongolia. Many people think the Gobi is just a huge desert. However, unlike the Sahara, only a tiny part of it is sandy desert. While the Gobi is extremely dry, the region also has springs, steppes, forests, and high mountains, and supports a great diversity of mammals from the Asian wild ass and Siberian ibex to wolves and snow leopards. Like the takhi before them, many of these species are declining and may be on their way to extinction.

One of the main reasons that the takhi died out in the Gobi is that increasing numbers of people and livestock drove these shy, wary animals away from the area's few water holes. Unfortunately, some believe that the takhi's demise in the wild may have been accelerated by Western collectors, who killed and dispersed many adults in pursuit of foals.

However, zoos saved the takhi from dying out altogether by breeding the species. All of the approximately 1,200 takhi alive today are descended from 12 that were caught in the wild around 1900. Species that are reduced to such small populations can lose much of their genetic diversity, which in turn can make the adults less fertile and the young less likely to survive. And as if one round of drastic population decrease

wasn't enough of an impediment to conserving takhi, the species went through another round during World War II: In 1945 there were once again only 12 breeding takhi in the world.

This history notwithstanding, today's takhi population enjoys remarkably good genetic health, thanks to zoo propagation strategies such as avoiding inbreeding and ensuring that rare genes are not lost. The two largest of the four breeding programs are the Species Survival Plan (SSP) in North America, which has about 190 takhi in 21 zoos including the NZP's Conservation and Research Center at Front Royal, Virginia, and the European equivalent (EEP), which has about 600 takhi in 16 countries. The two other breeding programs are in Holland and Australia. In addition, the San Diego Zoo has frozen cell lines from about 500 takhi, which Ryder suggests could be used for cloning someday.

While breeding takhi in zoos has been a tremendous success, the ultimate goal of a breeding program is to re-establish free-ranging, self-sustaining populations of the species in the wild. Unfortunately, rather than coordinating with each other, each breeding program has promoted its own idea for how and where to reintroduce the species, say Dutch biologists Machteld van Dierendonck and Michiel Wallis de Vries in a 1996 paper in the journal *Conservation Biology*.

The question of where to reintroduce takhi arises in part because there is no consensus on the species' historical habitat. Some biologists say that takhi belong in the Gobi, claiming that those that died out there were the last of a population that once flourished in this arid habitat. Others counter that takhi belong in the grassy steppes, claiming that those living in the Gobi were a remnant population from the steppes that were forced into marginal habitat.

In the end, simply reintroducing the takhi back to Mongolia may be the most important issue. The contrast between the cushy conditions of zoos and those of their native land could hardly be greater. An Alaska-sized country sandwiched between China and the former Soviet Union, Mongolia is a land of extremes: Summer temperatures can soar to 104 degrees F while winter temperatures can plunge to 50 below zero. People can—and do—freeze to death in Mongolia. Every five years or so, winter sleet storms called the dzgud encase the vegetation in ice, causing starvation and mass deaths of grazing animals. Half the livestock in eastern Mongolia died after a dzgud a few years ago.

Yet the sturdy takhi once flourished in Mongolia and from a purely biological standpoint reintroducing them should be simple. There are plenty of takhi in zoos around the world, and their needs and behaviors are relatively well understood. In an ideal world, we should be able to release takhi in Mongolia and let them take it from there.

But while conservation is a noble endeavor, things done in the name of conservation are not necessarily noble. "Often the initiating organizations have hidden agendas unrelated to the principal goal of the conservation effort," admonish van Dierendonck and de Vries in their *Conservation Biology* paper.

The takhi world is rife with tales of dirty dealings. A prime example is the story of the race between a number of foreign groups to reintroduce the species. Being first was a sure way to curry favor with the Mongolians, who, upon winning their freedom after some 65 years of Soviet rule in 1990, wanted to bring takhi back in the country in time for the next annual Naadam Festival, a celebration of national pride that features wrestling, archery, and horse racing.

However, with the costs of transporting and maintaining takhi, bringing them back to Mongolia was an expensive proposition and the new government was in no position to foot the bill. The story goes that Christian Oswald—a German businessman who exports from Mongolia antlers, exotic meats, and other raw materials for his wildlife-derived products business—promised the Mongolians that he would be the first to bring takhi back.

But first does not necessarily mean best and Oswald's attempt to reintroduce takhi in the Gobi has had one problem after another. The Ukraine, which participates in the European breeding program, sent five takhi in 1992 and an additional eight in 1993. Before releasing zoo-bred animals to the wild, biologists recommend an acclimation period in a fenced enclosure. However, Oswald's site, which he named Takhin Tal (Mongolian for "Valley of the Wild Horses"), is not the best: Forage is scarce, the wind chill is fierce during the winter, and perhaps worst of all the enclosure has only one stream and even that is dry during most of the year.

Moreover, the Takhin Tal program failed to anticipate that a single enclosure would not suit the takhi's social system. As is true of domestic horses, male takhi vie for females and for resources such as food and water. During the first years of the program, the dominant stallion and his mare defended the relatively forage- and water-rich area near the stream, and a number of the excluded takhi died, according to a 1993 United Nations Development Plan Biodiversity Project report by a team of international takhi experts.

Taking umbrage at this report, Oswald took it upon himself to disparage the investigating experts in an open letter to all members of the European takhi captive breeding program (EEP). In a rebuke to Oswald, Mongolian Minister of Nature and the Environment Zambyn Batjargal said that takhi reintroduction should not be "an arena of competition between foreign" interests.

While the EEP provided the initial takhi for the Takhin Tal program, it has not sent any since. Likewise, the North American breeding program (SSP) has not sent any

takhi to Mongolia. The Australians did give Oswald seven mares but some suspect that their motives were questionable—they were lobbying Mongolia to cast its vote for Sydney as host of the summer Olympics in the year 2000. (For the record, Mongolia voted for Sydney.)

Since 1993, the Takhin Tal program has improved. The stallions have separate enclosures so that none will be victimized by the others, and the Mongolian staff supplies feed and water daily. But even so, there is little hope that the Takhin Tal program will be able to reintroduce takhi into the wild. Although the Gobi may be a good place for takhi in theory, the factors that led to the species' demise have not been alleviated. If anything, the situation in the Gobi is worse: The military grazes more than 5,000 head of domestic livestock there year-round, and nomads graze about 75,000 head there during the winter. Some fear that overgrazing will turn the Gobi into a Sahara-type desert.

In support of doubts that the Gobi can currently support a free-ranging, self-sustaining population of takhi, an attempt to release a group from Takhin Tal last year failed. The takhi returned to their enclosure because they couldn't find enough food, says Waltraut Zimmerman, curator of mammals at the Cologne Zoo in Germany and coordinator of the takhi EEP.

Right now, the best hope for successfully reintroducing takhi is a program in the Hustain Nuruu Steppe Reserve, which lies in the low, rolling mountains of central Mongolia and was historically protected as a khan hunting preserve. The reserve's takhi reintroduction program is a joint effort of the Mongolian Association for Conservation of Nature and the Environment (a non-governmental conservation organization) and the Foundation Reserves for the Przewalski Horse (a private Dutch group that manages takhi in the Netherlands and Germany).

Life is good for the takhi at Hustain Nuruu during the summer, when the streams flow freely and the mountains are green with forage. Since the program's establishment in the early 1990s, three harems have been released from their initial acclimation enclosures and are faring well in the wild. Notably, although the frozen, windy winters can be particularly hard on nursing mothers and foals, more than a quarter of the 56 takhi in the reserve were born in Mongolia.

While Washburn University's Boyd, who does field studies of the takhi at the reserve, feels positive about the Hustain Nuruu reintroduction, she is the first to admit that it is not without potential problems. Chief among them is the reserve's proximity to domestic horses. When domestic horses mate with takhi, they produce fertile hybrids that could dilute the takhi's bloodline. First-generation hybrids can look exactly like pure-bred takhi and the only way to differentiate between them is genetic testing: Takhi have 66 chromosomes, domestic horses have 64, and hybrids have 65.

Reserve wardens do all they can to prevent hybridization, including riding geldings when in the reserve, driving domestic horses out of the reserve, and escorting the nomads and their livestock during their annual migrations through the reserve. In addition, all of the takhi are individually recognized and named. But someday there could be so many takhi in Hustain Nuruu that they will come and go as they please, and keeping tabs on them individually will not be feasible. "We have about 25 years before hybrids will be a big problem [in Hustain Nuruu]," predicts Boyd.

Even if the Hustain Nuruu program achieves its goal of establishing a free-ranging, self-sustaining population of takhi, more reintroduction sites will be required to secure the species' future in the wild. And as vast as Mongolia is, finding space for reserves is difficult because where there is water and forage, there are also people and livestock. Creating a reserve typically means that herdsmen who have grazed livestock and hunted in the area for generations must yield scarce resources to wildlife.

After more than 200 years of first Chinese and then Soviet rule, the newly independent Mongolia is still finding itself. The country is making the transition from a state-controlled economy to a privatized free-market system, but has not yet recovered from the loss of Soviet aid (until 1990, the Soviets sold Mongolia nearly all of its imports and bought most of its products). Food is scarce in part because only one percent of the land is arable and the growing season is very short.

"The people and the government really support takhi reintroduction efforts," says Jachingiin Tserendeleg, who coordinates the Mongolian Takhi Reintroduction Project and is president of the Mongolian Association for Conservation of Nature and the Environment. "But they are not able to contribute to this activity."

Until Mongolia is ready for more takhi reintroduction programs, the best that conservation organizations can do is to continue keeping the zoo populations healthy. "The good news is that we're not risking the gene pool," says the San Diego Zoo's Ryder, who formerly coordinated the North American zoo breeding program. "We can preserve the species until it is securely re-established in the wild."

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Source: <http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Publications/ZooGoer/1997/5/takhiwildhorse.cfm>, accessed 20 December 2009.

APPENDIX VIII

SPATIAL ARRANGEMENTS INSIDE THE GER

