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Caroline Humphrey, Marina Mongush and B. Telengid

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# Attitudes to nature in Mongolia and Tuva: a preliminary report

Caroline Humphrey & Marina Mongush & B. Telengid

Studies of attitudes to nature in Mongolia and Tuva show that concern for the environment is one of the most important issues for rural people. This paper describes preliminary findings from the MacArthur Project (University of Cambridge) using materials gathered in 1992-93. It discusses indigenous ideas of nature as an interactive system, hunting and killing, reproduction and artificial insemination, natural products as medicines, rituals to influence nature, attitudes to nomadism, and practical efforts of the concern for the environment.

Recent studies of attitudes to nature in Mongolia and Tuva show that concern for the environment is one of the most important issues for rural people.<sup>1</sup> There are numerous rules concerning the correct way to treat natural objects and living beings. Of course these are not always followed, but the rules remain as ideals and it is a cause for resentment when other people appear to be flouting them.

What ideas lie behind the rules? Herders in Inner Asia have an overall concept of nature which does not set it apart from humanity. The Mongol term for nature, *bnigal'*, deriving from the verb *bai-* (to be), includes human existence. Thus to express the idea of 'the environment', which is a modern concept, Mongols add the term *orchin* (surroundings, external circumstances) to express the idea of external nature, not including humanity.

## Nature as an interactive system

According to the original idea, nature is an all-encompassing system which ideally remains in balance, a state of normality, regulated by *tenger* (the sky, Heaven). Actions or events in one part of the system affect the other parts. Most of the rules con-

cerning human treatment of things in nature are designed to preserve the normal, 'balanced, state of affairs, and essentially this means leaving such entities to exist in their own way. For example, trees should be left to grow and die without interference. Since human beings are part of this system they also are to be allowed to live as humans do, and the implication of this is that humans can use natural resources if they are necessary for existence, just as animals, for example, eat plants or other animals if that is necessary for their existence. People who overuse resources, for their own pleasure, wantonly, or neglectfully, are severely criticised, and it is thought that they may incur misfortune as a result. Animals may also be destructive, but with some exceptions this not thought to be intentional, and in the case of domesticated animals the herder's task is to guide animals away from destructive activities. Examples of this way of thinking can be seen in the following responses:

*Horses have a bad effect on the environment for sheep and goats; they destroy the pasture of sheep and goats with their hooves. Yaks also have a negative effect as they dig up grass with its roots, and the pasture takes 2-*

*3 years to recover. Therefore herders should keep horses and yaks away from sheep and goats. Yaks are considered to be wild animals, so the best place for them is the mountains or the forest. (Old herdsman, Uvyur district, Tuva, 1992).*

Here it is recognised that animals' activities affect one another and that they have their 'appropriate places' in nature which is the herdsman's task to observe.

*We gather onions and tsatsargana (?iris bulbs) for food. But we recognise that this influences the condition of the plants and land. It used to be possible to gather 2-3 bags of onions, but now we can only get one bag a season. There has been too much gathering and now people are in competition over it. Some even gather bulbs before the seeds have developed. This is done together with cutting wood. Because of this, the river level has dropped. The Kazakhs' attitude to nature is particularly careless. (Local administrator, Uvs aimag, Mongolia, 1992).*

*You must never cut trees or grass, that is sin in the tradition of our ancestors. In August I cut grass for hay, but that is necessary for our livestock. I use only dead wood and never cut living trees. (Herder, Uvs aimag, Mongolia, 1992).*

*We never cut living trees. Why would that be necessary? We gather berries, but not too much. We should take care of nature. Recently I saw an uprooted tree in the forest and I took it home and planted it near my house. Now it is growing. (Herder, Uvyur district, Tuva, 1992).*

*We gather fruit, nuts and berries only occasionally. We never gather mushrooms. Onions and lily bulbs are gathered nearly every year, but only when we need them for immediate use. We do not store them up like the Russians. Old people say that in the past, when there were very bad winters, people used to gather cedar nuts as food, so as not to die of hunger, but that was a necessity. (Herder, Uvyur district, Tuva, 1992).*

This last response suggests that produce gathered from nature is seen perhaps as bounty, not to be stored up, and that it is in a different category from livestock products, which are regularly dried, frozen, etc. for storage as staples. Whereas domestic animals are the legitimate object of consumption, one should always be careful of wild nature, which may take revenge if balance is not preserved:

*The main animal hunted round here is the marmot. Marmots are being over-hunted these days because the prices for their skins are constantly rising. People smuggle bullets from Russia to do this hunting. There have been many cases of the plague this year.<sup>2</sup> If we do not treat nature well it will turn against us. (Herder, Uvs aimag, Mongolia, 1992).*

*We want to protect the five natural springs near here. Too many people are coming to take a cure at them, there is no control, and this affects the environment. Nature suffers because of our bad management. Lakes dry up when forests nearby are cut down, and the natural balance is lost. This happened to Lake Sang-hel in the Dus-dag sum. We stopped cutting trees recently because we are aware of this. I suppose building brigades do still take wood, but they need a licence. (Local administrator, Uvyur district, Tuva, 1992).*

*What are the causes of drought? Well, nature can get tired and needs a rest. But that rarely happens on its own; mostly drought is the result of human actions, such as cutting down trees. Everything is foreseen by nature. If we use violence against it, then there will be bad consequences for us. For example, the arjaan (natural spring) at Destig-Kara is almost dry. Perhaps the people did something harmful there. (Herder, Uvyur district, Tuva, 1992).*

These responses illustrate the idea that nature is an interactive system. The links people make between causes and conse-

quences are based on local understandings which are sometimes integrated with ideas from western science. Often the sense that natural entities react to human actions is stronger than observation of processes within nature. For example, though marmots do carry the plague, the idea that over-hunting them causes an increase in the incidence of plague seems to be based on a concept of retribution rather than observation of how the disease spreads. On the other hand, the idea that excessive gathering of plants and cutting down trees influences the water-level in nearby rivers and lakes might, in principle, correspond to a real progress, though some doubt has been cast on this for arid regions of Inner Asia (Smith *et al.* 1993).

The entities in nature, inanimate as well as animate, are thought to have their own qualities or powers. These powers may appear to people of western culture as somehow 'supernatural' but within the terms of Inner Asian culture they are precisely 'natural', that is they derive from the indigenous concept of nature. An example of this is the Mongols' division of livestock into 'hot' (*khaluun*) and 'cold' (*khuiten*). While sheep have a hot quality (*khuluun chanartai*), goats have a cold quality (*khuiten chanartai*), and herdsmen will say that the sheep warm up the goats in a common herd, or that goats will "freeze the pen". By this they mean quite literally that the place in the pen where goats stand will be cold.

The qualities of natural entities can be desecrated. It is said in some areas of Mongolia that sacred mountains are polluted if women walk on them. Fire is easily polluted by putting dirt, rubbish, liquids or sharp objects in it (all of these actions may cause disease in the family). In Western Mongolia people say that 'white' and 'red' things should not be put into water (for example: meat, blood, milk and yoghurt are thought to harm water). If bodies of dead animals are found in water, herders will take them out (Telengid 1993). Some Mongolians (Arkhangai *aimag*) say that it is wrong to wash in rivers or springs, as this

pollutes (*buzardag*) the water (you should take water from its natural source with some clean implement and only then wash in it). Others (Dornogov' *aimag*) say that only the head should be washed in rivers, not the whole body (although this rule is often flouted) (Sneath 1993). In Tuva people commonly say that washing yourself in springs and rivers is all right, but that clothes should never be washed in them. Polluted water may cause harm unless it is purified. An elderly women herder from Gov-Altai said that this could be done by Buddhist lamas, who used to say prayers and sprinkle special sand (*dultsenjiin els*) in the water to purify it (*ibid.*).

Just as humans may harm and pollute nature, natural entities can influence human lives and destinies. Thus, many Tuvan herders said that people have a duty to bathe ritually in springs and rivers (as opposed to washing in them). That is, people should drink the water three times and splash it over themselves three times and then they will be healthy and happy. In Mongolia, the birth-place, the first water taken by the infant, the meat eaten from animals pastured on the 'pure' grass of the homeland, all of this is held to influence the physical make-up and personality. It is not the case that nomadism eradicates the memory of the homeland. On the contrary, adults will go back to the precise hillside where they were born and make a ritual libation there as a sign of respect for the place (Humphrey 1993).

In a religious context such ideas are sharpened into the explicit concept of personified spirits of natural objects, known as 'masters' or 'owners' (*ezed* in Mongolian). A Tuvan herder said, "all natural objects have their owners. If the natural things are badly treated, or even if you just have a bad attitude to them, the owners will cause trouble to the people." Humans can influence the 'owners' by means of rituals (see below), but generally the actions of nature are mysterious and beyond human control. One Tuvan herder, explaining livestock losses from epidemics and hurricanes,

said, "we (humans) can't make an agreement with nature," (Mongush 1993).

## Hunting and killing

Hunting is officially regulated all over Mongolia and Tibet. The hunting of certain species such as wild goats is prohibited altogether, while for others it is permitted only within certain times. Hunting is also forbidden in certain localities within many *sums*. In Mongolia, hunters should register with the local hunting association; however, as herders said:

*I know hunting involves both members of hunting associations and people outside them. There are more of the latter. Generally most of the people involved are incompetent. Because of this the animals are frightened and are evacuating this area. Just now almost everyone is interested in hunting and this probably influences the wildlife badly. (Herder, Davst sum, Uvs aimag, Mongolia 1992).*

*The most hunted animals round here are marmot and fox, the marmot for its delicious meat and its fur, and foxes for their fur. The number of marmots is going down. In the past this hillside had 13 holes but now there are only 2, with two marmots. Wolves have increased because of the ban on hunting them. Now there are wolf packs of 20-30, though they used to go around singly, and we have seen a new kind of behaviour among these animals. Panthers (irves) are becoming rare because of their expensive fur. (Herder, Davst sum, Uvs aimag, Mongolia 1992).*

In many areas of the country, such as Dornod, there are hunting inspectors. People are secretive about hunting out of season, since they fear neighbours' criticism as much as being found out by inspectors.

In Tuva hunting is more strictly regulated and seems to be less popular than in Mongolia. The State Hunting Organisation registers hunters and gives each man a strict

plan of the numbers and types of animals to be killed. All skins must be sold to the Organisation. In Uvyur district Tuva, which is just over the border from Davst *sum*, Mongolia, many families said they did no hunting at all; people here frequently made ethical remarks about the need to preserve 'animal wealth' and almost all voiced fears about the reduction of wild animal numbers (even though it is not clear that there are in fact lesser numbers here).

*Everyone understands: you shouldn't take a lot from nature or nature will take revenge on you. The numbers of animals to be hunted should be limited this year and hunting should be forbidden completely next year to give the animals time for reproduction. Many of our animals are already in the Red Book. (Herder, Uvyur district, Tuva).*

Killing living creatures is a sin in Buddhism, and at the same time it has an equivocal status in the general system of ideas concerning nature. Killing without necessity is (or it might be more accurate to say was) condemned. Thus in Gov-Altai it was a sin to kill horses, which were not generally eaten, and such a person would be shunned (now, however, people admit to killing horses in central Mongolia). One Mongolian from Uvs *aimag* said that during his early youth he had done a great deal of hunting and had also slaughtered many domestic animals; however, after serving in the Mongolian army he became disgusted with killing, and since then has stopped killing of any kind (Telengid 1993). We can see the deeply ambivalent attitude to killing also in the elaborate ritual surrounding the execution of prisoners in pre-Socialist Mongolia. There was a special prison to the east of present Ulaanbaatar where condemned prisoners were held. On the eve of the execution they were moved to a special tent (*maikhan*). On the final morning they were given a last meal, but only one chopstick to eat it with. Then they were taken out, not by the door but through the back of the tent. Two executioners in special robes



## Reproduction and artificial insemination

Both Mongols and Tuvinians select males for breeding domestic livestock and they contrast this practice, which is seen as 'natural', with artificial insemination. Mongolians and Tuvinians have slightly different attitudes to artificial insemination according to our data. In Mongolia many people are unfamiliar with the practice. Others accept the idea, though without much enthusiasm, and it is noticeable that the artificial insemination points formerly serviced by the *negdels* have been abandoned in some places in Dornod. In other regions, such as Dornogov', artificial insemination is practised and popular for the special state-owned flocks of *karakul* sheep. However, in Tuva, the idea and the practice are explicitly rejected.

*I don't know how things were before my birth, but I think that there was not so much difference from now in the selective breeding of the domesticated animals. One of the main features of the selective breeding in Tuva was the naturalness of this process. This means that only free coupling of domestic animals was accepted. Artificial processes were not used.*

*As for artificial insemination, there was an attempt to use it in our region. But this technology turned out to be not very successful. Now we use only traditional forms of animal husbandry.*

*It is necessary to have special rams for breeding sheep. They are put in the flock for free-coupling...they usually are chosen from young animals and they are prepared for reproductive activity. It's the same with other animals. As you know, Tuvan people had no technical equipment in the past and everybody was used to these conditions. For example, the people had no water-carriers to bring water for animals. So they drank from springs, rivers and snow-water in winter. Hay was also not prepared. Fodder was natural. Even in winter animals ate what they could find under the snow.*

awaited them there. However, these people being officials, did not carry out the deed themselves. They handed over the prisoners to another, 'low' person, i.e. to someone already polluted by the sin of having done executions in the past, and he was paid to carry out the killing (Humphrey 1993).

Killing of any kind appears to be contrasted conceptually with giving birth and nurture. Rules common to Mongolia and Tuva forbid women to kill domestic animals, go hunting or even touch hunting implements. The contrast between the genders in this respect can be seen from one Tuvan respondent, who said, "when boys approach adulthood they begin to kill sheep and go hunting; when women reach this age they begin to give birth and look after children."

It is consistent with this that, despite the general ethical objections to taking life, death and killing are an everyday part of life. We found a robust matter-of-fact attitude to the slaughter of livestock. This can also be seen in attitudes to the death of young animals. In central Mongolia lambs are frequently taken inside the *ger* (felt tent) if they are weak and they are sometimes fed by bottle. If a calf dies, herders would take off the skin and wrap it, still moist, round a strange calf to encourage the mother of the dead calf to give milk to the new one. Sometimes, if mares reject their foals or ewes reject their lambs, songs are sung to them to encourage them to suckle their young. However, it is only possible to make such efforts for a certain time and for a few animals. If a widespread disease strikes, such as *aduuny haniad* (horse flu), the herders may give up on foals that are obviously ailing. A young foal in this condition, even if pathetically coughing outside the *ger*, will not be taken in overnight, and there is little grief at its demise. The corpse is dragged aside and left for birds and animals to devour (Sneath 1993).

*The main condition for all this was having good pastures. Shepherds had to take care of them.*

*Now we are entering market relations we have a lot of difficulties, the prices are rising, we have shortages of technical equipment and petrol. This is another reason to return to traditional methods of animal husbandry, as they are much more economical. Many generations of our ancestors lived like this. Experiments with new breeds of sheep and goats turned out to be not very successful, because only Tuvan breeds can survive in our climate. So only traditional methods will help us to increase productivity. (Herder, Uvyur district, Tuva 1992).*

*We work with pure breeds of sheep and goats. We don't need mixtures of breeds of any kind. They don't give any positive results; they only worsen the Tuva breeds of goats and sheep. Tuva breeds of animals are very tough during the cold winter time and their survival rates are very high. (Herder, Uvyur district, Tuva 1992).*

*We consider that it is better not to trick and not to make experiments. The best method is to rely on the experience of our ancestors. They lived here for centuries and they occupied themselves with livestock-raising which was considered to be the source of existence. We are not going to use artificial insemination in the near future and we hope that we'll never have to use it. We are quite conservative in this respect and we rely only on the laws of nature. (Herder, Uvyur district, Tuva 1992).*

### Use of natural products as medicines

In both Mongolia and Tuva shortage of medicines has been recognised as a severe problem in recent years. However, the reaction differs somewhat in the two countries. In Dornod *aimag*, Mongolia, people complain about the high prices and general unavailability of European medicines,

and the more religious people will approach Buddhist lamas for cures (Tibetan medicines, prayers, and ritual blessings). Only a very few people were said to have knowledge of local medicinal plants and this knowledge was said to be kept secret (Humphrey 1993). Similarly, in Dornogov' people talked about certain old men who were said still to gather medicinal herbs on sacred mountain sites, but no-one we met had used any of these in recent times. One natural product was still widely used, however: bear's gall for horse flu (Sneath 1993).

In Tuva, on the other hand, folk remedies made from hunted and gathered produce are widely made and used by ordinary people. As one herder from Uvyur district said:

*Recently we have had some problems with medicines. There are not enough medicines and we don't get some of them at all. Besides, prices are constantly rising and that includes the medicines too. And so many people have returned to the old methods, to folk medicine. It is no exaggeration to say that we have no-one in our district who ignores or rejects medicines made from natural resources. For example, we have rose-hips (good to prevent a headache); red bilberries help when you have kidney disease or high blood pressure; juniper (for stomach-ache), cedar nuts (for fractures) etc. Many young people learn the methods of folk medicine from the older generations. In the past the old people tried to hide their knowledge, because there was no belief in folk medicine. At the moment the situation forces them to make their knowledge known. We have chaos everywhere, including the area of medicine, now. That's why we need the knowledge of old people. Treatment with grasses is often used now. This treatment is often used with a ritual. In general, the results of this treatment are positive.*

*Also, some animal products, such as deer horns, are widely used. Various tinctures are made from them.*

## Rituals to influence nature

As noted earlier, it is thought that natural entities not only have physical qualities, but also have inner powers that can act either to help or harm human beings. This idea lies behind the great popularity of astrology, which is a method for understanding the hidden powers and their mutually interactive influences. Astrology works at several levels of professionalism, ranging from consultation of complex books in Tibetan, which requires a specialist, through popular books in Mongolia, to the everyday 'reading' of signs and omens.

The most important of natural powers is the sky. One of the rituals mentioned by herders in Uvs aimag was 'closing the heavenly door' (*ogtorguin üüdkhaana*) (Telengid 1993). The idea here is that the sky has the shape of a *ger*, vaulted at the top, and from time to time its door opens—a shaft of sunlight appears through clouds. Buryats say that if, when this happens, someone on earth needs help, he can ask for riches, power or rank, and his wishes will be fulfilled. However, the Khalkh and Western Mongols believe that the 'door of the cosmos' is also the door to loss. When it opens, favourite cattle will die or wealth be destroyed, and therefore there is a ritual to 'close' the door (Dulam 1989:176). From this it can be seen that the same physical phenomenon can have opposite interpretations in different parts of Inner Asia. However, this is not quite such a contradiction as it might seem, since the main characteristic of natural entities is that they are powerful, rather than that they are either 'good' or 'bad'. Rituals are devoted to attracting (*uri-*) fortune and dispelling harmful influences.

In Mongolia there is a series of rituals known generally by the term *dallaga* for inviting or beckoning-down good fortune (Chabros 1991). This ritual is done at the cairns (Mong. *ovoo*; Tuv. *ovaa*) on mountains and mountain passes. In Dornod aimag, Mongolia, there are three types of mountain worship: 1) large-scale communal and regular rituals at elaborate cairns

(*tahidag ovoo*, usually a whole cluster of cairns at one site); 2) sporadic simple rituals at wayside cairns situated on mountain passes; 3) individual rituals at particular mountains with which there is a personal link (Humphrey 1993). In Inner Asian traditional culture it is not only mountains, or mountain 'owners', that bring luck and blessings. The wide-ranging sources of 'fortune' can be seen from verses 5 and 6 of the "Inviting the [fortune of the] starry sky ritual book" (*Odon tengeriig urih tahih sudar*):

From  
the owners (*ezed*) of mountains that stand  
imposingly,  
the owners of waters that rush noisily,  
the owners of mountains that are many-  
peaked,  
the owners of grasses and trees that grow  
multi-branched,  
we beg good fortune.

From  
the owners of flowing waters,  
the owners of whirlpools at river-bends,  
the owners of airy winds,  
the owners of lying stones,  
we beg good fortune (Dulam 1989:20).

In Mongolia today the ritual at the *ovoo* is by far the most popular of the rituals concerning nature. In Tuva, on the other hand, respondents also mentioned ceremonies at fresh-water springs, trees, lakes, irrigation channels and forests. These rituals involve not only inviting or repelling influences from nature on human beings, but also the 'sanctifying' or 'purifying' of the natural objects themselves. This is done by burning sweet-smelling leaves (usually juniper) so that the smoke purifies the object, and also by attaching varicoloured strips of cloth (*chalama*) to the object. Some of these rituals are carried out by shamans. Kenin-Lopsan (1987:30) reports that the Tuvian attitude to springs is that they are sacred places, and that sanctifying of springs was always connected with shamanising to cure illnesses. The shaman would say, for example, "this patient has been devastated by the anger of



the owners of the earth and waters, and it is necessary to carry out the sanctifying of the spring." It is interesting that in Uvyur in 1992, when Tuvinians were already more open about religious observances than before, such rituals were carried out by both shamans and Buddhist lamas, and that communal rituals were initiated by the state farm on behalf of its members. One herding household for example said that over the past three years the head of the statefarm "followed the aspirations of the people" and officially organised religious rituals connected with the sanctifying of natural objects (mountains, rivers, channels, *ovaa*, etc.). The statefarm was responsible for all the expenditures. Besides, the members of this household invited Mongolian lamas from Ulangom to read sacred books for the prosperity of the family. Rituals they had attended in the past year included sanctifying the children's *ovaa* (*uruglar ovaazi*), sanctifying the forest at Ak-Bedik, and sanctifying the irrigation-channel at Shivling (Mongush 1993).

'Sanctification' rituals (*dygyyr* or *dagyyr*) are carried out not only for direct human benefit, but also to influence processes in nature that will help human beings indirectly. Thus the worship of shaman-trees (*xam yyash dagyyr*) is sometimes aimed to bring rain (Kenin-Lopsan 1987:31) and the Mongolian 'calling of the birds' ritual held in spring is designed to encourage the onset of lambing, foaling, etc.—and hence milk—in the female livestock.

### The landscape and nomadism

In both Mongolia and Tuva most people brought up in the country appreciate and value pastoral life. For example, in Dornogov' *aimag*, "we cannot live in the city." "We never go to the city." "We like [living in the countryside] because we are moving and living all the time in the fresh air." "We like nomadic life; to stay in beautiful new places with good pasture and water for our animals is great," (Sneath

1993). In Tuva people express these ideas even more strongly:

*If we didn't like nomadic life, we would never become shepherds. We like the life among nature very much. We are used to large areas, movement and clean air. We can't imagine the life in the city. When we are in the city we begin to feel uncomfortable... we don't have enough space and air in the city and we feel this lack. City people live in their 'cages'. In winter it is very hot in their flats and we usually have a headache when we are there. We feel very good among pastures and it is difficult to imagine any other job we could do except the job of shepherds. (Mongush 1993).*

There is a preference in Tuva for wide open spaces:

*We don't herd our animals in the forests. It is inconvenient and besides, nature is quite beautiful here in the steppes; nobody has touched and destroyed it yet. We also don't herd animals in places where predatory animals live because that is dangerous for our herds. All our pastures are open areas and it is very convenient to herd animals there. We don't seek other territories. We just don't need it. (Herder, Uvyur district, Tuva, 1992).*

Of course, despite these attitudes, many people do leave the country and go to live in the *sum* centre or the towns. This is true especially of young people. Nevertheless, for most herders a complete break with pastoral life was unthinkable. A common answer to the question, "what would happen to your herds if you decided to leave the countryside and live in the town?" was "this couldn't happen," or, "in this case our animals will stay with our children in the country." Having animals and looking after them is seen as an intrinsically good thing. For example,

*I like my nomadic life because animal is related to this. The nomadic life is one of the*

*best ways to get animal products and use animal products and resources. (Poor herder, Davst sum, Uvs aimag, Mongolia, 1992).*

### Some practical effects of concern for the environment

In Tuva many localities have set up Societies for Environmental Protection funded by local institutions. The Society at Handagaity received 62,000 rubles in 1991, of which 24,000 were spent, and in 1992 it was planned for the funding to rise to 69,000 rubles. The district leader at Uvuyr said,

*At the moment the problem of environmental protection is considered to be one of the most important problems. And we have reasons for this. First of all, the rivers are drying because of the cutting of the forests near them. Secondly, cases of poaching are more frequent now, as some people break the law, killing rare animals that should be protected. Besides, there are some people who pollute water resources, cut trees, and leave rubbish in open places because of their irresponsibility and disrespectful attitude to nature. All these circumstances made us take action. For example, during the last two years, 13 people were fined 6,750 rubles and 21 institutions were fined 21,768 rubles.<sup>3</sup> We pay a lot of attention to the citizens of Mongolia. It's not a secret that they smuggle. Besides, they destroy the environment. Only this year they were fined 158,304 rubles for cutting trees in our territory. The offenders can be absolutely different in their nationalities, age, sex and education. It is difficult to concretise. But one thing is clear: they damage the environment and must be punished for this. (Mongush 1993).*

In Tuva lessons in environmental protection are important in all schools. It is interesting and significant that these lessons include, what often amounts to, participation in rituals. With widespread teaching in schools, knowledge about nature that

was previously received only in a haphazard way from older generations, is now being systematised. A teacher in Uvyur, who herself consults a shaman for illness in her family, said,

*As for environmental and cultural conservation, our district is considered to be one of the most active. We regularly conduct special 'ecology months'. All the pupils take part in this. The ecology month means special classes, conducted by biologists, geographers and form-mistresses. Sometimes specialists from the district Ecological Committee are invited. They read lectures and show the children The Red Book listing endangered species. All these classes are conducted within each separate group and after that we hold different seminars, lectures and other classes for all the pupils of our school.*

*Our programme of ecological conservation includes the excursions to the beautiful and picturesque places of our region. For example, every year the pupils of our school visit arjaans—mineral springs, which are situated in Uvyur. As you know, we have three main springs: Angaraktyg, Taldyk-Chardyk and Ulaataj. We constantly visit them.*

*Two years ago we began practising 'folk pedagogy'. This means that we now pay a lot of attention to the traditional methods of raising children. We want our children to follow the traditions of their ancestors, to promote the revival of the national traditional holidays (Shagaa—traditional New Year, Naadym—the summer festival of herders; rituals connected with the honouring of natural objects: mountains, rivers, ovaas etc.). According to traditional Tuvan culture, where nature played the main role, we try to return to all the traditions and customs connected with honouring nature (Ovaadagyyr, Sug Bajy, Dagyyr, etc).*

*After we had begun practising folk pedagogy, ecological education was systematised. In the past we had no system at all. We tried to teach our children to take care of nature but we had no programme. During the last two years we created a system to teach this*

*subject and we will try to develop it in the future. It is easy for our children to learn the elements of ecological education. It is connected with the influence of parents and grandparents. All children know that they must take care of rivers, woods, animals etc. They have heard this since their birth. At school we must consolidate these skills. This is our aim, (Mongush 1993).*

In Mongolia we found a more relaxed attitude to environmental protection. Nevertheless, Davst *sum* in Uvs *aimag* had appointed an environmental protection officer. He had followed up 58 cases of violation of the laws on conservation, mostly concerning illegal hunting. Some of the offenders were fined, others were given warnings. Conservation of wood was recognised as a problem and the *sum* had planned a modest plantation (1 hectare); however, this was not carried out for lack of funds. In Sumber *sum* in Dornogov' *aimag* there is no environmental protection officer, but there was an inspector concerned with the disposal of rubbish. He said, "every year there is some local government expenditure on this, and this year we plan to bury the rubbish around the town of Choir. Fourteen people were fined for killing marmots without a licence." (Sneath 1993).

## Conclusions

This article has provided some preliminary information on ideas about nature in Tuva and Mongolia, but it is important to note that the focus has been on expressed attitudes which belong to the sphere of culture and ideology. The relationship between such attitudes and behaviour is the subject of ongoing research in our project. It is relatively clear in the sphere of ritual, about which people are happy to talk, but less so in that of everyday activities, where people may hardly notice the environmental effects of their habitual behaviour. For example, around Mongolian and Tuvan herds-men's' camps there is often a lot of rubbish

(bits of wire, rags, broken buckets, etc.), but an example of a common response on the question "what do you do with your rubbish?" is:

*Tuvan people usually have no wastage and this means that they have no garbage. The toilet is natural. There are no water wastes. Clothes are never thrown away. Even if there is some garbage it is gathered in one place and it disappears by itself within a short period of time. (Herder, Uvyur district, Tuva 1992).*

Here the ideological picture, that herders use everything economically and produce no waste, overrides the fact of there being rubbish and makes it 'invisible'.

However, our data suggests that mess and damage caused by outsiders is all too visible. The ideological lamp is, as it were, switched away from one's own activities and focused on those of other people. Thus, 'tourists' were blamed for damage at sacred springs, and even more common was blame (for all sorts of harm) directed at other ethnic groups. This can be a cause of ethnic antagonism. For example, Tuvan herders would attribute poaching, as opposed to legal hunting, mainly to Russians. In the village of Solchur, it was a Russian who (possibly justifiably) kept on being fined for poaching. He happened to be the director of the local T.V. station, and every time he was fined he took revenge on the villagers by switching off the T.V. broadcasts (Mongush 1993). On this topic Mongush has written: "long experience of field-work has led me to the conclusion that very often the different attitudes of Russian and Tuvan people to nature and the environment leads to conflict. This is often called an ethnic problem or, even worse, a display of one-sided nationalism by the local population," (1993). There is the potential for environmentalist ideology to be used in this way in the relations between Mongolians and Russians (now virtually all departed from their military bases) in Dornod *aimag*, and between Mongolians and Kazakhs in West-

ern Mongolia (similarly, many of the Kazakhs have left the country in the past few years).

This article may indicate some reasons why attitudes to nature have such potential. They are closely tied to a specific human way of life which is conceived as part of nature—its own processes are intertwined with those of the external world. At the same time, pastoralists by their way of life identify deeply with particular regions, and thus when the land, waters and animals are threatened, they feel this affects them too.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on preliminary findings from the MacArthur Project on environmental and cultural conservation in Inner Asia, University of Cambridge. The materials were gathered by Dr. M. Mongush (Tuva), Mr. B. Telengid (West Mongolia), Dr. D. Sneath (central-south Mongolia) and Dr. C. Humphrey (Dornod *aimag*, Mongolia) during 1992-93.

<sup>2</sup> Marmots are called *tarbagan*. The bubonic plague is called *tarbagan takhal* (marmot plague) because these animals are one of the main carriers of the disease.

<sup>3</sup> The leader added, "there is a special law, according to which people who break the law of environmental protection should be punished. This is from the juridical point of view. There is a social opinion which blames people who damage nature, but this opinion is nothing without juridical grounds. If a person

breaks the law of environmental protection for the first time he gets a warning and the information is transmitted to his place of work and social opinion is supposed to influence this person. He can also be fined. But, if this person is caught once more for breaking the law, he will be called to account. I mean to answer in court."

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Dr Caroline Humphrey is a lecturer at the department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge, and a member of King's College. She has been publishing in the field of Mongolian studies for over twenty years, and the first of her books, *Karl Marx Collective*, won the Staley Prize for Anthropology. She is presently the director of the Mongolian and Inner Asia Studies Unit and the MacArthur ECCIA programme.

Dr B. Telengid has recently completed his PhD in Animal Science in Ulaanbaatar, and has published widely in this field. He has recently carried out an exhaustive anthropological case study in Mongolia as part of the MacArthur ECCIA project.

Dr Marina Mongush has a Kandidat degree from the Moscow Institute of Ethnography and is head of the History and Ethnography department at the Tuva Research Institute of Language, Literature and History, Kyzyl. Her publications over the last ten years range from studies of Shamanism to the medical practices of Tuva lamas. She has recently carried out a case study as part of the MacArthur ECCIA project.