

# Commission on Nomadic Peoples

“Mongolia’s nomads build a new society again: social structures and obligations on the eve of the private economy”

Slawoj Szykiewicz

Nomadic Peoples, Number 33, 1993

The Commission on Nomadic Peoples of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) is collaborating with the Ford Foundation to digitize, preserve and extend access to the journal of *Nomadic Peoples*. For more information regarding the journal *Nomadic Peoples* visit the Commission on Nomadic Peoples website at [www.nomadicpeoples.info](http://www.nomadicpeoples.info) and the Berghahn Books website at [www.berghahnbooks.com](http://www.berghahnbooks.com)

# Mongolia's nomads build a new society again: social structures and obligations on the eve of the private economy

Slawoj Szykiewicz

Mongol kinship and local communities are presented with a historical perspective as structures organising the society. Among the reasons for their decay, the role of herding collectives is indicated. Prospects for their animation in new conditions of private economy are considered. Kinship has been reduced to a subsidiary role of alleviating stress, and in this function it is now gaining some importance. Minimal local communities will be essential in the process of reviving private herding, though they are not able to cope with problems of wealth differentiation and with acquiring knowledge about livestock strategies, which previously was left to the collective management. A brief treatment of ownership rights focuses on problems it presents in the transitory period. The final section considers a system of ritual circulation of property in a socialist society aimed at gaining status. Intensified ritual exchange creates links which substitute for the waning kinship system. It also invades local politics. The system, deeply rooted in tradition, enters into the new economy with the same vigour.

## Introduction

Mongolia is undergoing the fourth transformation in this century which will cause a basic change in ways of life, of thinking, and of organising social ties, and demands a general reform in life strategies of virtually all Mongolians. The former transformations followed the revolution of 1921, the suppression of the opposition in the early 1930s, and collectivisation of the rural economy in 1959. This time it is the introduction of the market economy and the dissolution of collective farms which marks a new stage in the country's history.

The object of this paper is to describe some essential institutions of the nomadic part of Mongol society and how they have adapted to new situations, and to conjecture on their possible adaptation in the future. The description is based on field research done in 1992 for the PALD Project<sup>1</sup>, and on my earlier research in this country.

## Overview of social change in modern Mongolia

The four initial decades of the Mongol People's Republic were dominated by the idea of building a socialist nation by eradicating tradition from ideology and social set-up, that is almost everything which belonged to the former system. However, activists of the new order had no clear idea of what they were struggling for and what was wrong in the things inherited. Therefore they tried to erase most of the past, including such things as etiquette and snuff-bottles. Religion was among those remnants which aroused few doubts. The Church was a dangerous counterpart to the Communist state which secured exclusive power by extinction of the former, together with all rituals bearing any religious imprint, however weak and formal. Thus not only communal or family sacrifices disappeared for decades, but also weddings distantly connected to religion by their astro-

logical content. Surprisingly, the imposition of atheism divorced monasticism from the philosophical tradition; while the institutional Church was abolished, some of the ideological values of Buddhism were spared.

This was perhaps due to the official regard for classical Marxist writings which in popular perception became just a gloss to the holy scriptures. The latter were neither quoted nor discredited, which contributed to their continued esteem. Moreover, it enabled a Mongol intellectual tradition to survive in those stratas of society which were beyond the reach of routine purges among the town intelligentsia. This situation contributed to a certain integrity and integration of society, at least of its nomadic portion, which endured as a whole in good condition through the period of atomisation characteristic of repressive regimes. This suggests that nomads are able to become an agent integrating a society around a set of values particular to that society and to secure its continuity as a social system and an ethnic entity. In the Mongol case the nomads constituted a great majority of the society at that time, and it was they who gave shape to the nation.

The Buddhist philosophical tradition is inclusive and contains much of what can be termed national anthropological knowledge with some moral aspects. Thus it embraces kinship ideology, both in genealogical and practical dimensions. It is also concerned with structures of social organisation, but only those of a higher level, the state or a fief, since its interest is located in a just and harmonious rule. Very seldom does it go down to the family or basic community level. The social aspect of Buddhist teaching is then, in a sense, the opposite of Confucian ideology. Due to its persistence perhaps, the common sociological self-knowledge of the Mongols stresses the importance of kinship, and diminishes that of family and communal structures. This understanding is discrepant with the observed realities of modern Mongolia.

The Mongol social system was severely stressed in the period preceding collectivisation. Practically all the institutions of social organisation, including marriage, the family, and local communities, faded under the pressure of de-ritualisation and of economic degradation through the deliberate decapitalisation of private households. Society became very mobile, both horizontally and vertically. Local structures lost their aim and consistency, and were replaced by revolutionary institutions, and later the party/state administration. The incompetence of the latter was long responsible for instability and growing mobility of the cadres and of people dissatisfied with their activities. Constant changes of administrative borders brought about a weakening of local communities which lost their organising role in society as shown by their low endogamy index.

Wholesale collectivisation brought stability to the Mongol countryside. After a decline in herd sizes, they began to rise, having been liberated from restrictive taxation. Social mobility was reduced, though continued through the channels of the army and education, thus providing outlets for professional and social promotion. Restrictions on movement and a high birth-rate contributed to the restoration of local communities, strengthened by stabilisation of the lowest administrative unit, the *sum*. On average, each *sum* represented one third of the area covered by the old *khoshuu*, the pre-revolutionary fiefs or later counties. This has enabled them to integrate quickly, helped in this process by a unified economy, since each *sum* was equivalent to the collective, a *negdel*. The communalism ingrained in both the idea and system of a collective farm worked to re-establish local communities at several levels.

Mongol kinship system is patrilineal with the Omaha terminology characteristic of most Central Asian nomads (Vreeland 1957). It is no longer composed of corporate descent groups, though their remnants can be found as weak traces of lineages. The latter are still discernible among the

Oyrats of western Mongolia, the Darkhats of the North, or even in the Gobi, but do not constitute a basis for social organisation. In most of Khalkha Mongolia, kinship structures had already disintegrated in the 19th century. This means that there are no communities composed of descent groups and no ceremonial functions involving representatives of such groups. Life cycle rituals became a matter of communal interest, while in-family religious rituals were extinguished in the late 1930s. The latter are now being revived in some places, but much less effectively than communal rituals.

Some minimal lineages of descendants of an ancestor four generations removed are left. These are not corporate groups, do not control any assets of economic or symbolic value, and no organisational functions are vested in them. Even exogamy is ensured by a simple account of the kin in between, and has lost a group character. The once famous genealogical memory of the Mongols has been reduced to three or four generations, and further tracing is exceptional. The emotional functions of kin relations are now practically the only uniting power. In such circumstances, descent has lost its importance and kinship becomes a generalised pattern. Yet at the start of this century, kin were strictly divided into paternal and maternal groups, supplemented by descendants of females from the paternal line. In addition to these three, there were also affines, and the four groups created a system, within which the game of kinship rights and obligations was played. This remained true even after descent groups disintegrated. Ceremonial functions survived as the economic ground for acting cooperatively.

Clustering of kin in common camps was a frequent practice even until the *negdel* period, but these were kindred groups composed of chosen relatives from any of the four divisions of kin, as opposed to descent groups formed exclusively by agnates. At the same time kin rights and duties within the patriline, which were still

important in the pre-collectivisation period, were loosened in favour of close links with members of the families of origin of both spouses. This has moved the pattern towards bilaterality in most of the country. Adding to the picture a strong matrilineal tendency in the Gobi, we arrive at the conclusion that there has been a decomposition of Mongol kinship structures. This became a fact in the first half of this century at the latest, and contributed to a serious decline in the ability of the social system, deprived of its spinal cord, to resist the changes forced on it. Nevertheless the kin network had remained important throughout the country as the basic matrix for co-operation and for ritual.

Therefore *negdel* organisers took care to create unrelated production teams out of a conviction that kin interests would otherwise take precedence over collective ones. This was an ideological choice in the struggle to create a new society free of kin allegiances, understood to be a feature of the closed systems associated with feudalism. On purely practical grounds organisers tended to avoid nepotism and corrupt practices which would have been to the detriment of collective property, and of state interests. Interestingly, the same anxiety is spelled out by *sum* administrators now in anticipation of privately managed services (such as transport or veterinary care). The argument about possible nepotism in distribution of scarce resources is used to support the idea of services controlled by the administration, in theory free of kin involvement.

Essential labour within the collectives was confined to small teams, usually of one to three households. Since they were the basic units for financial accounting, they became integrated by a common interest. Therefore relatives from outside the team lost importance in economic matters. Combined with frequent migrations, this contributed to the removal of kinship rights and duties to a purely private sphere. The initial ban on kin networks in production was relaxed with time. This did not create,

however, any particular pressure towards recomposition of the old teams, although a tendency towards joining related families was evident. A change appeared in kinship interests, reoriented now to closer ties with kin based outside the pastoral economy and thus having access to different types of goods and services. This served to create a network of goods exchange between unequally supplied areas, the countryside and the town. Kin channels again became economically important, this time in provisioning instead of production, as had been the case during the *pre-negdel* period.

Though obligations to kin have been relaxed, they are still compelling in relation to members of the family of origin and parental siblings. These are substantially supported, no matter where they live (see the section on *idesh* below). Elderly people are always found either living with their children or nomadising in the same camp. Lonely and disabled people without close relatives are taken care of, as a rule, by distant kin according to an old pattern of safety nets. This is not, however, a moral obligation any longer, which points to the need to develop communal social services. The present transitional period has introduced anxiety about the future, and has reinforced kinship ties as a natural resort in a situation where other familiar institutions cease to operate and to provide security. Reintegration of kin in common camps and on common pastures is going on, while natural kin ties are being supplemented with fictitious ones, reviving the old institution of sworn brotherhood. Nevertheless, any form of cooperative movement which is likely to arise would unite households on an economic basis rather than through kin links, and would repeat the process of marginalising kin, observed in the early collectives.

## Local communities

The Mongols nomadise alone or in groups. The former solution predominates in winter when they settle at established sites provided with shelters for animals, storehouses and perhaps other outbuildings. Summer and autumn are the seasons with the most active social life, and individual camps may then number a dozen households, depending on the region. These groupings, the *khot ails*, constitute a micro society, commonly responsible for socialisation of children, for performing familial ceremonies and other observances or feasts, for economic activities and for leisure. The group takes up functions of each particular family and acts as a kin group. Even unrelated families camping together produce kin-type relations, common to all group members (Szykiewicz 1982).

Traditional *khot ails* used to be formed to use a given ecological potential effectively, that is to fill a niche with a herd of an optimal size, and therefore should consist of grouped individual herds, or of a herd with a set of herding personnel around it. This principle was essential in regulating the group size and composition, leaving aside even eligible kin, if their herds were larger than the *khot ail's* potential. Only the Oyrats used to accommodate a lineage within a common nomadic group. Labour sharing, too, was an essential reason for living in *khot ails* in the past. Households tended to pool labour so that it could be available in emergency situations or at times of particularly heavy work. For most of the time, however, there was surplus labour, a sort of hidden unemployment. Each group was known under the name of the camp leader, usually the eldest member who was responsible for organising team work, the sequence of grazing and choice of the next camp site.

The term *khot ail* is not commonly used throughout Mongolia; often it is simply referred to as *ail*, roughly a 'home'. Also the term for group leader has been forgotten in many places. This points to a serious

decline in the *khot ail's* importance for both herd management and social organisation. The *negdel's* tutelary administration and technical services have replaced grass roots initiative, impoverished the ability for self-reliant herd management and selection of pastoral strategies.

Camp composition is variable from season to season according to herd management requirements. It can be re-established each year if other influences remain unchanged. From this point of view the *khot ail* can be considered a group with an enduring or even permanent membership, the more so since seasonally separated members remain close neighbours. This makes it possible to consider large *khot ails* as the basic local communities. In fact, they are almost identical with so called groups of one valley, usually referred to as communities of a lower order. These concentrate around a common source of water, which they use in summer or autumn, that is during the period of most active social contacts, which is the essential point in discerning a local community. Often they are committed to the idea of using that territory as their genuine family area, with a tradition going back to ascending generations. Membership in such a community is often by individual ascription since more people are usually born in a territory than it is able to accommodate. Compared to communities of a higher order these are more flexible.

In practice the least flexible is the population of the *sum*, as also was its past counterpart, the *khoshuu*. This has been the centre of local political life, of ceremonial practices with a main annual sacrifice for wellbeing at an *ovoo* stone cairn, and of religious life with a central monastery (discontinued in the socialist period). It has always provided trade, recreational and administrative services. Identification with this community of the highest order was secured by its symbolic and ritual functions, and in the past by its aristocratic ruler with his own tradition (a *khoshuu* was the equivalent of a fief). Often one *sum/khoshuu*

has stood against others in sporting competitions which were also intense integrative events. Modern *negdels* have given another strong incentive to integration, the common estate creating a sort of corporation. The next lower is the medium local community of brigade, now often called a *bag*, which is also an economic unit with more intense face-to-face contacts and more calculable production interests. Brigades or *bags* contain most of one's kin on a given territory.

Local communities of a lower order have provided a framework for more intense social activities, for immediate support in individual calamities or disasters, and for common responsibility for the proper use of neighbouring pastures and often for ceremonial life. Within the *negdels*, local communities were deprived of all functions except social ones. Privatisation changed little in this picture, except that it introduced instability in community membership, resulting from the wish of some people to change their pastures, either returning to areas they had occupied earlier or moving closer to newly acquired winter or spring shelters. The number of unattached people wandering around good pastures increased, behaviour which was condemned in the past by the authorities and former communities. It adds to present instability in the process of formation of integrated new local communities.

With increasing wealth differentiation, *khot ails* and valley communities will have to cope with a greater number of poor people. Many others will have to learn about traditional herd management and pastoral strategies. Much can be learned within *khot ails* by observing the behaviour of the experienced leaders, but more is to be expected from the *sum* administration. Many young herdsmen in the *sum* community are in need of expert training in livestock management. Relying on example within small communities does not promise a great advance and may instead corrupt these groups, themselves seeking for adequate models of behaviour, functions and forms of organisation.

## Property rights

Social structures operate within a paradigm which patterns the behaviour of participants in a structure. Concepts of ownership are critical in shaping nomad ideas about their own society. They can be crudely summarised as follows: private animals are for social purposes, collective herds for subsistence, while land is for unreserved exploitation by those who occupy it. These ideas have been put into practice.

Collectivisation made animals communal property, apart from a limited herd left in private hands. Each household was entitled privately to own a number of animals, fixed for each of two geographical regions. Species composition of private herds was left to households to decide. In most cases the limit was not reached, though there were no particular obstacles to it, except inadequate management. Many pastoral families looked after the private herds of their relatives or friends already pensioned or occupied in non-pastoral professions. This was generally understood as part of an exchange of services. Private herds were grazed with the collective ones but with more attention, while seasonal products were collected with the help of kin or neighbours. The two herds satisfied different consumption aims. Nutritional needs were met mainly from collective income (payment for labour was partly made in animals, and there was also a possibility of purchase at reduced prices). Private herds met needs for social and ritualised exchange, as well as ostentation (mainly in riding horses).

Collective ownership poses a puzzle from the point of view of a Western economy. Formally, members of a collective were shareholders in the estate. Initially shares were recorded according to herd size contributed on entering. Soon these were forgotten, as membership became inherited and original shares were diluted or were considered equal for each member person, not household. On dis-

solving the collective, a possibility not earlier envisaged, the question of property apportionment arose. There were doubts about individual equality of distribution, since each member had contributed a different effort in developing the collective's potential, and many had moved to other places while retaining the formal membership acquired by being born and having grown up in the community. Each collective, or their regional associations, resolved the problem in their own way.

Rights in land are a particular issue. Formal ownership is vested in the state and always had been, with the state substituted by an emperor or a ruler. On the spot the state has been represented by a local chief or the administration/collective leader. The latter could move a herder to another area, but that was exceptional. As a rule, herdsmen used a customary set of pastures. Legally each household is entitled to graze within the administrative borders of a *sum* or formerly a *khoshuu*. But there always has been a gap between legal and actual rights on the ground and no one is supposed to wander at random in a territory and graze on land which is not his habitual pasture. An exception is the right of passage allowing a herder to move herds to some distant place, and this right is often abused by a prolonged stay on someone else's rich pastures. There are no legal regulations about customary grazing rights, but in the past there was much litigation about notorious abusers. These were usually the *shabinar*, or herders of monastery livestock, who often took the liberty of moving at will, protected by the ecclesiastical authority. With the revival of the private economy there is again an anxiety about uncontrolled use of grazing by strangers.

The definition of a stranger presents difficulties, especially in legal terms. It is, however, well understood in the native cognition, though it can be described in conditional or contingent terms only. Rights to land are not exclusive and claims can be made on the basis of long use, family tradition, membership in a local group,

kin or friendship with an already established user, or an informal agreement with the latter. Thus rights are acquired by status qualities, whether expressed by tradition, kin or other personal relations, or position of influence. Rights to a particular site may be transient, though with some notion of permanence entitling a passing membership in a community.

Men from outside the widest *sum/khoshuu* community may have been admitted either on grounds of having one of the above statuses, or by special permission of the local authorities. In their case, tradition may also be a motive, as during climatic calamities herdsman move to recognised and familiar places with better grazing. In regions with differentiated ethnic composition, strangers in need were granted temporary admission against a fee. Now they are treated on the same footing as neighbours from the next administrative unit and need official agreement (though in some cases such an agreement is not obligatory).

### Social functions of property

So far we have been discussing rights over productive property and their dependence on social status. Property, however, can by itself create a status, and this has been the case in Mongolia since long ago, not excluding the socialist period. The classic mode is wealth differentiation, which was also present among the collective members, though to a lesser extent. What we can call a truly classic social function of property in Mongolia is ritual exchange which has even increased over the last two decades. The reasons for this increase are manifold: a need to distinguish oneself within the formal uniform society of the collective, growth in well-being and consequent intensification of social activity, formal restrictions on simple wealth status, revival of family rituals since late 1960s, activation of public and political life at the local level which has mobilised industrious individuals to enter the game according to long

established rules of ritual exchange. Additional motives included the need to participate in a struggle for privileges accessible by administrative distribution, including higher education, travelling abroad, scarce goods, health resorts, excursions to the then Soviet Union, and many others.

With growing demand for social consumption, privately owned animals have lost part of their productive role and became socially consumable goods. The latter also includes other kinds of goods, traditionally belonging to this category: spirits and foodstuffs (including meat, dairy products, cakes and sweets made with sugar). New items also enter the scene—market goods, of which only lengths of fabric for Mongol gowns, *deel*, and tobacco have a long tradition of exchange. Mongol culture has adopted the Tibetan gift of gifts, a silk scarf *khadag*. Symbolically the most honorific presentation, indispensable in betrothals and funerals, it became a rarity due to cuts in imports from China. In some regions it has been replaced by scarves of simple white cloth.

Ritualised exchange consists of gift-giving with delayed reciprocity, on the occasion of feasts or special situations. The feasts in question are usually childbirth, first hair clipping, weddings, an advanced birthday (one in a lifetime, as a rule), funeral, son's conscription or departure for prolonged important business such as to university, establishing a new yurt, maternity award, receiving honorific titles or prizes. On many of these occasions a solemn feast (*nair*) is organised, following a set of specific rules and celebrations. Participants in a *nair* are supposed to bring gifts, even token ones, which will be reciprocated on the spot. The only gifts which are not reciprocated immediately are live animals, which are only announced and delivered later.

A decision to organise a *nair*, and the scale and choice of an occasion are defined by the particular interests of a host family. According to current custom it is commonly expected that the feast will be given for a wedding and on receiving the title of

Hero of Labour (a very rare event). An adult man will be satisfied with one *nair* in his lifetime, usually on marrying off his son. With the rise in the social position of women, it is often their ambition to give one on receiving the maternity medal for multiple births. This is the only case where a woman is the hero of the *nair*, which is the latest development. The decision is a matter of strategy: the *nair* can be just a confirmation of one's ties with the local community, in which case the extent of the community is restricted in order to limit invitations (from one's own valley to the *sum*). But a *nair* can also be a means in a constant struggle for prestige and status within the community, and thus it has to be properly addressed and repeatedly organised for whatever reason. An open *nair* without limits on attendance is the most ambitious and competitive, though costly.

Each *nair* demands some initial investment, though for the host the net balance of income over expenditure is usually (though temporarily) positive, mostly in the category of live animals which are reciprocated on the spot by symbolically important portions of mutton, e.g. the highly valued cooked carcasses of sheep, beverages and consumer goods. Other gifts have to be balanced by gifts of the same kind. The food and drink consumed by the crowd of guests are not reciprocated.

In longer perspective the net gain of *nair* disappears because animals received should be reciprocated more or less equivalently on a similar occasion to conclude, or rather to continue, a circulation of animals and other prestigious consumer goods. Thus, private animals withdrawn from own consumption return finally to the stock, being in the meantime converted into valuables of ritualised exchange, which in their turn are exploited to achieve personal social influence.

This points to the fact that within the general system of exchange with wide participation there is a subsystem of exchange among people of homogeneous class. Any guest at a lavish *nair* can bring a

small gift and he or she will be treated respectfully, and will have the personal satisfaction of a dignifying participation in an important event. Other guests, whose personal strategy resembles that of the host, will have high aspirations reflected in generous presentations. Giving is as rewarding as organising a *nair*, so both sides play the same game.

Therefore the tactics adopted decides the practical gains of giving *nairs* and presents. A Gobi man, a driver by profession, has organised three great *nairs* over ten years on various family occasions. He lives in a village centre, but his *nairs* have been general and they have brought to him great popularity. Consequently he won the position of *bag* chief, to which he aspired, according to his own account. This shows how the collective economy permits a struggle for status by means of old-fashioned ritual exchange.

Participation in *negdel* politics, making a career in the local hierarchy, or just operating safely as a proficient and respected member of the community, requires a network of friendly and trusted people in general, and in complementary sectors of the division of labour in particular. One cannot rely on kinship ties since they are diffused and have become too few and too weak. *Nair* exchanges create a replica of kinship ties by reciprocal giving of substantial presents. Those who exchange between themselves at consecutive *nairs* become closely related socially and take on mutual obligations, even if they are not close friends. At the same time *nairs* remain a demonstration of competitive behaviour, though not necessarily with conflicting aims.

The institution of *nair* is likely to continue in the new conditions of a market oriented private economy. The main reason behind its survival is the particular role played by personal contacts and affiliations in a scattered society where spatial distance has to be moderated in order to minimise the social distance. Ritual face-to-face contacts developed by Mongol culture are an

experienced and deeply rooted method, which will have to adapt to a new set of statuses developed in new circumstances and select a (partly) new class ready and able to play the game.

It is interesting to note that in the collective period people holding high office in the collectives were formally excluded from participation in *nair* exchange. Nevertheless, they participated in the status distribution within a *sum*. Although discouraged by the higher authorities from organising *nairs*, they or their relatives did hold them, thus entering the goods circulation. There also existed another type of exchange they were involved in, one quite devoid of ostentation. The administration of the collective was concerned with the production results of a certain group of herdsmen, particularly the heads of teams critical to returns for the whole collective. They contributed much to plan fulfilment which in turn, promised benefits to the administrative staff. These herdsmen enjoyed some more or less veiled privileges, facilities and sometimes donations. The most significant privilege was the title of Hero of Socialist Labour, with important advantages and favours for both sides. Therefore there was a great deal of manipulation, both in choosing a candidate and in piloting and promoting him through the decisive channels.

A particular sort of ritualised exchange involves kindreds dispersed spatially and located in various occupational milieus. This is an institution of goods and services exchange, known as *idesh*, between close relatives living in towns or *sum* centres and in the countryside. The term, meaning 'meat for the winter' covers meat for rural household consumption prepared in early winter as well as the gift of meat to relatives in towns. In return, town relatives visiting the countryside family during summer holidays bring clothes, beverages, prestigious consumer goods, and also offer help in getting access to town based services (such as health or administrative promotion). This makes an equivalent and balanced exchange. The balance has dis-

appeared lately since there are few goods in urban shops, but herdsmen still perceive giving *idesh* as a kinship obligation even for token returns. The exchange includes a mechanism of delayed reciprocity.

Though *idesh* commodities may simply be delivered through the postal system, it is still considered a ceremonial gift because it coincides with the New Year. Summer visits by town relatives are ceremonialised in their own way, hence the whole institution takes on the form of ritualised exchange. Nevertheless, *idesh* exchange is the only one among those described here which meets standards of redistributive mechanisms. The rest, even the non-ritual exchange dispensed by the administration, is oriented towards prestige or status seeking; this is understandable in the context of the accepted conceptualisation of Mongol society as a hierarchically patterned one.

Redistribution in the sense of alleviation of severe cases of poverty, whether caused by a calamity or not, was the responsibility of the very institution of the *negdel*. It included assistance and insurance mechanisms based on redistribution of manipulable resources<sup>2</sup> or assets left at the collective's disposal. Shared security provided by the socialist form of socio-economic organisation became a safe enough background for individual efforts to attain social and public influence and status. However the struggle was possible on the condition of accumulating some capital to be used in exchanges, and was therefore limited to an already secure fraction of the collective members. The same process can be expected to appear in privatised pastoral society.

A small number of such private herdsmen developing after the sharing out of collective herds, now display wealth differentiation and behaviour which follows the traditional model. Households of medium and considerable affluence already have relatively high spending on social consumption and ritual. The wealthiest tend also to accumulate a large proportion of horses in their herds for purely ostenta-

tious reasons, as in the traditional private economy. This situation may change, but it proves that the old model of social obligations and use of wealth is persisting.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Policy Alternatives for Livestock Development in Mongolia, project, run by the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, UK, and the Research Institute of Animal Husbandry, Ulaanbaatar. My research was done together with Tomasz Potkanski whose observations I have used in the text. See Potkanski and Szykiewicz 1993.

<sup>2</sup> This term denoting a surplus to the obligatory delivery plan, i.e. a left-over after meeting obligations to state funds, was introduced by Humphrey (1983:9). Some of the produce could be sold to the state at more advantageous prices, but some might be redistributed among collective members. This possibility was subject to fulfilment of plan requirements, which was unusual.

## References

- Humphrey, C. 1983, *Karl Marx Collective. Economy, Society and Religion in a Siberian collective farm*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Potkanski, T. & S. Szykiewicz 1993, "The Social Context of Liberalisation of the Mongolian Pastoral Economy". *Research Report No. 4*. IDS, University of Sussex.
- Szykiewicz, S. 1982, "Settlement and community among the Mongolian nomads", *East Asian Civilisations*, 1:10-44.
- Vreeland, H. H. 1957, *Mongol Community and Kinship Structure*. New Haven: HRAF.

Slawoj Szykiewicz graduated from Warsaw University in 1962 where he received his Ph.D. degree in 1975 for a dissertation on Mongol kinship terminology. He has done extensive field work in Mongolia, and some in Buryatia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and elsewhere. His interests include the social organisation of nomadic peoples of Central Asia and Siberia. He is currently professor at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology in Warsaw.