

LORDS OF THE MONGOLIAN TAIGA:

An Ethnohistory of the Dukha Reindeer Herders

W. Alan Wheeler

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Christopher P. Atwood

Supervisory
Committee

György Kara

Larry Moses

Date

To Kim

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Introduction

Tucked away in the northernmost district of Mongolia is a small group of approximately thirty reindeer-herding families who call themselves the Dukha.¹ For centuries unknown to the Western world, the history and culture of the Dukha have remained largely a mystery. Significant works on the Dukha's history are rare at best in Western literature and basically nonexistent in English. According to the Finnish ethnographer and linguist Juha Janhunen's brief description, the Dukha "can probably be regarded as the most 'primitive' reindeer people presently living." Moreover, "creating a maximally complete recording of their life, as it still continues today, is one of the most urgent tasks of North Asian ethnography" (1983: 76). While a "maximally complete" record of the Dukha's life is beyond the scope of this thesis, the aim here is to provide a concise ethnohistory of the Dukha with a specific focus on their reindeer-herding populace so as to create a basis for future research.

¹ "Dukha" has also been alternatively spelled Toha or Tuha.

Chapter 1

LORDS OF THE TAIGA

The Land and People of the Sayan Region

The trans-national region at which the Russian republics of Tuva and Buryatia meet with northern Mongolia is the land of the Sayan mountains, which are separated into two ranges—the Western Sayan, which forms the northern border of Tuva, and the Eastern Sayan, which divides the Khövsgöl *aimag* (Mon. “province”) of Mongolia from Buryatia. The area of the Eastern Sayan range, combined with the Cis-Khövsgöl mountain complex to the south, boasts of snow-capped peaks that reach heights of over 11,000 feet, forming the main watershed for the Upper Yenisei basin in Tuva and Mongolia. The many rivers and alpine lakes throughout the region are populated with fish such as sig, taimen, lenok and grayling. Apart from the boggy valleys and mountain tundra of the highlands, the bulk of this territory is blanketed by a stretch of boreal forests made up of larch, cedar, spruce and birch, a landscape that Russians have labeled the *taiga*.¹ This cover provides habitat to a great number of mammal species, including squirrel, sable, wolf, fox, lynx, wild boar, brown bear, roe-deer, elk, moose and reindeer.²

¹ The word *taiga* is not Russian, but is indigenous to several Siberian languages, including Tuvan and its various dialects. While the traditional Russian usage of the word has come to connote the boreal forests of the Northern Hemisphere, to ethnic Tuvan reindeer herders, the word more precisely refers to the mountain-tundra plateau found above the altitudinal tree-line. The Dukha specifically distinguish the forest, *arga*, and mountains, *daglar* (also snow-capped mountains, *mengilig daglar*) from taiga, i.e., areas of mountain-tundra that are rich in *shulum*, or “reindeer moss,” the lichen which is the reindeer’s preferred diet. This information is based on data I gathered jointly with Morten Pedersen during a portion of my fieldwork with the Dukha in the summer of 1999. For the sake of convenience, I shall adhere to the typical Russian meaning of the word throughout this thesis.

² Although the species *Rangifer tarandus* is known in North America as caribou in the wild and reindeer in its domesticated state, in Eurasia it is simply referred to as wild or domesticated reindeer. Unless referring to “wild reindeer,” the term

The remote region of the Eastern Sayan is also home to interrelated groups of people who for centuries have relied predominantly upon herding reindeer combined with hunting and gathering for their sustenance, effectively utilizing the largely inaccessible resources of the vast Siberian taiga region. Following the theory of “economic-cultural types”³ developed by Soviet ethnographers, the Russian anthropologist Sevyan Vainshtein classifies these groups as the “Sayan upland sub-type” of the hunters and reindeer-herders of the Siberian taiga ([1972] 1980: 49). According to Vainshtein, the economic life of these people was “characteristically” based on “hunting for meat throughout the year, with seasonal fur-hunting, the latter being a marked speciality, and also reindeer-breeding (for load-carrying, riding, milk and, in times of extreme necessity, meat)” ([1972] 1980: 49). Other aspects important to their economy included gathering and, on occasion, fishing.

Although these lesser-populated peoples of the Eastern Sayan region share a similar ancestry and are linked by common origins, the course and events of history have divided them into four distinct cultural entities in separate locales of south Siberia and northwest Mongolia. These are the Tuvans of eastern Tuva, the Tofalar of the Irkutsk *rayon* (Rus. “district”) of Russia, the Oka Soyots of the Oka region in southwest Buryatia, and the Dukha in Khövsgöl aimag, Mongolia.

reindeer will be used throughout this thesis in reference to the animal in its domesticated state.

³ For more on the notion of economic-cultural types, see Humphrey (1980: 5-8).

Eastern Tuvans

Representing the largest and most documented of the four groups⁴, the reindeer herders and hunters of eastern Tuva have historically occupied the mountainous taiga region which forms the watershed for the Biï River and Kaa River and stretches from the Ut River in the northwest to Tere Khöl Lake⁵ in the southeast (Vainshtein [1972] 1980: 46).⁶ Considering those reindeer-herding families in the vicinity of Tere Khöl, the Eastern Tuvans now represent the southernmost reindeer-herding people in the Northern Hemisphere.⁷

In earlier works, the terms Uriankhai⁸ and Soyot, or Soiot,⁹ were most commonly used to designate Tuva's indigenous population. However, ethnic Tuvans, in general, including the reindeer-herding population, use the ethnonym Tyva¹⁰ in reference to themselves, their language and the land of present-day Tuva.¹¹ In recent literature, Tuva's reindeer herders and hunters have been variously called Todjin (Vainshtein [1972] 1980), Todzha (Whitaker 1981: 342), Todzhan (Potapov [1956] 1964), Tozuans (Mänchen-Helfen

⁴ The amount of Russian literature on these groups is, of course, extensive. The works of early writers on the region in general, such as Potanin (1881, 1882, 1883) and Grumm-Grzhimailo (1914, 1926, 1930), as well as Rassadin (1967) who wrote later on the Tofalar language were not available at the time of writing.

⁵ Although *khöl* means "lake" in Tuvan, I have chosen to retain this word as part of the proper name.

⁶ For substantial material in English on the reindeer-herding hunter-gatherers of Tuva, see Vainshtein ([1972] 1980: 120-144), Mänchen-Helfen ([1931] 1992: 47-57), Diószegi (1962), Whitaker (1981), and Carruthers (1914: 198-256).

⁷ In 1981 Ian Whitaker correctly asserted that the Dukha of Mongolia were the southernmost reindeer-herding people (1981: 343). When the Mongolian government relocated the Dukha further north in 1985, this title went to the eastern Tuvans.

⁸ Cited in sources as early as the twelfth century, the term "Uriankhai," and its various cognates, was a designation given to forest-dwellers in general and has become an ethnonym applied to both Mongol and Tuvan tribes. The word was also used in reference to the country and people of Tuva during the Qing Dynasty. For more discussion on the ancient Uriankhai, see Coloo (1976: 59), Wilhelm (1957: 172-176). In regards to the origin of the term, see Krueger (1977: 9-10).

⁹ Although used to designate Tuvans in general, Soyot, which has been given a Mongolian plural ending, derives from Soyán, the name of one Tuvan clan.

¹⁰ Because the initial /t/ in Tyva is unaspirated, the name may sound more like "Dyva" to the English speaker's ear.

¹¹ Given the prominent use of the name Tuva in Western literature, the word Tuvan will be employed throughout this thesis as the term's English adjective instead of Tuvinian, which more closely follows the Russian designation.

[1931] 1992), and even Todzhinians, after the Toja region of Tuva where most, but not all of them, reside. This group will be specified here, however, as Eastern Tuvans to distinguish them from Tuvans in the east that have not historically engaged in reindeer herding.

Tofalar

Previously known in literature as the “Karagas,” the Tofalar or Tofa of Irkutsk rayon are located to the north of their Eastern Tuvan neighbors but are separated from them by the Eastern Sayan range. Documenting comparative aspects of their shamanistic material culture, the well-traveled Hungarian ethnographer Vilmos Diószegi noted that in the late 1950s there was a total of 430 to 440 Tofalar (1968: 239). According to Diószegi, before the Soviet era, the reindeer-herding Tofalar migrated in somewhat isolated areas along the Gutara River to the west, the Iya River to the east, and the Uda River in between (1968: 239). Since the early 1930s, the location of the Tofalar has become more closely associated with three villages, Alygdzher, Nerkha and Upper Gutara, which were the administrative centers of collective farms established by the Soviets to facilitate the Tofalar’s sedentarization (Sergeyev [1956] 1964: 481). The 1989 Russian census reported that 731 Tofalar remained, of which 43% had retained their native language (Kolga et al. 1993).

Oka Soyots

Certainly, the least-documented of these reindeer-herding groups is the so-called Oka Soyots, who have also been known as Tunka Soyots or Tunka Tuva.¹² The early Buryat scholar G. Sanjeev noted in 1930 that the Oka Soyots were “completely Buryatized and had forgotten their own Soyot language” by the end of the nineteenth century (quoted in Diószegi 1962: 188, n. 167). According to Sanjeev, the Oka Soyots migrated in the late 1700s toward the upper reaches of the Oka River to an area that would become their herding and hunting grounds. Supposedly they had previously lived in the vicinity of Lake Khövsgöl of present-day Mongolia (quoted in Diószegi 1962: 188, n. 167). The most recent report estimates that the Oka Soyot number just over a thousand (Plumley 1995: 83).

Dukha

The only enclave of this diaspora located outside the Russian Federation is the Dukha, who have become the single reindeer-herding culture within the present confines of Mongolia. Aside from those who, for various reasons, have settled in other locations throughout Mongolia, the Dukha can currently be found in Tsagaannuur (Mon. “White Lake”),¹³ a *sum* (Mon. “district”) named after the main lake in the Darkhad Valley. Together with neighboring Darkhad¹⁴ Mongols, most of the Dukha now lead a settled life in the sum center. Just 30-32 households—approximately 180 people—live in the taiga with their reindeer. According to the demographer O. Sükhbaatar of the Mongolian

¹² Citing Sanjeev, Diószegi notes that they are called “*bojōj*” in the local dialect” (1962: 145), which can simply be understood as “soyon” considering the inclination in the Buryat dialect of Mongolian towards changing the consonant /s/ to /h/.

¹³ Tsagaan Nuur is Mongolian; the Dukha refer to both the lake and administrative district as Ak Khöl when speaking in their dialect of Tuvan.

National Center for Anthropological Studies, the settled and the nomadic Dukha together total just under five hundred (1998: 1). As have the Eastern Tuvans, Tofalar and Oka Soyots, the Dukha have also endured various ethnonyms mistakenly given to them by outsiders. According to the prolific Mongolian ethnographer S. Badamkhatan, the Dukha were known in early Mongolian sources as Soyot Uriankhai, *taigyn irged* (Mon. “citizens of the taiga”), and *oin irged* (Mon. “citizens of the forest”) until 1935 when the Mongolian word *tsaatan*,¹⁵ or “reindeer herder,” was first published in the newspaper *Ünen* (1962: 3). So, as the Hungarian Mongolist Otto Farkas remarks, until shortly after the socialist revolution in 1921, “[the Dukha] were named without any distinction from the other Eastern [Tuvans] or Toji-Tuvinians to whom they originally belonged” (1992: 2).

Given the inconsistencies in and between the various reports regarding their self-designation, identifying what the reindeer herders of northern Mongolia actually call themselves becomes a difficult task. For example, in three of his articles on the “*tsaatan*,” Batamkhatan provides three differing statements as to their self-determined ethnonym by stating that:

“...they call themselves ‘Uigur’ of Uriankhai descent” (1960: 30)

“...they call themselves Uigur-speaking *Dukha* (*Tuva*) of Uigur descent” (1962: 3)

“...the *tsaatan* call themselves *Uigur-Uriankhai* of Toja Khoshuu”¹⁶ (1996: 270)¹⁷

Diószegi reports that “the ‘Uryankhais’ west of lake Khubsugul call themselves in their own language *toba* (pl. *tobalar*)”¹⁸ and further notes that “available sources do not mention the

¹⁴ Also called Darkhat and Darxad.

¹⁵ *tsaa* (Mon. “reindeer”) + *tan* (Mon. “-er,” i.e. a person or thing with...), c.f. *ajiltan*, *oyutan*, *am’tan*, *yastan*, etc.

¹⁶ i.e. the Toja region of Tuva.

¹⁷ Emphases were added in these three examples.

self-given name *Toba*¹⁹ (1962: 145). The Hungarian archaeologist M. Gábori also claims that they “call themselves Uryankhay rather than Tuva” (cited in Whitaker 1981: 343).

As explained by the noted social anthropologist Caroline Humphrey (1980: 4) and by Farkas (1992: 1), the term *tsaatan* has become the most popular label for the Dukha in current literature, both Mongolian and Western alike. While the word *tsaatan* actually signifies the profession of only those Dukha in the taiga, in Mongolia the term has basically become the label for the ethnic group altogether, including those who have never kept reindeer. According to Farkas, however, “this originally occupation-based name was never practically accepted as their own name of the ethnic group. Moreover, it was offending for them if someone used the name *tsaatan* in order to distinguish them from other Tuva people” (1992: 1). Simply put, the Tuvans of Tsagaannuur sum, whether herding reindeer in the taiga, settled in the sum center or herding typical steppe-based livestock, call themselves *Dukha*. Yet the term *tsaatan* can prove useful in distinguishing the Dukha who herd reindeer, or “Dukha *tsaatan*,” from Dukha engaged in other livelihoods, such as “Dukha *malchyn*,” i.e., herders of steppe-based livestock (Wheeler 1999: 60, cf. Farkas 1992: 1-2). Farkas confirms that the Dukha “are willing to use the title *tsaatan* as the name of their occupation, but not as their own nationality” (1992: 2).

A more recent factor in perpetuating the Dukha’s mistaken identity has been the imprecise use of the label “Darkhad” to refer to the Dukha. The Darkhad are actually a distinct group who neighbor the Dukha and who form the majority populace in the

¹⁸ With the exception of the Oka Soyots, which have entirely adopted Buryat Mongolian as their native tongue, people of Tuvan ethnicity may alternately attach the plural suffix form “*lar*” to their ethnonyms in their respective Tuvan dialects. Thus, as in the case of the Tofa or Tofalar, Tuvans, who call themselves Tyva, use the plural form “Tyvalar,” and the Dukha use “Dukhalar.”

¹⁹ This is obviously a variation of the term Dukha. Emphasis is given in the original.

surrounding mountain-steppe area. Apparently, this misnomer began during the sixties when Badamkhatan alluded that there is a connection between reindeer herding and the Darkhad (1965, 1963), information which was subsequently replicated by Vainshtein ([1972] 1980).²⁰ In his monograph entitled *The Darkhad People of Khövsgöl*,²¹ Badamkhatan included a section on reindeer herding in which he stated:

Reindeer herding has been passed down from the ancient clans and tribes that inhabited the Darkhad region. Yet, Darkhad reindeer husbandry did not actually include every clan of the Darkhad; moreover, there were many clans which did not even know how to herd reindeer. Nevertheless, the issue of Darkhad reindeer herding is greatly connected to the ethnogenesis of the Darkhad people. (1965: 113)

Ironically, Badamkhatan never actually encountered any reindeer-herding Darkhad households and failed to substantiate this supposedly important link between reindeer herding and Darkhad ethnogenesis.²²

As noted by Farkas, it is not uncommon for particular ethnic groups to be given names other than their self-designations by neighboring peoples (1992: 2). Particularly in the Dukha's case, one may wonder why so many different names have been applied to them not only by outsiders, but also by the Dukha themselves. In part, the Dukha's geographic remoteness has certainly hampered the flow of accurate information regarding their identity to the outside world. However, this anomaly can also be explained by the fact that these assorted "ethnonyms" coincide with various periods of their geo-political

²⁰ Because Vainshtein ([1972] 1980) relied mainly on Badamkhatan's works in Russian for his information, he refers to the reindeer herders of Mongolia as Darkhad throughout his book, and no mention is made of the Dukha proper.

²¹ The word "People" here is actually *yastan*, which can also be translated "ethnic group" or "race".

²² Out of the twenty-six Darkhad clans he describes in the book, only two were "reindeer-herding clans," the Zoot and Soyan, which, as he later explains, were two "Uriankhai" clans that abandoned reindeer herding in the eighteenth century and later assimilated into Darkhad culture (1965: 113-114). Still, apart from Badamkhatan, there is some indication that a small number of the Darkhad previously engaged in reindeer herding on occasion (Čeveng [1934] 1991: 68). Presently, however, with the exception of Darkhad individuals who have married into Dukha families in the taiga, reindeer herding is nonexistent among the Darkhad. The point of the author here is not to propose some inherent connection between an economic-cultural type (reindeer herding) and ethnicity (the Dukha), but to bring the occupational trends of the Dukha and Darkhad into historical perspective.

history.²³ Thus, even presently, Dukha informants may offer sundry responses to inquiries concerning their designation as a social group depending on factors such as the individual's knowledge of Dukha history, the identity of the outside inquirer,²⁴ and the language in which the questions are asked.

Another enigmatic factor in their designation is the term Dukha itself, which is unique to the reindeer herders of Mongolia. Although certain members of the Dukha population still have immediate relatives across the border in Tuva, there is no indication that the variant term "Dukha" is used by the Eastern Tuvans, much less the Tofalar and Oka Soyots. It is probable that the terms Tyva, Tofa and Dukha are all cognates of the same original ethnonym, and Diószegi even asserts that the self-assigned name of the "*tobalar*" (i.e. Dukhalar) and their clan names "make it evident that the *tobalar*...are ethnically identical with the *tivalar* (i.e. the Siberian Tuvans) and with the *topalar* (Tofas)" (1961: 200). However, a more accurate perspective might be that the minor but extant differences in these self-designations, coupled with the existence of clans not shared by all four groups, are evidence that they are not "ethnically identical." Rather, their geographic isolation from each other has become a major catalyst in defining their current cultural, linguistic and ethnic differences.

²³ Because the Dukha's language is not a written language, their history has been maintained through oral tradition.

²⁴ e.g. "Dukha" to an American anthropologist, "Uriankhai" to a Mongolian historian, and "Uigur" to a Hungarian linguist.

Chapter 2

NATIVE NOMADS?

The Political and Ethnic History of the Reindeer-Herding Peoples of the Sayan, Prehistory to the 1680s

Given their relative isolation, one might assume that the reindeer-herding groups of the Sayan region have been “wholly independent of outside influence” as the English explorer Douglas Carruthers commented on the Eastern Tuvans (1914: 215). More recently, Janhunen noted that, in comparison to those on the Russian side, Mongolia’s reindeer herders are “still very much isolated from the rest of the world” (1983: 76). In reality, however, as far as their beginnings can be traced, the reindeer-herding cultures of the Sayan region have been greatly influenced by the outside world. Presently, the impact of external forces continues to change the face—and may determine the future—of these cultures.

Though speculating on geographic and genetic origins is generally considered outdated in Western anthropological thought, archaeological evidence, as well as early sources on the political history of the Sayan region, have provided insights as to the ancestry of its present inhabitants. This issue of origins has historically been of considerable importance as outside political entities have attempted through the centuries to determine where these people belong and how to deal with them.

In examining the origins of the reindeer-herding peoples of the Sayan region, the origins of the Tuvans in general must be taken into account. For in as much as the Dukha

and the other Sayan reindeer-herding groups are ethnically related, their respective histories are inseparable from that of Tuvans at large who have mostly engaged in herding typical Inner-Asian livestock on the steppe.²⁵ In the words of the Russian ethnographer L. P. Potapov, “the ethnic composition of the Tuvans is rather complex” ([1956] 1964: 380), and likewise many details of Tuvan antiquity remain unclear.²⁶ The most current theory on Tuva’s past has been built on the consensus of early researchers and outlined by Vainshtein. According to Vainshtein, a Scythian culture known as the Kazylgans inhabited the area of modern Tuva from the seventh to third centuries BC. Judging from their remaining burial grounds and monuments, the Kazylgans, who could be found throughout the area stretching from the edge of the Altai Mountains to the forests of the Sayan, were engaged in pastoralism in the west and hunting and fishing in the east. With the advent of the Hun conquest in the second century BC, however, the Kazylgans were displaced on the Tuvan steppe by other Hun-like pastoral tribes who dominated the area until the early centuries of the first millennium AD. ([1972] 1980: 39-45)

Though little is known concerning the inhabitants of the mountain-taiga area of the Sayan region at this time, the most widely accepted view is that they were of Samoyedic and Kettic linguistic affiliations.²⁷ Previously known in literature as Yenisei Ostyaks, the only group of Kets who have retained their language is located along the middle reaches of the Yenisei. The Samoyedic language is currently spoken among the Nenets, Nganasans, Enets, and Selkups, all of whom engage mainly in reindeer herding, hunting and fishing in

²⁵ For materials on other groups of the Tuvan diaspora in Xinjiang, Bayan Ölgii, Uvs, Khovd, Khövsgöl, see Diószegi (1962), Mongush (1996), and Zolbayar (1996).

²⁶ For discussions on the ethnogenesis of the Tuvans, see Mänchen-Helfen ([1931] 1992: 164-183), Potapov ([1956] 1964: 380), and Vainshtein ([1972] 1980: 39-43).

the polar region from northeastern Europe to the eastern side of the Yenisei delta.²⁸ While Samoyedic languages fall under the Uralic linguistic family, ironically the ancient homeland of the original Samoyeds is considered to be the Sayan Mountains. Finding Samoyedic-speaking clans among the Kamas, Koibal, and Tofalar, two early explorers, J. G. Georgi (1775) and P. S. Pallas (1776), asserted that the Samoyeds originated in the Sayan and were mostly driven north. Along with a few Ket tribes, a remnant in the Sayan Mountains gradually adopted the languages of neighboring Turkic groups and became the ancestors of hunting and reindeer-herding clans found among the Tofalar and Kamas. The well-known linguist M. A. Castrén further supported this theory a century later with his claim that certain clans of Eastern Tuvans were of Samoyedic descent ([1856] 1969: 359-361).

During the reign of the Turks over Inner Asia from 551 to 744 AD, the steppe region of present-day Tuva was predominantly occupied by ancient Turkic tribes, some of which integrated with the taiga-dwellers of the Eastern Sayan. Chinese sources note that during the seventh century the Eastern Sayan region became populated by tribes of Dubo, from which the ethnonyms Tuba and Tuva originate (Potapov [1956] 1964: 382). Due to struggles within the Turk Empire, the Uigurs gained a brief period of sovereignty over much of Inner Asia from the mid-eighth century to the early part of the ninth. According to Vainshtein, the Turkic-speaking Tuba were most likely connected to these Uigurs, of whom a segment remained in the area and integrated into the local populace ([1972] 1980: 40-42). Today, only four ethnic-Tuvan groups reportedly claim to be Uigur-speaking or of

²⁷ On the etymology of the term Samoyed, or Samodi, see Prokofyeva ([1956] 1964: 547). Ket is a unique Paleo-Asiatic language apparently unrelated to any other.

²⁸ For descriptions of the Nenets, Nganasans, Enets, Selkups and Kets, see Levin and Potapov ([1956] 1964). For a good source on recent historical, linguistic and census data on these and other minority ethnic groups in Siberia, see Kolga, et al (1993).

Uigur descent. Of these four groups, two are in Tuva—one in the west near Sut Khöl and the other in the southeast near Tere Khöl (Vainshtein [1972] 1980: 41, 190). The other two “Uigur” groups are found in Mongolia—the reindeer-herding Dukha in the area northwest of Lake Khövsgöl (Badamkhatan 1960: 30, 1962: 3, 1996: 270) and the so-called Üürin-Uriankhai located east of Lake Khövsgöl²⁹ (Badamkhatan 1965: 23; Čeveng [1934] 1991: 73-74; Diószegi 1961: 199). Given the Dukha’s view of themselves as “Uigur-speaking” people, the Uigurs of the eighth and ninth centuries may possibly be responsible for initiating the turkicization of the Dukha’s Samoyedic- and Ketic-speaking ancestors.³⁰

Adding to the Turkic component of the Eastern Sayan’s indigenous population, the Kyrgyz conquered the area extending from the Altai Mountains to Lake Baikal, displacing the Uigurs in the first half of the ninth century. These so-called Yenisei Kyrgyz maintained a dominant presence in the region to the end of the twelfth century. According to Vainshtein, groups of Tuvans still retaining the ethnonym Kyrgyz inhabit the southeastern part of present-day Tuva in the area of Tere Khöl ([1972] 1980: 41). Presently, large stone-pile burials remain scattered throughout the steppe region of Tsagaannuur, Rinchinlümbe, and Ulaan-Uul sums of Khövsgöl aimag in Mongolia as reminders of Kyrgyz presence in the Sayan and Cis-Khövsgöl region (Badamkhatan 1965: 17).

Then, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, the land of Tuva and the Sayan region would experience perhaps its greatest impact with the advent of the Mongol conquest. Citing excerpts from *The Secret History of the Mongols* and the accounts of Rashid

²⁹ Still calling themselves Üürin-Uriankhai, these Tuvans now inhabit parts of present-day Tsagaan Üür and Chandman-Öndör sums.

³⁰ It is difficult to know for certain the degree to which the Dukha actually see themselves as “Uigur-speaking *Dukha* (*Tuva*) of Uigur descent” (Badamkhatan 1962: 3) since very few Dukha maintained this claim during my fieldwork in 1999. In fact, one older Dukha informant, who served as a guide for both B. Rinchen and Badamkhatan during the 1960s, stated that “Uigur” was a term that the Darkhad inaccurately applied to the Dukha.

al-Din, Badamkhatan concisely summarizes the events which led to the Mongol occupation of the area west of Khövsgöl Lake, which he refers to as the Darkhad territory.³¹ At the beginning of the thirteenth century, Temujin, as he was known before receiving the title Chinggis Khan, conquered his childhood friend-turned-enemy Jamukha and his forces, which included tribes such as the Tatar, Tayichi'ud, Khatagin, Salji'ud, Khonggirad, Merkid³² and Oirat.³³ After losing in battle as part of Jamukha's confederation, the Oirat prince Khudukha Beki fled northwest to occupy the Shishgit River valley. Then by invitation of Khudukha Beki in 1207, Chinggis Khan's oldest son Jochi advanced with Mongol troops into present-day Tuva through the Shishgit River valley. By taking over the Oirat, Buryat, Bargu, Urusud, Khabkhanas, Khankhas and Tuba tribes, the Mongols had secured dominion over the Kyrgyz, including their Samoyedic- and Kettic-speaking subjects in the taiga (Badamkhatan 1965: 19-21; cf. Potapov [1956] 1964: 382-383).

After the fall of the Yuan Dynasty in 1368, the Mongols disbanded and returned to their competing tribal factions, which were divided mostly into Khalkha khanates in the east and Oirat tribes in the west. From the late 1300s, the area of Tuva and northern Khövsgöl fell under Oirat rule until the late 1500s when the region was seized by Sholoi Ubashi, who titled himself "Altan Khan"³⁴ (Bawden 1989: 49-50). The reign of Sholoi

³¹ Badamkhatan's "*darkhad nutag*," or "Darkhad territory," indicates the area of Bayanzürkh, Ulaan-Uul, Tsagaannuur and Rinchinlümbe sums of present-day Khövsgöl aimag. This term is used in contrast to "*darkhad khyazgaar*," i.e. the "Darkhad Borderland," which he uses in reference to the area as an administrative region when its inhabitants were the subjects of the Jabdzandamba Khutugtu.

³² In reference to the Merkid in the "Plain of Bargu," Marco Polo wrote "The people *who dwell there* are called Mecrit and are *very* wild people, *and for the most part* they live on animals *which they take in the chase*, and the most are deer *which are very large*, of which they have many. And *what is more* I tell you that they *domesticate and ride the deer by way of horses, they are so large*" (Polo 1938: 177, emphasis in the original). Whitaker (1980) asserted that Polo's mention of these "Mecrit" was an early reference to the ancestors of Tuvan reindeer herders, but doubting his assumption he later rejected this theory (1981: 338).

³³ One popular speculation is that the Oirats were also originally a forest people who were called the "*Oin arat*" (Mon. "people of the forest").

³⁴ Note that the Altan Khan Sholoi Ubashi should not be confused with the earlier Altan Khan of the Tümet.

Ubashi's khanate continued throughout most of the seventeenth century under his successors, who also bore the title of Altan Khan.

Like most of Inner Asia at this time, the Sayan region felt the increasing pressures of colonialism with the encroachment of Russians to the north and Manchus to the south. Although the Altan Khans claimed suzerainty over the area, political instability was the reality as remnant forces of the Kyrgyz, Oirat and Khalkha continued to skirmish over the fealty of the indigenous population (Forsyth 1992: 94-95). In 1616, Sholoi Ubashi became the first among the Khalkha Khans to establish relations with the Russians in an effort to offset the increasing dominance of the Manchu-Chinese in trade relations and to gain assistance in combating the Oirats. After Sholoi Ubashi's death in 1620, his son Ombo Erdene became the second Altan Khan, and according to the precedent set by his father, he continued to foster relations with the Russians. In order to continue fighting off the Oirats, Ombo Erdene also made an alliance with his Khalkha and Kazakh neighbors. As the Oirats consolidated under the Jungar confederation, Ombo Erdene went as far as to swear allegiance, at least temporarily, to the Tsar in 1634 or 1635. (Bawden [1968] 1989: 49-50; Forsyth 1992: 126)

The Russians took the Altan Khan's pledge seriously and began to infiltrate the Altai-Sayan region heavily by establishing posts for collecting tribute from the native inhabitants. By 1628, the Russians had built the Krasnoyarsk fort, which quickly became the center of the Krasnoyarsk Uyezd, an administrative region which, according to Russian sources, included "the Turkic-speaking Khasut Tuvans (near Lake Kosogol)" (Potapov [1956] 1964: 112). While the Krasnoyarsk Cossacks had gained access to northwest Mongolia via the Upper Yenisei valley from the early 1600s, Forsyth explains that the Russians' seizure of the

Angara region also facilitated their entrance into “Uriyangkhai” land from the east. He

notes:

In 1661, for instance, Russians under Yakov Pokhabov, led by Tungus guides, went up the Irkut valley and crossed the Great Sayan range to Lake Hovsgol (Khubsu-gul). Here they encountered people of Tuva, forced them to submit to *yasak* and abducted one of their princes as a hostage. (1992: 95)

Hence, the Russians, along with the Altan Khanate and Oirats, became the third group to demand tribute from the inhabitants of the Sayan region.

These Russian sources provide the first known ethnographic data concerning the populace in the Khövsgöl region south of the Eastern Sayan. The fact that these people are noted as both Tuvan and Turkic-speaking seems to indicate that they were already an ethnically integrated whole. Yet, the various surviving clans found among the Dukha today reveal the broader cultural diversity involved in the composition of Dukha, or Tuvan, ethnicity. In contrast to many other groups in Mongolia and Tuva, the Dukha have preserved their clan system and various aspects of its functionality remarkably well.³⁵ The clans presently existing among the Dukha are the Soyan, Balygsh, Urud, Zoot, Salchak, and Dodot.³⁶ Most of the Dukha population are Soyan, Balygsh or Urud, while only a few remaining households represent the latter three clans. As detailed below, all of these clans

³⁵ See chapter three for more details on Dukha social organization.

³⁶ The six clans that I have noted here were represented by the numerous Dukha informants with whom I met during three fieldwork trips. Based on his fieldwork among the “Darkhad and *tsaatan*” during the summer of 1959, Badamkhatai claimed that there were eleven *tsaatan* clans: “Categorizing the people which we recorded (excluding the young and deceased) by clan name, 48 people are divided into 11 clans (Khuular-5, Urud-3, Sors-1, Dargalar-2, Kashtag-2, Balygsh-13, Demjee-1, Dodot-2, Soyan-7, Zoot (Jogd)-6, Kher deg-6)” (1960: 33). In a later article, however, he wrote that these eleven occupied the “Uriankhai Uigur of Toj sum,” instead of referring to them as *tsaatan*. Evaluating a list, which he provides later in the same article, with the names (28) and clans (6) of virtually every household head in the taiga, renders a clearer representation of the existing Dukha clans: Soyan-4, Balygsh-11, Urud-8, Zoot-1, Salchak-1 and Kyshtag-2. (1996: 271, 290-291) It should be mentioned that the same informants that he records as Kyshtag, also claimed to be Khuular to Otto Farkas (personal communication) and Urud to myself.

are also found among the Eastern Tuvans,³⁷ and to some extent, among the Tofalar as well.

Soyan

As one of the most prominent Tuvan clans, the Soyan clan name can be found among ethnic Tuvans from Buryatia (Diószegi 1962: 145) to Xinjiang (Mongush 1996: 121). Although the specifics of their ethnic origins are unknown, the Soyan probably did not arise from a single ethnic group, but are most likely a conglomeration of ancient Samoyedic, Kettic, Turkic and Mongolic peoples. One cannot help but notice the obvious similarity between the name of the Soyan clan and the Sayan Mountains, which would correspond with the link often found in Inner Asia between clan ancestry and mountains (cf. Pedersen, n.d.; Humphrey 1980: 256, n. 9; Vainshtein [1972] 1980: 238). Unfortunately, available sources fail to offer any insight to this similarity.

Balygsh

Unlike the Soyan, the Balygsh are localized to the regions of eastern Tuva and northwest Khövsgöl. As do many ethnonyms, the term Balygsh indicates that the people were engaged in a specific vocation, which in this case is fishing, since Balygsh means “fisher.” According to Vainshtein, the Balygsh “are descendants of the ancient people of the Uigur stronghold Por-Bajin on Lake Tere-Khol” in eastern Tuva ([1972] 1980: 190). Diószegi also notes that he found Balygsh households along the “Little Yenisey” River, i.e. the Kaa River (1961: 200). Vainshtein further suggests that the Balygsh “hardly migrated at all” since fishing at Tere Khöl Lake was their chief occupation combined with hunting,

³⁷ Vainshtein provides a list of “some of the principal clans” of the Eastern Tuvans: “Maad, Kezek-Maad, Khaazut, Soyan, Kara-Soyan, Saryg-Soyan, Chogdu, Choodu, Todut, Al-Todut, Kara-Todut, Kuular, Kezek-Kuular, Dargalar, Khoiyuk” ([1972] 1980: 257, n. 10).

gathering and limited amount of herding ([1972] 1980: 190). Though this may have been true for their ancestors, the Balygsh among the Dukha currently associate more with the *tsaatan* vocation.

Urud & Salchak

The Urud and Salchak clans represent the Mongolic element of Tuvan ethnicity (Vainshtein [1972] 1980: 43; Badamkhatan 1960: 33). Although the Salchak are located in various regions in Tuva, the Urud are exclusive to eastern Tuva and northwest Khövsgöl. Urud is also a clan name used during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries by Mongol groups along the Onon and Kherelen Rivers, as well as in present-day Inner Mongolia (Badamkhatan 1965: 64). Considering that the word is Mongolian for “south,” Dukha oral history naturally claims the Urud came to the area long ago from a distant land in the south (Badamkhatan 1960: 34). As of late, most Urud among the Dukha have settled for various reasons in Tsagaannuur sum center. The Dukha’s last remaining Salchak, on the other hand, is a female shaman who has lived in the taiga from the day she was born in 1906!

Dodot

The Dodot clan, which are referred to as the Todut or Todu (Badamkhatan 1960: 35) in the literature on the Eastern Tuvans, represent the last remaining descendants of the ancient Kets included in the list of Dukha clans (Vainshtein [1972] 1980: 43). Very few Dodot can be found among the Dukha at present, and as Vainshtein points out, the Todut in Tuva “are known only among the Todja population” ([1972] 1980: 43).

Zoot

Those of the Zoot clan, or Choodu as they are known throughout eastern Tuva, are considered by consensus to be the descendants of the Sayan region's ancient Samoyedic population (Badamkhatan 1996: 272; Vainshtein [1972] 1980: 43). Badamkhatan notes that the ethnonym of this clan comes in many variations. He provides a list of other variations of the ethnonym, such as Chogdu, Chota, Cheda, Djokdy, etc. (1965: 75). Diószegi also notes that he not only met Dukha of the Ak Choota clan in Rinchinlhümbe sum, but also of the Saryg Chogdu clan in Ulaan-Uul sum in Khövsgöl during the summer of 1960. Like Badamkhatan, Diószegi believes that both the Choota and Chogdu are synonymous with the Zoot (1962: 144); however, Vainshtein ([1972] 1980: 257, n.10), as well as one older Dukha informant, listed the Zoot and Chogdu as separate clans. In light of the fact that the consonant /g/ is often dropped in the morphology of Tuvan words, one could conclude that the terms Zoot, Choodu and Chogdu are derivatives of the same name. Considering that the five principal clans of the Tofalar are the Cheptey, Kash, Saryg-Kash, Chogdu and Kara-Chogdu, the Samoyedic substratum connecting the Eastern Tuvans, Dukha and Tofalar becomes all the more evident (Sergeyev [1956] 1964: 479).³⁸

Khaazut

Finally, although further examined in chapter three, brief mention should be made here of the “Turkic-speaking Khasut” or “Kaysot” as noted by Russian sources (Potapov et al. [1956] 1964: 112; Potapov [1956] 1964: 350). While this clan seems to be nonexistent

³⁸ I only encountered one Kara Zoot family, albeit a large one, among the Dukha in the taiga while collecting data for this work during the summer of 1999.

among the reindeer-herding Dukha today, Badamkhatan states during the 1960s that some “Khaasud Uriankhai” were located in Khankh sum north of Lake Khövsgöl, as well as some Darkhad Khaasud in Rinchinlümbe sum (1965: 74). Evidently, the clan remains among the Eastern Tuvans under the name Khaazut (Vainshtein [1972] 1980: 257, n. 10) and among the Tofalars as the Kash and Saryg-Kash (Sergeyev [1956] 1964: 479). As with the Zoot and Chogdu, the Khaazut are believed to be the descendants of the ancient Samoyeds. Presumably, this is indicated by the Samoyedic word *khasava*, or “man,” which is still used by the Yamal Nenets (Prokofyeva [1956] 1964: 547). The Russian ethnographer B. O. Dolgikh asserts that the Khaazut of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were divided into two sections—the Turkic-speaking Khaazut occupying the area near the Shishgit and Kaa Rivers, and the Samoyedic-speaking Khaazut on the Oka and Bela Rivers in present-day Buryatia (1960: 263).

The Samoyedic, Turkic, Mongolic, and Kettic elements found in the Dukha clans reveal the diverse influences upon the formation of the Dukha’s ethnicity. Yet, simply studying the ratio of clan representatives in proportion to the total population of the Dukha does not determine the degree of influence each of these various ethnic components played. Due to the fact that Tuvan kinship and clan affiliation is generally maintained solely through patrilineal descent, as well as other factors, clans which are presently represented by few members could feasibly grow in representation depending on the gender ratio of future generations.

As noted above, accounts of Russian ventures provide evidence that Turkic-speaking, ethnic-Tuvan peoples had already populated the regions east and west of Lake Khövsgöl by the early 1600s. While these seventeenth-century Tuvans can certainly be

considered the ancestors of the Dukha, there is still some question as to how long the present population has considered present-day Khövsgöl their home. Relying on his informants, Diószegi suggests that the Dukha are “no aborigines to the area in question,” and comments that, while some first migrated into the area in the eighteenth century, the others arrived as late as the 1940s (1961: 201). Yet, as with the ethnonym issue, depending on the informant’s knowledge of history in regards to his specific clan and the Dukha as a whole, different informants may give different answers to the question of when they entered into the confines of what is now Mongolia.

Examining place names in the region provides evidence supporting their early arrival, evidence which is perhaps more significant than either the Russian documents or the Dukha’s oral history. While some place names are definitely either of ancient Turkic origin (e.g. Khoridol Sardag Mountains and Lake Khövsgöl³⁹) or of Mongolian origin (e.g. Tengis River, Khogorog River and Orkhon Mountains), an equal or greater number of place names that are specifically Tuvan exist. While Badamkhatan has compiled a list of Turkic and Tuvan place names elsewhere (1965: 78-80), the following table is provided to illustrate the specific Tuvan elements of prominent place names that are well within the confines of present-day Mongolia:

Tuvan Place Names in Northwest Khövsgöl

Names of Rivers		Names of Mountains	
<i>Doshdyg (Khem)</i>	Icy (River)	<i>Güshteg (Dag)</i>	Powerful (Mountain)
<i>Kara Chas</i>	Black Rain	<i>Agaya (Ak-aya)</i>	White Cliff
<i>Saryg Chas</i>	Yellow Rain	<i>Jarui</i>	Beautiful
<i>Sailag</i>	Rocky	<i>Khalbagtag</i>	Spoon
<i>Bagtag</i>	Rope		

³⁹ The word “Khövsgöl” has no meaning in Mongolian, but most likely derives from the Turkic words *Kök Sug Köl*, meaning Blue Water Lake (information from Yoengsiyebu Rinchen transmitted by György Kara, personal communication).

Names of Lakes
Mungarag Khöl Discouragement Lake

Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the various Mongol tribes were increasing their religious and political ties with Tibet. In 1639, the Tüssheet Khan's younger son was chosen by the Khalkha to become their religious head and was commemorated at his inauguration by other Khalkha nobility with donations of vassals that became his clerical serfs, or *shavi* (Mon. "disciple"). In 1649, the young prince-lord was sent to Tibet for a period of study under the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama, where he was deemed the Jabdzandamba Khutugtu, the living Buddha of the Khalkha. After his return, the Jabdzandamba Khutugtu quickly gained religious and political power among the Khalkha tribes to the degree that his administrative office, or *shavi yaamen*, rose economically to a level equal with a Khalkha khanate. The increasing power of the Jabdzandamba Khutugtu created tense relations between the Khalkha and the regent of Tibet, who was an ally of the Jungar leader, Galdan Khan. (Bawden [1968] 1989: 53-69)

Meanwhile, the third and last Altan Khan, Lubsang-Taiji, had become so entangled with Khalkha disputes that he killed the Dzasagt Khan in 1662 while the Russians were penetrating his territory. Immediately, the murdered Dzasagt Khan was succeeded by his brother, but amid the disturbance, some of the nobles belonging to the Dzasagt Khan moved with their subjects to join the newly appointed the Tüssheet Khan, the older brother of the Jabdzandamba Khutugtu. Ignoring the new Dzasagt Khan's request to retrieve his subjects, the Tüssheet Khan welcomed the new immigrants. For reasons unknown, the Tüssheet Khan was compelled to avenge the death of the murdered Dzasagt Khan and pursued Lubsang-Taiji, but he escaped to the Kemchik River in present-day Tuva where he

was subjugated in 1667 by the Jungar Confederation. Once again, the area of present-day Tuva had fallen under the rule of the western Mongols. (Bawden [1968] 1989: 63)

Due to the lack of detailed information concerning the area during this period, it is difficult to know exactly which entity, or entities, had actual claim over northern Khövsgöl after the capture of Lubsang-Taiji. It is possible that, in the effort to find an inroad into Khalkha territory, Galdan Khan, the new head of the Jungar, included this region when he handed Lubsang-Taiji over to the Dzasagt Khan (cf. Bawden [1968] 1989: 63). Based on an old Mongolian source, Badamkhatan asserts that the Altan Khan's rule of northern Khövsgöl and its inhabitants were replaced by Genden Sain Khuntaij of the Dzasagt Khanate. Supposedly, Genden Sain Khuntaij later decreed the area to be the Banner of Prince Erdene Dzüregch and assigned at least a section of the inhabitants to his nephew Geleg Noyon Khutugtu as clerical serfs (1965: 24). Sources are not clear, however, on the actual location of this group of inhabitants.

The 1680s, as Bawden ([1968] 1989: 69-71) records, were filled with internal struggles among the Khalkha, mainly between the TüsHEET Khan and Dzasagt Khan, while both the Jungars and Manchus tried strategically to exert their respective influences on the Khalkha in hopes of eventual conquest. In order to strengthen Manchu-Khalkha relations, or perhaps to stabilize a prospective colony, the Manchu-Chinese emperor arranged for the Jabdzandamba Khutugtu and a representative from Tibet to meet at Khüren Bilchir in 1686 with the Khalkha khans and facilitate reconciliation between them. According to Bawden, the assembly was a success. The TüsHEET Khan agreed to return the runaways to the Dzasagt Khan, and they “all embraced in an atmosphere of apparent sweetness and light” ([1968] 1989: 71).

Interestingly, Badamkhatan proposes that, amidst all the serf shuffling at the Khüren Bilchir assembly, Geleg Noyon Khutugtu presented his shavi population to the Jabdzandamba Khutugtu whereby they were bestowed the title “*Darkhad*,” meaning “of special reserved status” (1965: 25). The exact reasoning behind this move is unknown; yet, the transfer does seem understandable given the familial ties of Geleg Noyon Khutag to the Dzasagt Khanate and the Jabdzandamba’s relation to the TüsHEET Khan, not to mention the conducive “atmosphere of apparent sweetness and light” at the assembly. Bawden further notes that while the Jabdzandamba had control over numerous groups of clerical serfs in different regions, the only actual territory under the shavi yaaman administration was that of the Darkhad ([1968] 1989: 69).

Given the fact that this combination of both the shavi and territory of the Jabdzandamba, and even the name Darkhad, is unique to northern Khövsgöl, one must wonder whether this “*darkhad*-ness,” i.e. special status, was ascribed to the place, the populace or both. Also, since the title Darkhad is in the plural form of Mongolian which is generally used for people, as opposed to the singular, e.g. *darkhan gazar*, applied to land, the term itself suggests that this reserved status applied to the population rather than to the land. According to Badamkhatan, this unique combination came about because all other clerical serfs who were donated to the Jabdzandamba yet located elsewhere already had rights to rangelands before they became his subjects (1965: 26).⁴⁰ Correspondingly, Badamkhatan’s assertion would suggest the clerical serfs offered by Geleg Noyon Khutugtu had no rights to a specific territory and hence were either relocated or granted permission to settle in a new region which may or may not have been previously occupied. On the

other hand, it is possible that perhaps Geleg Noyon Khutugtu's gift was simply both the territory and its autochthonous population.

When exploring the relationship between the ethnic identity of the Dukha and the region in which they reside, it is crucial to understand that the term *darkhad* does not necessarily apply to the territory, but may possibly apply to the populace, as discussed earlier. Unfortunately, Badamkhatan makes the assumption that this donation to the Jabdzandamba was a gift of territory rather than of population.⁴¹ While he does acknowledge that the area of northern Khövsgöl was “indisputably” under Uriankhai tribes prior to the Khüren Bilchir assembly (1965: 61), he generally seems to write as if the whole region west of Lake Khövsgöl and within the confines of present-day Mongolia (i.e. the area of Bayanzürkh, Ulaan-Uul, Tsagaannuur, and Rinchinlhümbe sums) were offered to him as well (1965: 25-34). This would mean that the inhabitants of the area, i.e. the ethnic Tuvans, would have also been included in the offering to the Jabdzandamba. Granted, there are Tuvan elements in the ethnic composition of the Darkhad, but only five out of Badamkhatan's list of twenty-six existing Darkhad clans (1965: 113-114) could be considered Tuvan, while the rest are either of Mongol, Turkic or unknown origin. Similar to his analysis of reindeer herding, Badamkhatan over-emphasizes the “Uriankhai” element in Darkhad ethnogenesis in order to legitimize both his tendency of applying the term “Darkhad territory” to the said region and his inclination towards writing about the *tsaatan* instead of the Dukha. As if he were unaware of the fact that northern Khövsgöl was known administratively as Lake Khövsgöl Uriankhai Borderland (see next chapter),

⁴⁰ Bawden also notes that land and shavi were generally not intrinsically connected, or in other words, shavi-ness was usually about people and livestock not land, and thus could be relocated if desired ([1968] 1989: 14).

Badamkhatan rarely uses the titles of Uriankhai Region or Uriankhai Territory in his writings.

With the limited sources available, it is impossible to know exactly to which ethnic group the Darkhad belonged before becoming *darkhad*; nor are the details defining the specific boundaries of the given area known. Regardless of their ethnic origins, it should suffice to say that the population that inhabited the mountain-steppe region became the Darkhad in 1686. In any case, at least a portion of both the people and territory would ultimately become “reserved” for the Jabdzandamba as a result of the Khüren Bilchir assembly. Yet, this was not the most historically significant outcome of the assembly.

The Khüren Bilchir assembly and the reconciliation of the Khalkha was not such a success in the opinion of Galdan Khan of the Jungar. According to Bawden, the behavior of the Jabdzandamba toward the Tibetan representative apparently was considered inappropriate by Galdan, who took the occasion as a pretext for invading the Khalkha.

Bawden explains:

He [Galdan] claimed that the fact that the Khutuktu had been seated on a throne similar to that of the Dalai Lama’s representative and had maintained an unfriendly disposition towards him was an expression of disrespect towards the Dalai Lama himself. ([1968] 1989: 74)

As a result, Galdan Khan eventually launched an attack of such force that by 1688 the Jungars had all but displaced the Khalkha nobility, including the Jabdzandamba. Discussing their options in retrieving their land, the deposed Khalkha rulers convened in Inner Mongolia and made a decision that would change the course of Mongolian history. Unable to overthrow the Jungars alone, and uninterested in assistance from Russia, the

⁴¹ Since the question of Darkhad ethnogenesis has been thoroughly discussed by Badamkhatan elsewhere, it will not be dealt with in length here (1965: 57-80).

Khalkha essentially invited the Manchu emperor to accept them into the empire and support their struggle against the Jungars. Their request was granted, and for the next two and a half centuries, the land of Mongolia became a Manchu-Chinese colony. (Bawden [1968] 1989: 76-77)

Chapter 3

THE URIANKHAI

Conditions Under the Manchu Empire, 1688-1911

Once the doors were opened to the Manchu-Chinese in 1688, the Manchus established an administrative system that would keep the region under domination throughout the Manchu (Qing) era until 1911. Unfortunately, many of the vital documents that relate to northern Khövsgöl under Manchu rule were destroyed in 1912.¹ Thus, apart from a piecemeal of written sources and the Dukha's surviving oral traditions, many details of Dukha history in relation to this period remain a mystery.

After the Darkhad became the clerical serfs of the Jabdzandamba Khutugtu in 1686, Badamkhatan speculates that Mongolian peoples from various regions continued to join the Darkhad population as the Buddhist influence of the Jabdzandamba expanded. The annual migration of the Darkhad covered a distance upwards of two to three hundred kilometers from the Agar and Beltes Rivers in the south to the Shishgit River valley in the north. The original "Uriankhai" clans, however, continued to occupy the western edge of present-day Tsagaannuur and Ulaan-Uul sums under the supervision of Prince Erdene Dүүregch, with part of the population herding reindeer and the other herding steppe-bound livestock. Thus, according to Badamkhatan, the general area used by the Darkhad would be situated between Lake Khövsgöl on the east and the territory occupied by the Dukha to the west.

¹ In 1999, I was told by officials at the state archives in Ulaanbaatar that very few documents have survived from the Manchu administrative offices of Khovd and Uliastai (Ishdorj, personal communication).

Inevitably, “acute conflicts” arose between the two groups over water and pasture. (Badamkhatan 1965: 25-26)

Although Badamkhatan assumes that Manchu rule over the entire area of northern Khövsgöl began with the Jabdzandamba’s pledge of allegiance to the emperor in 1688, available sources are simply not clear which party retained power over the region. Considering the ensuing events, however, the area of northern Khövsgöl, outside the perimeters of the Darkhad’s pastures, most likely remained under the rule of the Jungars.

In 1727, the two great colonial powers of Russia and Manchu-ruled China came together in agreement under the Kiakhta Treaty which was to settle, among other things, the border issues between them. Given that present-day Tuva was to become enveloped into the Manchu Empire in the mid-1700s, the generally accepted view of the 1727 Kiakhta Treaty is that Russia and China had decided the whole region of the Upper Yenisei basin south of the Sayan range would belong to the Manchu Empire (cf. Forsyth 1992: 95). The Austrian ethnographer Mänchen-Helfen, who was one of the only Westerners to visit Tuva during the 1920s, points out, however, that the agreement specified that all disputed areas would be divided by watersheds. If a watershed emptied into a river that flowed north, it was declared Russian territory, and if south, it went to the Manchu Empire ([1931] 1992: 189). Hence, according to the Kiakhta Treaty, the whole of the Upper Yenisei Basin, including the northwest area of present-day Khövsgöl aimag, or the Darkhad region, should have become Russian soil and not Chinese.

For the next thirty-eight years after the treaty was signed in 1727, Bawden reports that the Manchus established watch-posts along the northern border in order to safeguard their new frontier from Russian encroachment and to hinder Russo-Mongol relations. Interestingly, the string of watch-posts stretching westward to the Altai Mountains marked

the northern border south of Lake Khövsgöl and Tuva (Bawden [1968] 1989: 103).² At the same time, Mänchen-Helfen recounts that the Russians maintained their border posts along the Sayan Range, which left the entire area of present-day Tuva and northern Mongolia outside the realm of both Russian and Manchu territory. Mänchen-Helfen explains this blunder by stating that “because they had no maps, the Russians were ignorant” of their own borders ([1931] 1992: 189). Granted, Tsarist Russia’s failure to seize a claimed territory is remarkable, yet the area was probably not a “no-man’s land” that was free of domination as Mänchen-Helfen proposes. On the contrary, the Jungars maintained control over present-day Tuva and probably northern Khövsgöl until they were finally displaced in 1757 by the Manchus.³ Perhaps most remarkable is that the Russians allowed the Manchus to take control of Tuva and Khövsgöl once the Jungars were toppled. As fate would have it, the border was drawn along the Sayan Ridge, dividing the Tofalar from the Eastern Tuvans, to whom they had been akin for centuries past (Potapov [1956] 1964: 384).

Once in power, the Manchus began to organize the Tuvan population, including the Dukha, into military-administrative units which were based on the “the former princedoms of Mongolia and Tuva” (Potapov [1956] 1964: 384).⁴ Vainshtein describes the administrative structure of Tuva as being arranged into administrative divisions and sub-

² Badamkhatan notes that after the watch-posts were established, a law was pronounced which allowed the Darkhad to enter Manchu-Khalkha territory only through the Beltes watch-post with written permission. He further claims that because the Darkhad and Khalkha guards came into conflict over various pasture and livestock issues, the Darkhad were not given due access to other Mongolian tribes. Badamkhatan proposes that this isolation resulted in the Darkhad becoming the most culturally and linguistically backward of all other ethnic groups at the beginning of the twentieth century. (1965: 26-27)

³ Since Bawden has already provided an interesting, in-depth description of the Jungar’s demise in present-day Tuva and northwest Mongolia ([1968] 1989: 110-124), the topic will not be dealt with here.

⁴ Vainshtein ([1972] 1980: 233-248) and Potapov ([1956] 1964: 384-389) deal with the subjects of administrative structure and social relations among the Tuvans during the Qing period. The topic will be discussed here only as pertains to the Dukha.

divisions which were, from largest to smallest, the *khoshuu*, *sum*, and *arban*⁵ ([1972] 1980: 234). Although all Tuvans were connected to a *khoshuu* and *sum*, according to Vainshtein, “this attachment was not to a particular territory or pasture area, but to an administrative unit and its members” ([1972] 1980: 237). Assessing cartographic materials on the Mongol region during the Qing period, the accuracy of Vainshtein’s statement is supported by the fact that no internal borders are defined (Sanjdorj 1980: xviii-xix). As for the region of present-day Khövsgöl, however, the Manchus, who were regulating internal boundaries in the mid-nineteenth century, gave the area the name “Lake Khövsgöl Uriankhai Borderland” (Bawden [1968] 1989: 88; Sanjdorj 1980: xviii-xix). With its western, northern and eastern borders situated roughly the same as they are today, the southern border of the Lake Khövsgöl Uriankhai Borderland extended east and west just below the southern shore of Lake Khövsgöl. While the northern and eastern edge of the border was the international frontier between Manchu and Russian territories, the western and southern borders functioned similar to present-day aimag boundaries.

The Lake Khövsgöl Uriankhai Borderland was arranged into three separate territorial jurisdictions—the “Ar Shirkhten Uriankhai” in the west, the “Darkhad Borderland” west of Lake Khövsgöl, and the “Lake Khövsgöl Uriankhai” east of the lake. The Ar Shirkhten Uriankhai region covered the area of the Ulaan Taiga Mountain complex with its eastern border stretching from the Tengis River pass in the northeast to the Delger and Beltes Rivers in the south (Čeveng [1934] 1991: 62; Sanjdorj 1980: xviii-xix). This region was the homeland of the Qing-era Dukha, or the “Ar Shirkhten Uriankhai”; however, it may not have included their traditional hunting grounds and rangelands. As Bawden points out, the

⁵ These three administrative terms are Mongolian words meaning “banner,” “arrow,” and “ten,” respectively.

migrations of the various tribes during this period were not all strictly limited to defined spaces ([1968] 1989: 88-89).⁶

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the area of present-day Tuva became a sort of aimag of Manchu-ruled Mongolia known as “Uriankhai,” but administratively it was fragmented. Tuva had been divided into nine *khoshuu* —Shalyk, Nibazy, Da-vana, Beezi, Khemchik, Oyun, Salchak, Toja, and Khaazut (Vainshtein [1972] 1980: 234; Potapov [1956] 1964: 384). Each *khoshuu* was divided into several *sums* that were further divided into *arban*. Although the organization from the *khoshuu* down to the *arban* was fairly uniform throughout Tuva, the leadership channels kept it from becoming a united whole. Vainshtein explains:

The *khoshuns* Todja, Salchak, Oyun, and Khemchik were governed by hereditary Tuvian rulers who were known as *daa-noions* or *ukberida*. These were in turn subordinate to the highest Tuvian official, the *ambyn-noion*, who was also a hereditary governor of *khoshun* Oyun. The *khoshuns* Beezi, Da-vana, Shalyk, and Nibazy belonged to Mongolian princes who lived in Mongolia, and were governed by officials who were sent by them to Tuva. ([1972] 1980: 234)

Thus, out of the nine *khoshuu*, four were under the rule of Mongolian nobility, while another four were governed by Tuvan *daa-noyons* or *ukberida*⁷ under the *ambyn-noyon*, which ultimately answered to the Manchu-Chinese governor-general in Uliastai.

For reasons he fails to mention, Vainshtein notes that the ninth *khoshuu*, Khaazut, fell under the direct control of the governor-general in Uliastai in 1787, only thirty years after the Manchus took over Tuva ([1972] 1980: 235). Vainshtein states that the Khaazut *khoshuu* “included people from Tuva whose migrations were concentrated mainly in the region of Lake Khövsgöl, now a part of the Mongolian People’s Republic, and in the

⁶ Pedersen shows that this attitude of boundless space still permeates the nomadic culture of the present-day Dukha (Pedersen n.d.).

⁷ Most administrative titles used during this period were various forms of Manchu terms with Mongol and Chinese elements that were “Tuvanized.”

vicinity of the river Shishkit to the west” ([1972] 1980: 255, n. 2). The Khaazut khoshuu, based on Vainshtein’s description, would have certainly included both the Ar Shirkhten Uriankhai, i.e. the Dukha, and the Lake Khövsgöl Uriankhai. During recent interviews, however, none of the older Dukha informants mentioned any connection to the Khaazut clan, let alone the Khaazut khoshuu. In fact, those who seemed knowledgeable on the subject claimed that the Dukha clans were either a part of the Toja khoshuu or the “Prince’s” khoshuu during the Qing Dynasty’s rule. Badamkhatan, who makes no mention of a Khaazut khoshuu, states clearly that the Tuvans, who were occupied with hunting and reindeer herding to the west of the Darkhad, paid fur-tribute to Prince Erdene Dūüregch (1965: 57).⁸ Unfortunately, Badamkhatan makes no attempt to explain any further details relating to Prince Erdene Dūüregch. It may be possible that both the prince mentioned by Dukha informants and Badamkhatan’s Prince Erdene Dūüregch, and his successors, were holding the same position, which may, or may not, have been the prince in control of the Khaazut khoshuu. The sources currently available, however, are simply not clear on the issue of the Khaazut khoshuu, nor on its connection to the Ar Shirkhten Uriankhai Borderland. Apparently, questions regarding the Khaazut khoshuu had no more answers just twenty years after the fall of the Manchu Empire than now. As Čeveng states, “there have been no investigators at all who have gone to the area of the Uriyangqai of the Qasud Banner, and (consequently) there is no way one can say anything about their population figures, and their customs and living conditions” ([1934] 1991: 74).

Čeveng himself provides a few more pieces of information on the Khaazut khoshuu, but they add more confusion than insight to the problem. The difficulty in understanding

⁸ Both Badamkhatan and the older Dukha informants used the word *nan* to denote the rank of prince.

his description is because he notes the members of the Khaazut khoshuu as being located on the eastern side of Lake Khövsgöl, yet he continues to describe other groups, such as the “Northern Sirkid” (Ar Shirkhten), the “Southern Sirkid” (Övör Shirkhten), “Köbsögöl Uriyangqai” and the “Soyod Uriyangqai,” as if they were all under the same administrative area, namely the Khaazut khoshuu ([1934] 1991: 74). Thus, the Khaazut khoshuu was either the administrative region of the Tuvans on the eastern side of Lake Khövsgöl alone or the administrative region of all Tuvans in the Lake Khövsgöl Uriankhai Borderland, which would exclude the Darkhad. It seems most probable that the Khaazut khoshuu was actually the administrative unit of the Lake Khövsgöl “Uriankhai,” who occupied the area on the eastern side of the lake, and not the Dukha in the Ar Shirkhten region.

According to numerous older informants, the clan and patriclan structure played an important role in Dukha social organization and administration right into the twentieth century. Although they were not identical systems, the administrative structure of the khoshuu, sum and arban closely correlated with the clan, or *söök*⁹, affiliation among the Dukha (cf. Vainshtein [1972] 1980: 238). Vainshtein notes that each khoshuu had an administrator called a *chalan* who was not necessarily the same *söök* of the various members within the sums and arbans ([1972] 1980: 235). According to several older informants, however, this connection between the administration and clan structure among the Dukha was more closely bound. For example, each of the major Dukha clan groups had a *chalan*, or *zalan* in the Dukha dialect, which was of the same *söök* as those under his

⁹ *Söök* is a Turkic derivative meaning “bone”, and equivalent of Mon. *yas* “bone; clan”.

administration. Today the Dukha even remember each clan's zalan from the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century by name.¹⁰

Also of importance was the existence of territories which were the particular migration and hunting grounds that were used by—or belonged to, in the case of the latter—specific patriclans of the Dukha. The traditional migration territory according to their patriclans were as follows:

Bilem River and Tengis River and Surrounding Region

Urud
Ak Soyan
Saryg Soyan
Gotai Balygsh

Bus River and Ulaan Taiga Region

Ork Soyan
Gisek Soyan
Dodot
Kara Zoot

Bus River, Shishgit River and Üsh Beldir Region

Atyg Balygsh

If the Khaazut khoshuu did not include them administratively, it seems that most of the Dukha found north of the Shishgit River may have been connected to the Toja khoshuu, while those to the south in the Ulaan Taiga area were probably connected to the Salchak khoshuu.¹¹

Apparently, the tense situation between the Dukha and Darkhad had stabilized by the mid-1800s as economic relations grew and intermarriage began to occur. One such case of Dukha and Darkhad intermarriage was that of Pagmish zalan who married a Darkhad woman and had nine children, of whom most of the present-day Dukha's Balygsh

¹⁰ These were Bileg of the Soyan, Lubsan of the Urud, and Pagmish (or Khangmish) of the Balygsh.

¹¹ The Toja khoshuu covered most of northeast Tuva, while the Salchak khoshuu, according to Vainshtein, "comprised the people migrating in the Kaa-Khem river basin, along the rivers Naryn and Buren 'and also around Lake Tere Khol'" ([1972] 1980: 255, n.2).

are descendants five generations later. Judging from statistical records of the shavi yaaman, which state that 67 out of 120,079 head of livestock were reindeer in 1764, and only 62 of 127,212 in 1821, the reindeer-herding Dukha had not greatly integrated with the Darkhad (Badamkhatan 1965: 27).

One Dukha elder stated that the Dukha and Darkhad trade relations during the Qing period were such that both groups served as intermediary links between other Mongols and Tuvans. The Dukha would hunt during the winter and barter with Darkhads and Buryats in spring by setting up a sort of trade depot of teepees where the taiga meets the steppe. Supposedly, the value of one sable pelt or half a rack of reindeer antlers was enough to procure a horse which would in turn be taken up a well-trod path through the Tengis River pass and sold to the Eastern Tuvans. Because of this type of trade, a fair amount of wealth was to be found among the Dukha at this time. Although no records of their total herd size from the Qing period are available, according to Badamkhatan, generally richer families would have two hundred to three hundred reindeer, a household of average wealth may have twenty to thirty, and the poorest family around two to six (1996: 269). Informants also noted that, due to the prosperity of the time, the early Dukha were quite accustomed to acquiring Chinese goods, tobacco, and various staples such as tea, rice and butter.

Chapter 4

CITIZENS OF THE TAIGA

Reshaping the Lake Khövsgöl Uriankhai Borderland, 1911 to 1955

When Manchu rule came to an end in 1911, the territories of Mongolia and Tuva experienced a decade of political upheaval.¹² At the end of December 1911, the eighth Jabdzandamba Khutugtu was appointed the Holy Emperor of an autonomous theocracy which would encompass all “Mongolian” peoples, including Tuvans, but ironically not Buryats (Ewing 1980: 33). The Mongolist Thomas Ewing notes that in 1912 at least five Tuvan khoshuus declared their desire to be included in this new theocracy (1980: 34). Working from compilations of historical documents written during this period, the Mongolists Urgunge Onon and Derrick Pritchatt report that “Khishigiargal, the chief of Uriankhais, Khövsgöl territory, . . . submitted to the Holy Khaganate” in the same year (1989: 39). Although the notion of an independent Mongolia under the Jabdzandamba invoked the loyalty of Mongol nobility throughout Inner Asia, the idea was not well received by Tsarist Russia, as the Mongols had hoped. While the Russians had maintained the policy that Mongolia should remain an autonomous territory of the Manchu Empire, they had a different approach to Tuva.

According to Mänchen-Helfen, imperialist Russia had determined that when the Manchu-Chinese authorities withdrew from Uliastai, they abandoned their right to the

¹² For detailed accounts of the events that transpired in Mongolia and Tuva from 1911 to 1921, see Ewing (1980), Forsyth (1992: 223-228, 279-282), and Mänchen-Helfen ([1931] 1992: 185-209).

region of present-day Tuva. Claiming that the area had belonged to the Tsars throughout the Altan Khanate, Cossack troops were sent in 1912 to occupy Tuva and suppress any commitment to Mongolia. Then in October 1914, the Russians cashed in on the Kiakhta Treaty of 1727 and declared the Upper Yenisei basin, including northwest Khövsgöl, to be a protectorate of the Tsar (München-Helfen [1931] 1992: 189). Coincidentally, Bawden ([1968] 1989: 14) notes that in the same year of 1914 “a whole banner of the Soyote Uriankhai” (i.e. the Dukha) who, according to Čeveng ([1934] 1991: 74) belonged to Duke Dalhasürüng¹³, became the subjects of the Jabdzandamba and were assigned to the shavi yaaman. Bawden suggests the move was motivated by a desire of these subjects to be alleviated from civil taxation ([1968] 1989: 14). However, given that the transfer of such serfs was generally determined by the nobility over them, it is possible that Duke Dalhasürüng was using the transfer to notify the Tsarist Russians that his subjects belonged to independent Mongolia, and the Dukha actually had nothing to do with the decision.

Shortly after the annexation of Tuva, Russia became preoccupied with World War I. At the same time, China became distracted by the advances of Japan. The chain of events that transpired throughout the ensuing years often affected Mongolia and Tuva in tandem. In 1915, another Kiakhta Treaty was made which left both Tuva and Mongolia as somewhat autonomous territories but under Manchu-Chinese suzerainty. Then with the onset of the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 and up until 1921, the area was alternately occupied by Chinese, White Russians and Red Russians. With the Communists ultimately gaining control in 1921, both Tuva and Mongolia would experience their own Bolshevik revolutions as they fell under Soviet influence.

¹³ This name was transliterated as “Talhasürüng” by Rachewiltz and Krueger.

Since the area of Tuva served as a battlefield during the war between Tsarists and Communists, it was easy for the Russians to maintain their occupancy and control of the area (Forsyth 1992: 280-281). Although efforts were made by Mongols and Tuvans to unite the two regions, the Russians made it clear that, like Mongolia, Tuva was to remain an “independent” satellite of the Soviet Union. Gerard Friters reports that in 1924 the Mongolian government requested the Soviets to address the issue of Tuva via a Russo-Mongolian commission. Though the Russians were unwilling to entirely grant the Mongols’ request to keep Tuva within its borders, they did allow Mongolia to keep a fraction of the territory (1949: 131). According to Friters, “a strip of territory, sparsely inhabited and small in size (about 16,000 sq. km.), called Darkhad—west of Khöbsögöl—was given to Outer Mongolia” (1949: 131).

In the same year, the eighth Jabdzandamba Khutugtu died, and without the Holy Emperor, the new Communist government determined that the shavi yaaman was no longer needed and dissolved its administration in 1925. To establish the region of northwest Khövsgöl under civil rule, the Fourth Party Congress soon issued a resolution to establish Delger-Uul Aimag, which was changed in 1926 to become a khoshuu of Tsetserleg Mandal Aimag¹⁴ with Rinchinlümbe as its center (Badamkhatan 1965: 36). Meanwhile, an agreement modeled after the Soviet-Mongolian Agreement of 1921 was signed in August 1926, by which the People’s Republic of Tannu-Tuva and the Mongolian People’s Republic agreed to recognize each other’s independence (Friters 1949: 131). With Tuva and Mongolia as separate countries, and the region of northwest Khövsgöl the

¹⁴ Present-day Arkhangai

possession of the latter, the question remained of what to do with the Dukha, who were now ethnically Tuvan and geographically Mongolian.

After eliminating the name of the Lake Khövsgöl Uriankhai Borderland, the Mongolian government apparently saw fit to remove the “Uriankhai” people as well. Once the agreement with Tuva was made, the Mongolian government surveyed their new border and began a campaign to expel the Dukha from their homeland. Although no written sources can be found which document the Dukha’s forced relocation, the consistency in personal accounts of virtually every Dukha elder provides evidence that some or all the Dukha were expelled up to five times between 1927 and 1956. Yet, within a few years of each eviction, the Dukha would return to the land of their ancestors—only to be driven out again. The years in which the forced removals occurred have been most consistently quoted as 1927, 1934, 1939, and 1952.¹⁵ Commenting on the motives of the Mongolian government, Farkas explains that the Dukha were first “moved to Tuva in 1927 because, as people of Tuvianian nationality, they were supposed to belong to their own national land” (1992: 6). Similarly, one Dukha elder, who was among those relocated to Tuva in 1934, explains, “they kicked us out because we had reindeer and spoke a different language.”

In 1931, Khövsgöl officially became an aimag, and as Badamkhatan explains, “The Darkhad sums of Rinchinlümbe, Ulaan-Uul and Bayanzürkh were then established in 1931 and 1933” (1965: 37).¹⁶ Listing them from north to south, Rinchinlümbe, Ulaan-Uul and Bayanzürkh sums basically covered the same territory as the former Ar Shirkhten and Darkhad regions. Given that the government was actively in the process of eliminating the

¹⁵ These dates were cited in separate interviews I held during my fieldwork. Farkas records these removals as occurring in the years of 1927, 1934, 1939, and 1951 (1992: 7-8).

¹⁶ In 1931, Rinchinlümbe and Ulaan-Uul sums were first founded, and then in 1933, Ulaan-Uul was separated into two sums with the southern half becoming present-day Bayanzürkh sum.

Dukha's presence from the area altogether, Badamkhatan could not have more clearly described the area west of Lake Khövsgöl than with the words "Darkhad sums" (1965). Although Čeveng reported in 1931 that there were still 848 Dukha in the area ([1934] 1991: 74), according to the Dukha, the government had so thoroughly removed them in 1934 and 1939, that no reindeer-herding households could be found in Mongolia until they began to return in the mid-1940s. Due to these various periods of exile in the 1920s and 1930s, most of the current Dukha elders were born on the Tuvan side of the border and then brought to Mongolia as their parents returned to their traditional migration and hunting grounds.

Despite these hardships, the Dukha, in many aspects, were better off than their affiliates in the Soviet Union, the Tuvans and Tofalar, who were collectivized and sedentarized by the Russians with great haste and force. Forsyth tells of the Tofalar's confusion when, after centuries of paying tributes, their new Soviet overlords refused to accept their furs. Rather than taking furs, the new government confiscated virtually everything the Tofalar owned in order to redistribute their meager assets (1992: 302-303). Forsyth reports that the situation in Tuva during the so-called Cultural Revolution of 1929-1933 "resulted in the collectivisation of three-quarters of the Tuvan population—at the price of much violence" (1992: 356). Although Badamkhatan's description of Rinchinlümbe and Ulaan-Uul sums from the late 1920s to the mid 1940s focuses almost exclusively on the feats of socialism, like the building of schools, hospitals and veterinary clinics (1965: 39-44), the period was also marked by violence as the Mongolian government subjugated its own people with political purges, forced collectivization and suppression of

religion.¹⁷ Apparently, the Dukha's isolation and mobility spared them from a great deal of the bloodshed during this period.

In 1942, the aimag government set up a small fishery on the banks of Tsagaan Nuur, which, according to Badamkhatan, was built in order to employ a “work unit of the indigenous nationality,” for whom a small village was also erected (1965: 38-39). Considering the Dukha were all in Tuva at this time, it can be assumed that he is referring to the Darkhad when writing of “the indigenous nationality.”¹⁸ As the fishery was being built, one Dukha household of the Urud clan, the first to return to the Mongolian taiga, moved back to the Tengis River area where the man was born and raised. For a couple of years, they herded and hunted as Mongolia's sole reindeer herding household. Then two other Dukha families joined them, and eventually many others followed. When the Dukha returned in the mid-1940s, they found that their traditional migration and hunting grounds had been administratively divided so that those who came back from Toja via the north entered Rinchinlümbe sum and those coming in from the Tere Khöl side found themselves in either Ulaan-Uul or Bayanzürkh sums. Although not all of the original Dukha families returned, Farkas points out that “other families, following their relatives, decided to move to Mongolia for the first time” (1992: 6).¹⁹

Although several older informants explained that their parents brought them and their families back from Tuva simply because they missed their homeland, others, especially

¹⁷ Bawden describes the bloody uprisings in Khövsgöl that were led by the Buryat rebel, Chojjn, against the new government ([1968] 1989: 319-320).

¹⁸ Based on interviews with one Dukha man, I reported in my 1999 paper that the fishery was established in 1956 to improve the living conditions of the Dukha (1999: 63). Further investigation revealed, however, that the fishery was actually established in 1942 and was upgraded to brigade status in 1956, the same year in which the Dukha received Mongolian citizenship.

¹⁹ cf. Diószegi (1961: 201) and Wheeler (1999: 61)

those who returned during the mid to late 1940s, gave reports of their parents fleeing the escalating aggression of the Soviets, who were confiscating possessions such as skis and meat, as well as drafting the young men to fight for the Russians in the second World War. Forsyth confirms that Soviet Russia was also forcing Tuvans into supporting the war efforts by making them “hand over 50,000 horses (over one-third of their stock) and tens of thousands of cattle, as well as ‘gifts’ of money, leather, skis, wool and other natural produce” (1992: 355). In addition to the turmoil caused by Russia’s demands on the Tuvans during World War II, Forsyth explains that the Soviet Union secretly annexed Tuva at the “request” of Tuva’s pro-Communist puppet government. Though Moscow did not announce the news until 1948, the People’s Republic of Tannu Tuva was reduced to a mere “autonomous” province of Soviet Russia by 1944. With the first wave of collectivization from 1929-1933 failing to bring the Tuvan population under Soviet control, the Soviets began another wave of brutal collectivization in the late 1940s (1992: 356-357, 373). These aggressions by the Soviets against the Tuvan population perhaps played the greatest role in convincing the rest of the Dukha to return to their homeland in Mongolia.

Chapter 5

THE “TSAATAN”

Integration into Mongolian Society, 1955 to 2000

By the middle of the 1950s, the Dukha had basically all returned to the Mongolian taiga.¹ The economic isolation and changes to their migration routes, which occurred while shuffling back and forth between Tuva and Mongolia from the 1920s to 1950s, took their toll on the Dukha’s reindeer herd size. No longer able to rely on bartering for various staples to enhance their diet, the Dukha had to depend more on sporadic hunting and gathering while away from their own hunting grounds. This, in turn, forced them to cull more of their reindeer. As an indication of their difficult circumstances, Dorjsüren of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences notes that in 1959 approximately only 400 reindeer were dispersed among 200 people (1959: 58). While some poorer households joined those with more reindeer, others had no choice but to move to the villages of Rinchinlümbe or Khankh to work for Darkhad or Buryat families in exchange for food.

Further illustrating the struggles of many of the Dukha during this period, an Urud elder recalls how his family managed to sustain themselves when exiled to Tuva. After their reindeer had diminished completely, his parents took him and his younger brother and began to work for another struggling family of reindeer herders in the Toja region. When he was twelve, his father died. As their economic situation grew

increasingly dire, the hosting family could no longer support him, his mother and brother. So, through several winters in the taiga, where the temperature often drops below negative fifty Fahrenheit, they survived by hunting squirrels on skis. By the time he had turned sixteen, the three of them had joined another group of households and traveled together with them back to Mongolia.

After one final and unsuccessful attempt in 1952 to remove the Dukha, the Mongolian government finally recognized that the Dukha would not permanently leave the Mongolian taiga and in 1955 began to register them as Mongolian citizens.² Unaware of the Dukha's self-designation, the government catalogued them in population records as "Uigur" people and then later as "Uriankhai," instead of "Tuvan" or "Dukha" (Dashdondov 1990: 1). Today, the Dukha, like all Mongolian citizens, carry national identification papers called "citizen passports," which, among other notations, indicate their *ündesten* (Mon. "nationality"). Yet, because "Tuvan" is not recognized as a particular nationality of Mongolia, the Dukha, like other Tuvan ethnic groups in Mongolia, still fall under the category of "Uriankhai" (Farkas 1992: 2). This ignorance of the Dukha's self-designation is compounded by the fact that many Mongolians think that Tuvans in general are simply another Mongolian tribe, as displayed by the Mongolian historian Jamsran, who includes the entire Tuvan population in Russia as a Mongolian group in his book on the Mongols of Russia (1994).

¹ This final chapter covers material similar to that in my 1999 article for the *Mongolian Survey*.

² This last attempt at expatriating the Dukha took place in Rinchinlümbe via the Tengis Pass and involved ten Dukha families who all eventually returned to the area.

After becoming Mongolian citizens, the Dukha had access to the services provided by the state at that time, such as medical care, schooling, employment and veterinary assistance. Yet, as citizens, the Dukha were also obliged to conform to the interests of the nation, which made demands of the new citizens that would inevitably change the future course of the Dukha. For example, virtually all of the young Dukha men in their late teens to early twenties were enlisted into compulsory military “service” for three years, sent to various locations across the MPR. Having received vocational training during their term of service, only a few of the young men who were permitted to return to northern Khövsgöl were allowed to return to reindeer-herding in the taiga since they were now of more use to the government in the sum centers.

Another such demand on the Dukha was the government’s insistence that they submit to national hunting regulations, which defined the Dukha’s age-old hunting rites as poaching during certain periods of the year. In regards to these new constraints, Farkas explains: “Since the ‘hunting law,’ the closed seasons and fair game restrictions affected them, the significance of reindeer breeding became more important in their life. As wild game hunting was limited, it became necessary to raise reindeer for food as well” (1992: 9). According to the veterinarian Dr. Stuart Badger³, a specialist in deer health, the optimal herd size needed to support a single household in the taiga is 150 to 200 head when hunting is limited. This number would allow for the slaughter of up to 10-20 head per year while still maintaining the herd size (cited in Robertson 1999: 8). Dukha households could generally sustain themselves with ten to

³ Dr. Badger visited the Dukha in September 1999 to assess the health of their herds. He submitted a report of his conclusions to the Mongolian Reindeer Fund.

twenty reindeer, but only when hunting could provide meat for food and furs for barter (Wheeler 1999: 62). Yet, with restrictions on their traditional hunting patterns, the foundation of the Dukha's livelihood—the critical balance between hunting and herding—began to deteriorate, and the Dukha were forced to rely too intensely on their dwindling herds.

After the Dukha's incorporation into the MPR, their culture was subjected to significant changes during the government's next wave of collectivization campaigns in the mid-1950s. In the government's haste to construct a socialist state, *negdels* (Mon. “collectives”) were established throughout the country with the aim of organizing the local population to contribute to the national economy (Bawden [1968] 1989: 394-404). In 1956, the Altan Tal (Mon. “Golden Steppe”) *negdel* was established in Rinchinlümbe sum, and Ulaan-Uul sum became the site for the Jargalant Amdral (Mon. “Happy Life”) *negdel* that same year. These *negdels* became the primary institutions through which the government would attempt to modernize and intensify the local agriculture and animal husbandry. In his lengthy review of the beginning years of the two *negdels*, Badamkhatan details the development achieved in both sums. Yet, these achievements focused almost entirely on steppe-based animal husbandry, ignoring the demise of the Dukha's reindeer-herding economy. (Badamkhatan 1965: 39-44)

As noted by several Dukha informants, Mongolians basically considered reindeer as worthless animals that belonged in the wild. According to Mongolian standards, reindeer were simply not *mal* (Mon./Tuv. “livestock”). Whereas Tuvans include reindeer within their list of the “*chedi chüzün mal*” (Tuv. “seven types of

livestock”), Mongolians conceptualize livestock in terms of the “*tavan kboshuu mal*” (Mon. “five kinds of livestock”), i.e. horses, camels, cattle/yak, sheep and goats (cf. Wheeler 1999: 62). The development of animal husbandry in Mongolia focused on livestock found on the steppe, an environment in which reindeer cannot survive for long. As indicated by the name of Rinchinlhümbe’s new negdel, which displays the Mongolian bias towards the *tal* (Mon. “steppe”) over the taiga, the reindeer-herding enterprise was regarded as insignificant and therefore essentially neglected.

The notion of reindeer-herding as a profitless endeavor was not limited to the borders of the MPR, but was also held by Buryat and Russian administrators launching collectivization plans among the Oka Soyots. Daniel Plumley, the director of the Totem Peoples’ Project of Cultural Survival, describes the situation:

In the Okinsky region (the Oka) of eastern Siberia, Russia, for example, reindeer herding was forced to decline during the 1940’s and 1950’s because the government and communist five-year agricultural planning ideology considered such practices uneconomical. The Oka reindeer were eventually lost to the wild during the ecologically degrading practice of introducing non-native cattle species; and killed off altogether in the 1960s by hunters. (Plumley 1998: 2)

In contrast, the Mongolian government at least considered the Dukha’s reindeer worthy of collectivization, which was carried out in 1959.⁴

Apparently, the government’s motives in collectivizing the Dukha’s reindeer did not stem so much from a concern in transforming reindeer herding into a productive part of the national economy, as from its aim of integrating the Dukha people themselves into production. Many of the Dukha were put to work herding steppe-based livestock. When collectivization began in 1959, Badamkhatan had already recorded 85 people who were formerly reindeer herders that had been converted to

⁴ Coincidentally, Badamkhatan was doing his fieldwork among the Dukha during this same year.

herding “*mongol mal*” (1960: 31). For the Dukha who were not employed as steppe-based herders, the government’s agenda was to sedentarize them.

Some of the Dukha remember these times as extremely difficult and report that they welcomed the opportunity to work without giving the impression that they felt they were being forced to settle. Yet, as indicated by Badamkhatan below, sedentarization was a deliberate policy:

The numerous *tsaatan* people at work for the common benefit are improving their lives with such progressive labor and are making their contribution to our construction of socialism. With the goal of further upgrading the culture of these *tsaatan*, measures have been taken in order to bring them down from the taiga to the lowlands before the 40th anniversary of the people’s revolution. (1962: 53-54)

He further noted that the MPR’s Council of Ministers issued a resolution in 1960 to provide finances and equipment for the establishment of full-scale settlements for the “*tsaatan*” in both Rinchinlhümbe and Ulaan-Uul sum centers and at the fishery on the banks of Tsagaan Nuur (1962: 54). In 1961, fourteen stationary houses were built in Tsagaannuur, which had risen to the administrative status of a brigade, to accommodate the Dukha now working at the fishery (Dashdondov 1990: 2). Badamkhatan noted that several “*tsaatan*” youth had “voluntarily” joined the Golden Steppe and Happy Life negdels, as well as the Tsagaannuur fishery and Turt shipping dock on Lake Khövsgöl, and were all “laboring with great output” (1962: 53).

On the other hand, other Dukha elders saw collectivization as a government campaign to forcefully sedentarize them. According to an older man of the Balygsh clan, collectivization not only robbed him of his reindeer, but of his life and livelihood in the taiga and ultimately forced him to move to the fishery when he was twenty. He explained that the elderly Dukha in Rinchinlhümbe were forced to settle in the center

and were given food but no money. Apparently, half of the younger generation was sent to work at the fishery while the other half was to stay in the taiga herding the government's newly collected reindeer. In the fall of 1960, this man was sent to the army for three years and subsequently assigned to work at a sawmill in Selenge aimag.⁵

Although settling the Dukha was of major concern, it seems that this goal did not necessarily preclude the development of reindeer husbandry into something economically profitable. It would be necessary to impose drastic changes in reindeer-herding methods, however, if the Dukha were to settle down. Badamkhatan proposed the following:

For thousands of years the *tsaatan* people have occupied the upper-reaches of the taiga and other uninhabited regions in pursuit of forage for their reindeer. In order to stop this tradition, the negdel administration, party, and public organizations should start from now on getting the reindeer adjusted to eating prairie-hay as fodder. Moreover, if measures are taken to train newborn or young calves to graze on hay (or even get older reindeer adjusted to many hay and grass feeds), keeping those which have learned to graze in lower areas apart from the others, it will become easy to sedentarize the *tsaatan* people in the sum, negdel and brigade centers and free them from eternal insignificance. (1962: 53)

Given that reindeer will eventually starve on a diet of hay, Badamkhatan's advice was understandably not heeded by the negdels. Yet, in its determination to save them from "eternal insignificance," the government did manage to help the Dukha improve herd reproduction. To aid them in their efforts, the government arranged for the purchase of twenty reindeer from Tuva. As a result, the Dukha's herds saw a great increase over the next decade. According to Sükhbaatar (1998: 5), the Dukha had a total of 770 reindeer in 1963, 1000 in 1970, and 2275 in 1977.

⁵ Twelve years later, the man was allowed to return to Khövsgöl and was commissioned to the taiga to lead the reindeer-herding division of the negdel in Ulaan-Uul.

In 1972, the Council of Ministers of the Mongolian People's Republic agreed to upgrade the fishery to the "Tsagaannuur Fishing & Hunting State Farm," which once again allowed the Dukha to hunt on a limited but regular basis. Skilled in hunting and forest-lore and aided by the agility of the reindeer in the taiga, the Dukha soon proved themselves modestly profitable to the government. The Dukha provided the government 250-300 sable pelts per year to be sold in Russia in exchange for guns and ammunition during hunting season and salaries which could be used to supplement their diet and raise their standard of living. (Farkas 1992: 10-11)

Another "profitable" initiative was established in 1979 when the government began to encourage the Dukha to harvest the velvet antlers of their reindeer to be sold in China (Farkas 1992: 12). Yet, these two profit-creating schemes did not prove lucrative enough to gain the full support of the government, who continued to see reindeer herding as an industry unworthy of any substantial effort towards development. In fact, there were periods when they appeared to be more inclined to eradicate the Dukha's herds. In the late 1970s, the Rinchinlhümbe *sum* administration ordered the slaughter of about half the Dukha's reindeer in order to provide meat to the local school. This government-mandated slaughter cut the total number of reindeer from 2275 head to 1278, a sharp decrease which seriously hampered the ability of the Dukha to maintain the new level of production expected by the government (Sükhbaatar 1998: 50). Understandably, many Dukha have a deep-seated mistrust of the Mongolian government that has remained to the present.

Finally, in 1985 the parliament passed a resolution that showed some commitment on the part of the government toward the Dukha and their traditional

mode of life. The resolution consolidated all Dukha and their reindeer from both Rinchinlümbe and Ulaan-Uul sums into one new sum which took the name Tsagaannuur, helping to administratively unify the Dukha. Since the borders drawn for Tsagaannuur sum did not include the area of the Ulaan Taiga mountains, the Dukha within the former borders of Ulaan-Uul sum were forced to move north. Currently, in Tsagaannuur sum the Dukha are divided into two regions northeast and southwest of the Shishgit River. The Dukha in the northeast, who were formerly under the administration of Rinchinlümbe sum, are now referred to as the “East Taiga” group, and those in the southwest, which were moved north from Ulaan-Uul sum, are known as the “West Taiga” group.

With the formation of a new sum, the government also separated the hunting division from the fishery and established the “Tsagaannuur Hunting and Reindeer Breeding State Farm” to promote hunting and herding for the Dukha. Yet, due to the fact that most of the Dukha of the East Taiga had already settled into various jobs in the sum center, Farkas notes that the reindeer of the East Taiga were sent to the West Taiga group in 1986 and the region north of the Shishgit was deserted by the Dukha (1992: 17).

By this time, the total number of reindeer had plummeted to a mere 671. Though the government’s slaughtering spree had contributed to these low numbers, inbreeding had begun to take a toll on the overall health of the herds. Locked within the borders of Mongolia, the Dukha were prevented from finding fresh gene stock from the north to strengthen the breeding of their animals. So, in order to replenish both the number and health of the Dukha’s reindeer, the government acquired another

50 head from Tuva in 1986 (Ayuursed 1996: 7). This boost to both the genetic condition of the reindeer and the morale of the Dukha brought a time of prosperity to the West Taiga group in the late 1980s. By 1990, the total number of reindeer in Tsagaannuur sum was already at 1200, and in September, Tsagaannuur sum celebrated the holiday named “*Myangan Tsaanii Bayar*” (Mon. “Thousand Reindeer Holiday”). Demonstrating their pride in collectively achieving the goal of reaching a thousand reindeer,⁶ many families sewed “1000 *Tsaa*” on the door-flaps of their tepees to commemorate the holiday.

The early 1990s saw this prosperity dissipate with the drastic economic changes that came with the dawn of democracy in Mongolia. With almost no government control over burgeoning self-serving business schemes, the freedoms of a market economy soon brought economic disorder and instability to every part of the country, including Tsagaannuur. Soon thoughtless overexploitation of fish in Tsagaan Nuur Lake forced the Ministry of Nature and Environment to close the Tsagaannuur fishery in 1990 and ban all fishing in the lake for ten years.⁷ With no work in the sum center, the Dukha of the fishery and other Dukha families left the settled life after thirty years and went back into the East Taiga to herd reindeer. Initially sixty reindeer from the West Taiga were allocated by the government for the group returning to the East Taiga.

⁶ A goal which they had already reached and surpassed in the 1970s.

⁷ An additional factor contributing to the disappearance of fish in Tsagaan Nuur Lake was the introduction of the *pelt* fish from Russia by the Mongolian Academy of Sciences. This foreign species essentially consumed the indigenous *tsagaan zugas* (Mon. “white fish”).

At first, the Dukha's reindeer remained under the ownership of the Tsagaannuur administration, and the Dukha continued to receive salaries for herding the animals, but in 1992, the overwhelming economic crisis had crippled the government financially. No longer able to pay salaries to the Dukha, they offered to "lease" the reindeer, giving the Dukha freedom to profit personally from the animals. From 1992 to 1995, more families left Tsagaannuur for the taiga in an attempt to make a livelihood. Then in 1995, the government completely privatized the reindeer by essentially giving each family the same reindeer herd that they were leasing from the government at the time.

During this difficult time of transition, the Dukha's herd numbers began a sharp slide. In 1992, the Dukha's herds numbered 1427. By 1995, the herd numbered 916. By the end of 1998, only 614 head of reindeer were owned by the Dukha (Sükhbaatar 1998: 5). The Dukha attribute this current decline to three problems. First, once the subsidies from the state were gone, the only way for the Dukha to procure money for buying staples from the sum center was to harvest their reindeer. Unfortunately, the total number of reindeer was simply not sufficient to sustain both the Dukha already in the taiga and those moving back into the taiga after the fishery closed.

Secondly, the overall poor health of the herd has weakened the reindeer's defenses against illness, increasing their mortality rate and hampering most efforts at increasing reproduction. Most Dukha attribute their herds' declining health to inbreeding, which is difficult to remedy due to the international border that blocks their access to fresh stock in Tuva. In addition to inbreeding, though, the cutting of

reindeer's antlers in their soft, velvety stage to sell to the Chinese weakens the animals' immune systems, making them more susceptible to infections and diseases.

According to most Dukha, non-human predators, such as wolves, have also played a role in the recent, rapid decline in herd numbers. During the socialist era, the government encouraged the extermination of wolves, which were considered a threat to all livestock, by giving out equipment for hunting wolves and offering bounties. With the cessation of such subsidized programs, wolves and other predators are increasingly posing a threat to the Dukha's herds.

Whereas many of the present difficulties threatening Dukha culture stem directly from previous outside pressures, it is ironic that the primary hope for the future survival of their livelihood may depend on assistance from the outside. In recent years, several non-government organizations, both national and international, have made efforts to assist the Dukha and the other Sayan reindeer-herding groups in sustaining their traditional existence in the taiga. In 1993, a project funded by USAID, under the direction of Dan Plumley, facilitated the purchase of sixty-three reindeer from the Tofalar in order to reintroduce reindeer herding among the Oka Soyots in Buryatia⁸. To assist the Dukha, a Mongolian NGO called the Mongolian Reindeer Fund (MRF) was established in January 1999 with the stated purpose of "helping preserve and promote the indigenous culture, ecology and reindeer-herding economy of the Dukha people" (Wheeler 1999: 66). The MRF has facilitated the delivery of various types of relief aid and veterinary care to the Dukha and their herds. In

⁸ Although reintroduced to Buryatia after a thirty-year absence, reindeer husbandry among the Oka Soyots has primarily been relegated to the tourism industry.

cooperation with Cultural Survival, they have also raised funds and made arrangements to help the Dukha procure eighty head of reindeer from the Eastern Tuvans to boost the gene pool of the Dukha's herds.⁹ These and other efforts have assisted the Dukha in attaining their first significant increase in herd numbers since the early 1990s, an increase from 614 in 1998 to 710 in 1999.

Although the Dukha have experienced this modest increase in their herd size, the trend over the past century has been the sometimes slow and sometimes accelerated, yet always steady, decline in the number of reindeer in the Sayan region. In Tuva, only 10% of the reindeer population has survived through the last century. Vainshtein provides census data from 1931 that records Tuva's reindeer herds as totaling 10,415 head, distributed among 392 households (Vainshtein [1972] 1980: 122, table 8). In the summer of 2000, the anthropologist Brian Donahoe reported that just over a thousand reindeer can now be found in Tuva, divided between a mere thirty families that remain in the taiga (personal communication). According to Plumley, a total of only 2200 head of reindeer remains among the four Sayan groups (Plumley and Battulag 2000: 19). The diminishing herds of the Sayan region pose the greatest present-day threat to the survival of the reindeer-herders' life in the taiga.

Writing nearly a century ago on the Eastern Tuvans, Carruthers claims that "they are a tribe which must soon disappear through the introduction of a stronger and more go-ahead people" (1914: 213). Entering into the twenty-first century, however, the Sayan reindeer-herding peoples—the Dukha, the Eastern Tuvans, the

⁹ Originally, this restocking project had intentions of acquiring reindeer from the Tofalar. But after sending a team to investigate the feasibility of the purchase, it was discovered that the Tofalar's reindeer herds are currently so depleted that they could not spare even a few for the Dukha.

Tofalar, and the Oka Soyots—are by no means in danger of extinction as distinct ethnic groups. Even when “stronger and more go-ahead” nation-states have enforced their ideologies of cultural sameness and economic uniformity upon them, these Sayan peoples have preserved their unique place in the taiga. More recently, Battulag¹⁰, a Dukha biologist, has made the claim that “without the reindeer we are not Dukha” (quoted in Plumley and Battulag 2000: 19). Though the Dukha will continue to exist as a people, even without reindeer, as those settled in the sum center or herding on the steppe have already proven, both Battulag’s and Carruther’s statements forewarn of the potential end of the Dukha’s ability to sustain their unique life in the inner reaches of the taiga. For only with their reindeer can the Dukha maintain their reign as lords of the Mongolian taiga.

¹⁰ *sic*

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VITA

W. Alan Wheeler

EDUCATION

2000	University of Cambridge <i>Master of Philosophy candidate in Social Anthropology</i>	Cambridge, England
1995 - 2000	Indiana University <i>Master of Arts in Central Eurasian Studies</i>	Bloomington, Indiana
1994 - 1995	University of Tennessee <i>10 graduate level hours in anthropology</i>	Knoxville, Tennessee
1987 - 1991	Lee University <i>Bachelor of Arts in Intercultural Studies</i>	Cleveland, Tennessee

POSITIONS HELD

1996 - 1999	Director of the Mongolia branch of the English Language Institute/China based in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
June 1999	Community needs assessment consultant for AusAid's Secondary School Rebuilding Project in Tsagaan Nuur, Mongolia
1992 - 1994	Instructor of English at the Hovd branch of the National University of Mongolia in Hovd, Mongolia
1991 - 1992	Artist for <i>English: Eye of Wisdom</i> . (C. Dirksen, Ts. Sumiya and B. Damdin. 1992. English Language Institute/San Dimas), the first English textbook published specifically for Mongolian secondary schools

AWARDS RECEIVED

1996	First Place in the Gombojav Hangin Graduate Level Essay Competition with the article <i>Anthropological Approaches to Nomadic Pastoralism with a Brief Focus on the Mongols</i> , at the 1996 annual meetings of the Mongolia Society in Washington D.C.
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PUBLICATIONS

“The Dukha: Mongolia’s Reindeer Herders.” *The Mongolia Survey*. (6: 58-66)

LANGUAGES

Mongolian	Fluent	(in the Khalkha dialect)
Tuvan	Proficient	(in the Dukha dialect)

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

March 1998	<i>The Dukha (Tsaatan): Mongolia’s Reindeer People</i> for the Mongolia Society, Indiana University
August 1994, 1996 - 1999	Lectures on Mongolian language and culture for English Language Institute/China’s teacher training conferences

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

1995 - present	Mongolia Society, Indiana University Member
1998 - present	UNESCO’s Center for the Study of Nomadic Civilizations, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia Founding member
1999 - present	Mongolian Reindeer Fund, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia Co-founder and board member