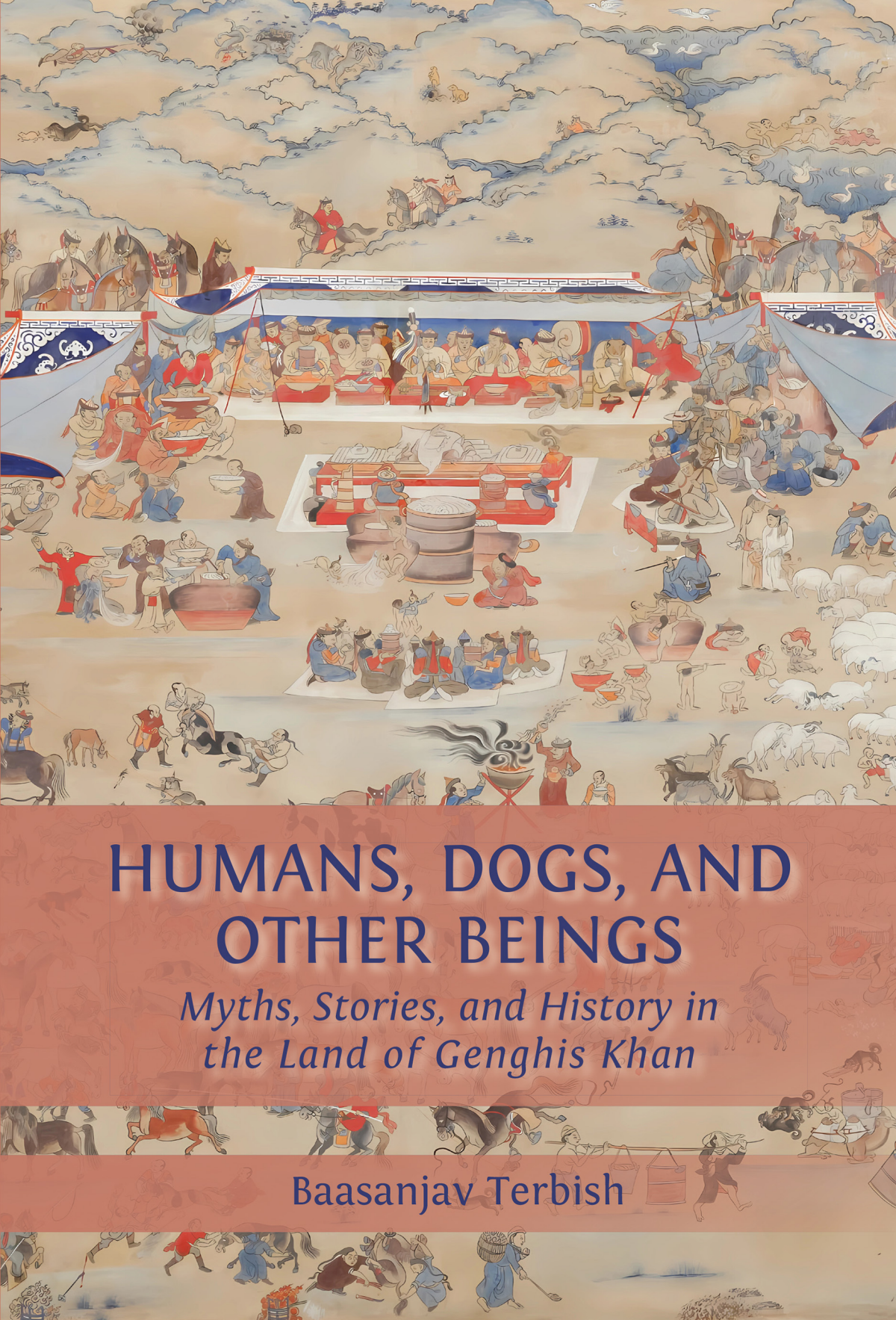

HUMANS, DOGS, AND OTHER BEINGS

Myths, Stories, and History in the Land of Genghis Khan

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2. The Dog

After the death of her husband, an attractive widow named Alan Goa, or 'Alan the Beautiful', gives birth to three more sons. To explain the circumstances surrounding her seemingly illegitimate pregnancies—particularly with a virile Bayad slave serving in her camp, which raised suspicions among everyone—she offers an astonishing story. She claims that each night, under the cover of darkness, a glowing ray of light penetrated through the roof opening of her nomadic *ger*. By morning, the light would depart, taking on the form of a golden-hued dog, leaving her satisfied and pregnant.[1] Among her three celestial children, Bodonchar stood out, as he was destined to become the forefather of none other than Genghis Khan.

This myth is recounted in *The Secret History of the Mongols*, the earliest Mongol chronicle written in the thirteenth century, which provides a detailed account of the ancestry and life of Genghis Khan (1162–1227) and the early history of the Mongol Empire. This mythological story not only paints a picture of a shamanic era when the lines between the divine, human, and animal realms were fluid, but also contains the first mention of the dog among the Mongols.

Much water has flowed under the bridge since those mythological times, and Mongolia is today a predominantly Buddhist nation with a recent—and, many would argue, traumatic—experience of socialism (1924-90) that has affected every aspect of daily life. However, despite these transformations, dogs continue to hold a special place in Mongol culture as one of the most cherished of companions, offering unwavering loyalty and affection, while contributing to the economic prosperity of their owners by safeguarding livestock and other valuables. As guardians of households, dogs also serve as conduits for expressing family-oriented

1 *The Secret History of the Mongols* §21.

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values, fears, and hopes within Mongol society. Consequently, harming or unjustly taking the life of a dog is considered a sinful act. A dog's feeding bowl signifies more than just a vessel; it represents a 'circle of abundance' (*hishgiin hüree*), and it is taboo to step over it.

However, if a foreigner were to spend time in Mongolia, they would quickly notice that the country is not exactly a canine paradise. As much as they are perceived as lovable and essential animals, dogs are often treated with disdain and contempt. The foreigner might be shocked to see that dogs are deliberately kept outside the *ger*, viewed as sources of pollution and danger, and their feeding bowls are reserved for leftovers.

This chapter examines the contradictory treatment of dogs in Mongolia, using it as a lens to explore Mongol culture specifically and human culture more broadly. The chapter is organized into three parts. The first part discusses the place of the dog in Mongol cosmology, which provides valuable insight into understanding the complex, often contradictory views of dogs as imagined animals imbued with both positive and negative traits. The second part delves into the historical treatment of dogs as flesh-and-blood creatures in Mongolia under various political and religious regimes. In the conclusion, I offer reflections on the broader human treatment of dogs, using Mongol society as a case study, and explore what zoophilia and sexuality reveal about Mongol culture from a different perspective.

Before diving into these sections, let's first take a brief look at the role of dogs in nomadic camps, which will help set the stage for the discussions to follow.

The Dog's Role in the Nomadic Camp

Mongol nomads have traditionally kept working dogs for two main purposes: (1) *hotoch nohoi*, dogs responsible for guarding the nomadic camp, and (2) *anch nohoi*, hunting dogs for those who enjoy outdoor adventures. Guarding dogs are typically mongrels or belong to the *banhar* breed of Mongol dogs, known for their large, muscular build and thick double coat. In contrast, hunting dogs are characterized by their long legs, slender bellies, short coats, long straight tails, and speed.

Despite the distinct names and breeds of dogs involved, these two roles are often as intertwined as a dog chasing its own tail. Some camp

dogs serve additional functions as herding aids and hunting partners, while hunting dogs are also expected to stand guard at the camp. Consequently, an average nomadic household often ends up with a couple of dogs, but some families boast a dozen or more, reflecting the diverse and essential roles these canine companions play in nomadic life.

Herders who want a good dog go to special dog breeders carrying a *hadag*, a traditional scarf used in various ceremonial and religious occasions. As with many pastoral activities, asking someone for a puppy is a ritualized affair, a bit like a courtship ritual. Referred to as 'taking milk to the mother dog', the ritual is performed as follows. The hopeful puppy seeker offers the breeder the *hadag* and delivers a formal line, 'Could you please bestow a puppy on me?' The breeder takes the scarf, offers the guest a meal and tea, and then engages in a lengthy chat about everything except the puppy. Just as the guest's patience wears thin and he is about to leave, the breeder casually mentions to return some other day to pick up what the guest had come for. When that day finally arrives, the guest brings along milk and treats for the mother dog. Using milk, typically reserved for humans or deities, implies that the puppy and its mother aren't just animals; they are considered top-tier beings, close to humans. In the Western context, offering milk would be somewhat akin to offering bread and wine to a dog—items that are considered sacred and reserved for human consumption in religious rituals such as Communion.

Once the puppy is settled in its new camp and the owners have built it a small shelter—akin to a crib layered with sheepskin or felt to protect it from the elements—the real training begins. If the puppy is destined to become a herding dog, the owners take it to the pasture to familiarize it with the surroundings and the herds. At other times, the puppy is kept near the animal shelter, close to the *ger* but at arm's length, to ensure it does not become too attached to humans and forget its duty. If the puppy dares to dash back to the *ger*, it is met with a stern scolding: 'Go away! Get back to the herds! Why did you come?!' After a few such high-pitched reprimands, the puppy usually learns its lesson. In the pasture, the puppy is trained to be vigilant and to spot predators like wolves, foxes, bears, and occasionally snow leopards.[2]

2 Tangad, 'Nohoi tezheezh baisan ardyn ulamjlalt zanshlaas', 29-32.

It is worth noting that the role of Mongol dogs in herding is quite different from that of, say, English sheepdogs, which are trained to round up livestock. Mongol dogs accompany their owners to the pastureland, where their primary role is to guard against dangers such as predators or thieves. The actual herding of livestock is carried out by humans, who follow the animals either on foot or horseback. In this sense, the role of Mongol dogs is distinct from that of Western sheepdogs.[3]

For those aiming to train a skilled hunter, the puppy's breed is as critical as its diet. It must be fed with high-calorie meals in small portions especially before hunting trips. To enhance its agility and loyalty, nomads castrate the puppy, ensuring that as it matures, it doesn't become distracted by bitches to the detriment of its camp duties and loyalty to its owners. These castrated pups are then trained to hunt marmots, hares, antelopes, foxes, and even wolves without damaging valuable fur. Nomads who frequently hunt often keep several of these castrated dogs. These seasoned hunters not only contribute to hunting expeditions but also pass on their knowledge to younger puppies.

All these dogs, whether guarding the camp or chasing down critters, are expected to demonstrate fierce loyalty to their human masters and to react aggressively to strangers, often trying to bite them.[4] It is no surprise, then, that most nomads grow up wary of other people's dogs. If you're ever visiting a nomadic camp, you'd better halt in your tracks and shout at the top of your lungs, *Nohoi hori!* ('Hold your dog!'), which doubles as a traditional greeting and safety measure.

Part I

The Dog in Cosmology

I would like to open this part with a story I heard from a friend. Many years ago, she went to the countryside to visit her friends who lived as nomadic herders. One morning the camp dog bit a sheep's tail and found itself in the midst of a whipping storm as punishment. From that moment on, the dog pulled off a grand performance. It refused to eat, ignored

3 Fijn, 'Dog ears and tails: Different relational ways of being in Aboriginal Australia and Mongolia'.

4 Humphrey, 'Some notes on the role of dogs', 17.

calls, and forgot how to bark. The head of the family, nursing some guilt, stepped out of his nomadic *ger* numerous times, attempting to have heart-to-heart conversations with the dog: 'Are you still angry with me? I know, you're just waiting for a ride, you son of a bitch!' As the sun dipped below the horizon, the man revved up his motorbike and called the dog, just to see it leap back to life, tail wagging. Together, they embarked on a motorbike tour around the *ger*. After the ride, harmony was restored, and the pooch went back to being the cheerful, tail-wagging, barking wonder.

Good Dogs

Let's begin with the positive aspects of traditional beliefs regarding dogs. Dogs hold a unique place in nomadic culture, symbolizing not only faithful companionship but also embodying individuality. This bond between humans and dogs is expressed through several distinctive customs, exemplified by the following three where dogs serve as human substitutes.

Puppy selection tradition: When a man seeks to acquire a puppy, it's customary for him to avoid taking one from his in-laws. This practice stems from the old belief that a man shouldn't marry two sisters from the same family. In this situation, a puppy becomes a symbolic substitute for an individual from the in-law's family.

Bridal ritual: In Western Mongolia, a wedding custom that persisted until recently involved a new bride kneeling before her husband's family dog. This dog, a guardian figure in the household, held a special place in the marital ceremony. The bride respectfully tied a *hadag* scarf around the dog's neck and offered a bowl of milk. During this ritual, as the new bride paid her respects to the dog and got to know it, her mother-in-law blessed the dog by proudly recounting its finer qualities—a scene that could have been seen staged in the romantic comedy *Monster-in-Law* (2011). In this movie, the overbearing mother-in-law, portrayed by Jane Fonda, creates challenging and demeaning situations for her son's fiancée, played by Jennifer Lopez.

Naming tradition: Puppies, especially males, are the only animals given individual names. Names like Basar ('giant'), Bars ('leopard'), Asar ('huge'), Arslan ('lion'), Baatar ('hero'), Baavgai ('bear'), Banhar ('strong and stocky'), Bürged ('eagle'), Malch ('herder'), Honich

('sheepherder'), Hurd ('speed'), and others are chosen for their strength, beauty, loyalty, and the dog's role in the nomadic household. Notably, some of these names, like Baatar, Arslan, Bars, and Baavgai, can also be given to baby boys.

Mongols hold traditional ideals for both humans and dogs, often drawing parallels between the two. They envision an ideal dog as one that refrains from attacking small animals (reflecting compassion), avoids unnecessary barking (equivalent to honesty), stays loyal to the household (akin to human loyalty to parents), loves and protects livestock (reminiscent of nomadic values), demonstrates courage, and abstains from stealing food. However, bearing in mind the inevitable gap between ideals and the reality on the ground, dogs, much like humans, may not confirm to these ideals. Yet the essence lies in the shared attribution of these ideals to both humans and dogs, emphasizing the perceived similarities between the two.

Given such a close bond between humans and dogs, it's no wonder that Mongols have composed poems dedicated to their canine companions. In Mongol oral tradition, a genre known as üge ('speech') featuring short poems composed by masters of the spoken word, are worth mentioning. These poems depict nomadic daily life, often featuring animals endowed with human language to express grievances. Through their lamentations, these animals give voice to the less powerful in human society, including commoners, impoverished nomads, and those in need of assistance—in short, the underdogs. Reminiscent of the Western 'Beast Fable' genre, these üge poems provide allegorical commentary on human nature and societal issues. Passed down orally, they sometimes find their way onto paper. One such üge poem, attributed to Sangdag the Storyteller, who lived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, is titled 'Words Uttered By a Dog':

> The man who raised me, kind and gentle,
> In my youth, his care was fundamental.
> As I grew, he gave me his trust,
> His belongings to me, he did entrust.
>
> When strangers come on horses grand,
> I bark and guard our family land.
> But at my master's guiding call,
> I pause, let strangers in, and stall.

When the strangers get back on their horses, I bark in spite,
With all my might, I fear no fight.
When they gallop, swift as the breeze,
I return, my master to please.

When wolves appear in shadows black,
I chase them off, no turning back.
With barks, I guard through endless night,
Against their cunning, I hold tight.

In winter's chill, I stood so bold,
Guarding my camp in bitter cold.
At dawn, in morning's chilly light,
I'd return, weary from the night,
Hungry and tired, seeking rest,
But met with beating, I must confess.
Inside the *ger*, I dared to peek,
Only to be driven and kicked, feeling weak.
No grudge I keep, though hurt and sore,
Offended briefly, then no more.

When my camp moves to pastures new,
On foot, I follow, faithful and true.
They call me glutton, bare bones my share,
What can I do, life's burdens I bear.
In peace I wish to live each day,
With my master, come what may.
Together we're meant, an ancient decree,
A long life for him and me.[5]

While dogs have the duty to attack anyone who approaches their camp, accompany their owners to the pasture, participate in hunting trips, and protect the household during the day, their most critical duty begins at night. A good dog is expected to bark relentlessly through the night, deterring intruders such as wild predators, strangers, thieves, and ghosts—all entities that nomads are typically afraid of—from approaching the nomadic camp.

Let's not forget the dog's role in the household economy. There is a saying that 'a household with a good dog prospers'. The dog's loyalty to the household, gauged by its physical proximity and activities in the

5 Tangad, 'Nohoi tezheeh baisan ardyn ulamjlalt zanshlaas', 29-30.

vicinity of the household, takes on additional symbolic significance. If a neighbor's dog visits, it's seen as a sign that good fortune is on the horizon. But the real jackpot is when a dog coughs up food while eating. This is interpreted as a sign that wealth and abundance are on the way. To put it another way, it's like a folkloric equivalent of imagining a dog coughing up money instead of kibble, promising to bring its owners great riches. On the flip side, if someone's dog runs away, it's seen as a sign of bad luck and impoverishment for the family.

However, as pointed out above, Mongolia has never been a canine paradise, and Mongols' relationship with their dogs has been complicated. Let's delve into the negative beliefs.

Bad Dogs

Due to their interactions with unclean substances, their habit of grooming their genitalia, licking other dogs' butts, and uncontrolled sexuality, dogs are considered in a perpetual state of pollution. People avoid kissing, hugging, or patting dogs, and objects are considered polluted if a dog walks over them or urinates on them. In many areas, dogs are not even allowed near valuable dung piles (used for fuel) for fear of causing spiritual chaos, as their urination on the piles might anger the fire spirit—a crucial entity in Mongol households that each family strives to keep happy and untainted. That said, in some areas, dogs are allowed to lie on dung piles, as the piles generate heat, enabling the dogs to stay warm outside in cold weather. In certain regions of Western Mongolia, nomads living on the slopes of sacred mountains abstain from keeping dogs altogether, a practice uncommon in nomadic culture. This decision stems from their fear that these 'impure' animals may provoke the wrath of the spiritual guardians of these sacred mountains. In 'ordinary' places, nomads typically prefer to keep male dogs.

As a consequence, female puppies are often separated from their mothers at a very young age, even before they open their eyes, and are left outside in the cold to perish. As it is deemed inauspicious for the head of the family to take on the responsibility of killing the puppies, this thankless task falls to his wife, who is considered a less symbolically important figure in the household (though this does not diminish her

critical managerial role, as Mongol wives have historically been vital to the management and functioning of the encampment). With a heavy heart, the wife places the helplessly whining puppies on the freezing ground, uttering a formulaic sentence to explain that there isn't enough space for them in the household and that the family cannot afford to feed extra mouths. This responsibility is assigned to women partly because, like a puppy, a wife is symbolically seen as a guest in her husband's *ger* within this patriarchal society. Yet, unlike the ill-fated pups, she has found shelter within his household. To draw a parallel in Western terms, it is akin to the lord of a manor asking a guest—one with whom he shares an intimate relationship and entrusts with the running of the household—to remove other unwelcome and less valued guests. However, if the pups are a bit older and have opened their eyes to the world, the situation changes. Nomads, instead of resorting to sending them to the afterlife, make efforts to accommodate them and find suitable owners. Nonetheless, those who manage to survive the initial ordeal of being left outside to brave the freezing cold or those deemed unwanted often become scavengers and strays.

Furthermore, despite their feeding bowl being charmingly called a 'circle of blessing', dogs are rarely blessed with good food, as leftovers constitute their usual diet. Often, camp dogs get so hungry that they follow their owners or guests to the open-air loo to await departing gifts of far less salubrious origin—just for a sniff, and perhaps a quick nibble. Times are good when they get the special treat called 'dog's share' consisting of soup, meat leftovers, intestines, and other goodies, during special holidays like the Lunar New Year. That said, dogs, being dogs, should never indulge—even during national holidays—in the exclusive delights meant for humans, such as livestock testicles, fat from the sheep's tail, shoulder blades, and head meat. Transgressing these taboos carries supernatural repercussions.

During my early teens, I spent a summer with my paternal uncle, a camel herder. One day, he castrated a goat and gave one testicle to his son-in-law, who chewed away with gusto. My uncle offered the other testicle to me, cautioning against giving it to the camp dog. Just before taking a bite, I had a change of heart, realizing that testicles weren't my kind of delicacy. I put it back. The following day, the castrated goat was found dead, presumably killed by an enraged deity who disapproved of

dogs chewing on testicles. My uncle and his family held me as the prime suspect in the untimely demise of their prized goat. Since this was the only plausible cosmological explanation my uncle's family could come up with, they concluded that I must have given the testicle to the dog after all. That was the first and last time I held any testicle close to my mouth. The innocent dog was also reprimanded for what it could not have possibly done. Due to this poor treatment, dogs are also described as 'the most miserable creatures of all'.

The low status of dogs in Mongol culture is further illustrated in Mongolian idioms and expressions, where the word *nohoi* ('dog') often carries negative connotations. Phrases like *nohoin zamaar oroh* ('to enter a dog's road', meaning something goes wrong), *nohoin hereg* ('dog's business', referring to complicated or messy affairs), *nohoin horoo* ('dog's den', describing a messy place), *nohoi shinjihgüi yüm* ('a thing even a dog wouldn't sniff', denoting something useless or dirty), and *muu nohoi* ('bad dog', used as a curse) show how dogs are often associated with disorder.

Given that dogs are literally 'given a bad name', concepts associated with canines are also symbolically viewed as inauspicious in certain contexts. For instance, according to the Mongol astrological calendar, it is considered unlucky to schedule significant events, such as weddings, during the Year of the Dog or on a Day of the Dog.

Since dogs are thus viewed as sources of impurity, mess, and inauspiciousness, they are strictly prohibited from entering the *ger*, with violations resulting in punishment, as evident in the above ü*ge* poem. Given the taboo, no matter what gifts the dog lays at its human master's feet, it won't be admitted into his *ger*. Even if the dog were to present its master with a morning offering of a dozen hunted sables, safeguard the household from a midday band of burglars, round up the entire flock without losing a single lamb in the afternoon, locate the master's missing child in the evening, and fend off wolves throughout the night—come sunshine, that diligent dog still won't receive an invite into the *ger*. Such is the power of the taboo against dogs entering the sacred human abode, which is also indicative of the deeply traditional nature of Mongol society. Not only that, one of the most serious transgressions a lowly dog can commit is leaping onto the roof of the *ger* (i.e., above the heads of humans), an act that

would drive even the most serene Mongols crazy and cause them to go berserk on the transgressor.

As we can see, dogs occupy a controversial place in the Mongol imagination, embodying both positive and negative qualities. To gain a deeper understanding of this duality, let's now explore the role of the dog in cosmology.

Cosmology

In Mongol cosmology, which has a strong Buddhist influence, dogs are perceived as beings closely linked to humans in the cycle of reincarnation, serving as intermediaries between the animal and human realms. According to this belief, any living being desiring rebirth as a human must first experience life as a lowly dog. Only after this canine existence can a soul be reborn as a human in its subsequent reincarnation.

This concept of reincarnation transcends mere discourse or casual conversation: it profoundly influences the way Mongols see the world in general and interact with canines in particular. This influence is vividly manifested in a distinct funerary ritual. When a dog dies, in anticipation of its potential rebirth as a human, Mongols follow a practice wherein they place a chunk of fat or ghee butter symbolizing pure sustenance into the dead dog's mouth, despite the otherwise unclean habits of licking genitalia and nibbling feces and other impure substances. Additionally, they sever the dog's tail and place it beneath its head as a cozy makeshift pillow. This ritual symbolizes the dog's transcendence from its canine state, and sends it off on a first-class cosmological flight, complete with fine food and a plush pillow, to Arcadia—a superior world where, upon arrival, the traveler reincarnates into a hairless, bipedal ape, only one step lower than the gods themselves. Just as dogs are promoted to humans in their next reincarnation, some naughty or sinful humans may get demoted into dogs or even lower beings, creating interesting karmic cases. For instance, departed individuals are widely believed to choose reincarnation within their own families, assuming the form of family dogs. Similarly, deceased dogs can also return to their former owners as their children.

One *bolson yavdal* story that exemplifies this idea occurred in the countryside of post-socialist Mongolia. In this story, a man called

Chimed had a dog that began killing sheep and goats in the vicinity, creating a dire situation for the local nomads and their herds. Fearing for their livestock's safety, they strongly urged Chimed to take action, which he reluctantly did by ending the dog's life. However, this decision had unforeseen consequences that turned the man's life upside down. In the wake of the dog's demise, a series of unfortunate events unfolded: divorces, accidents, and illnesses afflicted all members of his family, leading to the tragic loss of three lives within a year. Brought to his knees by despair, the man descended into a three-year bout of alcoholism, aggression, and self-destructive behavior. Eventually, Chimed overcame his 'inner chimp' and cleaned up his life. He also reunited with his (ex) wife, who soon gave birth to a baby boy. But instead of crying like a typical infant, the baby barked and howled. To make matters even more eerie, when Chimed held his baby, he witnessed a startling transformation: the baby's face morphed into that of the deceased dog. Terrified and at a loss, the man sought guidance from an astrologist, hoping for an explanation and a solution to his family's bizarre ordeal. The astrologist offered insight: 'All these misfortunes have befallen you because of the dog you killed. You must go and have some mantras recited'. After the ritual, which cost a small fortune, the man's life returned to normalcy.[6]

Endowed with spiritual powers, the dog can not only punish wrongdoers but can also establish an intimate spiritual connection with living humans during its lifetime. Among Mongols, it is a widely held belief that the soul of a living dog has the capacity to 'seek refuge' within a human body, usually that of a child whose body is already inhabited by its own soul. Such converged souls cannot be separated without endangering the lives of both the child and the dog, as is illustrated in yet another bone-chilling *bolson yavdal* story.

The story unfolds in the bustling Mongolian capital, Ulaanbaatar, where a successful businessman named Dorj embarked on a heartwarming mission. It's his daughter's impending fourth birthday, and he decided to gift her a puppy. With great excitement, he called his daughter on the phone to share the news, but to his amazement, she responded with an astonishing revelation: she had already seen the puppy in her dreams. When the long-awaited puppy finally arrived,

6 Terbish, 'The Mongolian dog as an intimate other', 145-46.

a bond swiftly blossomed between the pup and the girl. They became inseparable friends and soulmates. One day the girl's mother took her to a village outside Ulaanbaatar, leaving the puppy in the apartment flat, despite her daughter's pleading. Separated by distance but connected by their extraordinary cosmic bond, both the girl and her puppy fell suddenly ill on the same day. By the following morning, the puppy had succumbed to its ailment. Although the young girl eventually regained her health, she began behaving strangely, playing with an invisible dog. While many children believe in the existence of an imaginary friend invisible to the rest of the world, the family became alarmed and concerned, leading the father to seek counsel from a wise monk, accompanied by a fat fee. What he learned was both breathtaking and mystical—the souls of his daughter and the departed puppy had intertwined. This extraordinary union had bestowed upon the girl a remarkable gift: the ability to beckon back that which had departed the world of the living.[7]

These two *bolson yavdal* stories, like many others that may be based on 'facts', could be explained away in terms of visual and auditory illusions, where people see visions, faces, and hear voices that are not present. The human brain is not a perfect organ and is prone to mental health conditions, neurological problems, or transcendent experiences caused by a range of factors, from stress and drug use to psychiatric disorders to intensive meditation. Our ability to imagine and visualize things is called dreaming when we sleep; it is called imagination when we are awake. In cases involving mental and neurological conditions, it can be hallucination when people see and experience things that are not there as if they were present. However, let's not get carried away by modern scientific thinking for now and instead return to the explanations provided by cosmological thinking, which has been one of the prevailing modes of thought throughout Mongolia's history—and, indeed, that of humanity—and is the focus of this section.

In Mongol cosmology, dogs and children are sometimes seen as connected, as shown in these *bolson yavdal* stories. This connection can be partly explained by the Buddhist idea that dogs are future humans, while children are not yet fully human. Because of this, children are

7 Ibid., 147.

thought to share traits with both dogs and adults. As a result, there are many Mongol traditions that treat dogs and children as if they belong to the same category. For example, after the birth of a rainbow baby (a child born after a miscarriage), the infant is placed inside a dog's feeding bowl, where the umbilical cord is tied, and the baby is wrapped in a cloth or animal skin. Today, however, families have modernized this ritual by placing the baby in a cradle shaped like a dog's feeding bowl.

On the first day of the Lunar New Year, it is considered taboo to scold children or punish dogs. When a child loses a tooth, it is wrapped in fat and given to a dog with the phrase 'take my bad tooth and give me one of your good ones', akin to the tooth fairy tradition in Western societies. Prior to dressing a child in a new robe, some families smear ghee butter on the robe's inner side and have it licked by a dog. Following a person's passing, it is customary for the bereaved to feed both dogs and neighborhood children. Puppies and human children are traditionally regarded as two of the 'three most beautiful creatures on earth', with the third being the baby camel (as discussed in Chapter 5).

To gain insights into a household, it is said that one only needs to 'observe the children and dogs' because these two not only mimic the grown-ups but also shape the destiny of the household: well-behaved children will care for their parents, while good dogs will protect their masters and livestock. Such examples comparing children with dogs, which abound across Mongolia, may strike observers from foreign countries as bizarre, but when explained in the context of indigenous cosmology, they become understandable.

Anthropology is a social science that gets its teeth into the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of human cultures across the globe, aiming to understand the diversity of human beliefs and practices. To achieve this, the discipline employs a variety of sharp theories and concepts, complemented by participant observation, in which anthropologists immerse themselves in the daily lives of the subject populations to gain an insider's perspective. To comprehend the dog's cosmological role in Mongolia, it is illuminating to utilize classical theory and take a closer look at the concept of 'a transitional being', as coined by anthropologist Victor Turner. Using this term in relation to *rites of passage*, Turner points out that rites of passage indicate and constitute transitions between 'states', which are understood as 'a relatively fixed or stable condition'

prior to and following the transitional period. Transition, which is what rites of passage are all about, is, according to Turner, a process, a becoming, and a transformation. As the transitional period involves identity decomposition, neutrality, ambiguity,[8] and pollution, those undergoing this process (i.e. 'transitional beings') have characteristics of both states. In its broadest sense, a rite of passage refers to a ceremonial event marking the transition from one social or religious status to another. Found in all societies, examples include birth rituals, marriage ceremonies, coronations, initiation rites, funerals, and many others.

The Mongol dog fits Turner's concept of 'a transitional being' in that it doesn't quite fit into the category of a full-fledged beast nor a real human but rather embodies qualities of both. While Turner initially coined this term in the context of human societies, one can apply it to analyze the cosmological transformation from beast through dog to its eventual status as human without necessitating ritual implications. In the case of the dog, the two states, separated by the transitional period (i.e., the dog's status as a liminal, polluted animal), can be identified as the state of being a 'true' beast and that of being a human. During their transitional existence, dogs may oscillate towards either end of the spectrum/state, as observed in instances like (1) stray dogs mating with wolves and attacking people and livestock, and (2) domestic dogs connecting their soul with that of a child. When a dog reaches the end of its life (completing the transitional period/rite of passage and ceasing to be a dog in the cosmological sense), Mongols, as previously mentioned, place goodies in its mouth and chop off its tail to prepare its soul for its subsequent reincarnation into human form.

As transitional beings, dogs are believed to freely traverse the boundaries between the material and spiritual realms, endowed with the supernatural ability to perceive things that often slip past human senses. This is particularly evident in the case of the so-called 'dogs with four eyes' (*dörvön nüdtei nohoi*), distinguished by two small spots above each eye, resembling mystical eyeglasses for the ethereal. These dogs are renowned for their exceptional ability to detect the unseen, whether it be ghosts, impending natural disasters, or other mysterious phenomena. Tales of dogs alerting their owners by barking at ghosts,

8 Turner, 'Betwixt and between', 237.

rescuing individuals before earthquakes and floods, or guiding their human masters away from danger are abundant in *bolson yavdal* stories.

Turning to a broader perspective, the cosmology that shapes the lives of Mongols today, including their treatment of dogs, is not only flexible but also responsive to the forces of cultural evolution. Since all rules are products of human imagination, they naturally allow for exceptions, reflecting the inherent adaptability and dynamism of human cultures. This flexibility also implies that what is considered a norm or a cosmological given today may not have been so in the past. To further explore these ideas, let's now revisit the specific example of the ban on dogs entering human dwellings.

The Ban on Dogs Entering Human Dwellings and Its Origins

As previously discussed, Mongols keep their working dogs out of their *ger*s, a ban observed across the country. However, like all human-made rules, there are exceptions to this ban, which are as follows:

1. When a young puppy is introduced to a household, it is offered a lick of milk inside the *ger*. This ritual symbolizes the acceptance of the puppy as a new, albeit inferior, member of the household. To use a historical analogy from the West, it isn't dissimilar to a young servant boy being admitted to the private chambers of the lord of the manor to be welcomed into service and instructed on his duties.

2. In situations where the children of the household bring the camp puppy into the *ger* to engage in play, or when a puppy is in need for a warm place to recuperate by the fireside, many nomadic households allow the puppy to enter.

3. Historically, in caravan camps, female dogs with young puppies were allowed to take shelter in the same tent as caravan drivers.[9] This exception was based on ethical and practical grounds influenced by environmental factors. Caravans depended on dogs for protection and security, and they were constantly on the move. Constructing an external shelter for puppies and their mother at each camp, under varying environmental conditions (especially harsh winters and rainy weather) and in different

9 Lattimore, *The Desert Road to Turkestan*, 70.

geographical locations, was impractical. Allowing dogs and their pups into the tent was a practical adaptation to environmental conditions. Additionally, from a cosmological perspective, the caravan tent served as temporary shelter, making it less susceptible to permanent 'spiritual pollution'.

4. Leniency is extended to puppies and their mothers when they are in each other's company in specific situations. In contrast, adult male dogs are generally not granted any exceptions and are expected to bravely face any climatic conditions. While Mongol dogs were subject to stringent regulations regarding their entry into human habitats, one particular foreign breed enjoyed certain privileges: the Pekingese, known in Mongolian as *Beijin hav*. This exception arose when Mongolia became part of the Manchu Qing Empire in 1691, leading to cultural adaptations influenced by new political norms and practices. The Pekingese, a toy breed resembling puppies, held historical significance in the Chinese imperial court and was later embraced by the Manchu Emperor. It made its way to the Mongolian steppes through Mongol nobles traveling to Beijing, with further introduction facilitated by Chinese merchants during the Manchu Qing era. As elements of 'high Mongol culture' were influenced by foreign practices, foods, and animals, the trend of keeping Pekingese dogs gradually spread to ordinary Mongol households, particularly in settlements like Urga (modern-day Ulaanbaatar). Although local breeds were regarded as *working* dogs and typically kept outdoors, the enthusiasm for Pekingese dogs, considered *entertainment* dogs, persisted among Mongols for centuries.

5. In every society, there have always been families that deviate from social norms and codes of conduct. Though uncommon, certain households in Mongolia permit their adult dogs to enter the *ger*—a practice frowned upon by others.

Now, let's take a moment to explore the origins of this ban, which are grounded in several arguments rooted in Buddhist concepts of purity and pollution. These beliefs include: (1) dogs frequently groom their genitalia and display uncontrolled sexuality, (2) dogs carry fleas and are considered physically unclean, and (3) dogs may introduce spiritual

pollution from the realm of spirits. Each of these points will now be addressed, incorporating a historical perspective:

(1) In the early thirteenth century, the Mongols emerged on the world stage as practitioners of shamanism. In their shamanic tradition, dogs held a special place of reverence, being viewed both as heavenly creatures connecting the human world and the spirit realm and as loyal companions to humans. As creatures that belonged to a different category of beings, dogs—as far as one can judge based on historical documents—were not held to the same moral benchmarks applied to humans during this period.

Shamanism, as practiced among the Mongols, also had a distinctive perspective on human sexuality, differing significantly from the later-adopted Buddhism. While the latter views sex or sexual craving as one of the Three Poisons (the other two being 'hatred' and 'ignorance') that brings about mental and moral impurity and attaches humans to suffering, the former maintains an indifference to human sexuality. In the eyes of shamanic gods, all forms of carnal pleasure, be it pre-marital intercourse or same-sex relationships or multiple partners, were permissible and devoid of moral condemnation. Therefore, what might be considered under Buddhism as 'lax sexuality' was not a moral concern under shamanism.[10] People, as well as animals such as dogs, were not censured for indulging in carnal pleasure unless the indulgence posed a threat to the established patriarchal order rooted in inheritance (in the case of shamanic dogs, this was impossible to undermine for the simple reason that Mongols never included dogs in their wills). I'll return to sexuality, but for now, let's take a look at the notion of sanitation.

(2) Historical accounts from the Middle Ages, primarily written by Christian envoys and various Mongol vassals, depicted the shamanic Mongols as having different hygiene practices compared to other cultures of their time[11] and even more so compared to our contemporary standards. The nomadic lifestyle of the Mongols, characterized by living in mobile *ger*s and limited access to bathing facilities due to constant movement and water scarcity in their arid regions, greatly influenced their bathing habits. Mongols were noted for abstaining from washing for extended periods and rarely changing their clothes. Yet, as was the

10 Terbish, *Sex in the Land of Genghis Khan*.
11 Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*.

case until the beginning of the twentieth century, Mongols didn't mind this and were accustomed to the feel and scent of a long-unlaundered garments. Much like people today who aren't repulsed by the fact that our pet dogs don't shower every day, Mongols in medieval times never considered dogs unclean nor perceived themselves as filthy.

Far from being considered 'polluting' animals, shamanic dogs enjoyed close physical proximity with nomads. Although it cannot be definitively verified whether Mongols in the thirteenth century or earlier permitted their dogs to share *ger*s, both archaeological findings from the pre-Mongol period and historical sources from the Yuan period (1279-1368) shed light on this matter.

The Xiongnu (Hun), a pioneering confederation of nomadic tribes in Central Asia encompassing the ancestors of Mongols, thrived from the third century BCE to the late first century CE. They wielded significant political and military influence, shaping not only the region's history but also impacting the cultures of subsequent nomadic states. What is particularly relevant to our discussion is that burials from the Xiongnu period are notable for the inclusion of dogs alongside humans, a practice that persisted for centuries among later peoples until the rise of the Mongols in the thirteenth century under Genghis Khan.[12]

In contrast, only a few Mongol-era burials have been found to contain dog remains, and only one Yuan-period Mongol burial has been located which featured a clay figurine of a dog among other objects. This suggests that the practice of burying real dogs with humans became rare, with figurines possibly replacing live animals in these sites. If the shamanic Mongols and their ancestors had viewed dogs as impure or unworthy of sharing human habitat in life, it is unlikely they would have included dogs or their representations in human burials, intended to accompany their masters for eternity.

Another distinguishing feature of the Yuan dynasty, established by Genghis Khan's grandson Kubilai, is that it was during this time that Mongols began residing en masse in palaces and permanent buildings, emulating their Chinese subjects. Numerous poems and paintings from that era depict Mongols, especially the aristocracy, sharing their palaces and houses with their dogs,[13] once again indicating that Mongols didn't

12 Gonchigiin, *Nüüdelchdiin Nohoi*, *I Devter*.
13 Gonchigiin, *Nüüdelchdiin Nohoi*, *II Devter*.

view dogs as impure animals. Dogs came to be seen as impure following the Mongols' conversion to Buddhism.

(3) The transition of Mongol society from shamanism to Buddhism en masse in the sixteenth century was a watershed moment and had a profound impact on how nomads came to view both themselves and their dogs. Under shamanism, humans and animals enjoyed a harmonious coexistence and spiritual interconnectedness, with no inherent superiority of humans over animals. Dogs were revered as heavenly animals, serving as bridges between the spirit realm and humans.

However, when Buddhism elevated humans to a semi-divine status—just below bodhisattvas and Buddhas—the animal kingdom was correspondingly downgraded. In this transformation, dogs found themselves caught in the revolving wheels of Buddhist cosmology, recognized as the animals closest to humans in the endless cycle of reincarnation. According to these new beliefs, a living being must first be reborn as a dog before being reincarnated as a human. To borrow a metaphor from the movie industry, it would be akin to transitioning from an A-list celebrity to an extra in a B-grade, Groundhog Day-style film. This left dogs in an ambiguous position: viewed as superior to other animals, yet still inferior to humans.

As dogs came to be seen as possessing human-like qualities yet not being equal to humans, the term *nohoi* ('dog') began to be used as an insult, associated with mess, pollution, and inauspiciousness, as previously noted. Not only did Mongols stop burying dogs alongside humans, but calling someone a 'dog' or suggesting they possessed inferior canine traits implied that the individual was not considered fully human.

Imagine a Mongol market scene where a vendor, upon realizing that a customer is trying to haggle extensively, exclaims, 'Stop being such a dog about the price!' to which the customer quips, 'You also stop bitching about it!' Offended and angry, the vendor retaliates, 'Go away and get yourself shagged by a dog!' Little would the two realize that they're inadvertently perpetuating beliefs associating dogs with undesirable qualities. 'Getting oneself shagged by a dog!' (*nohoi chamaig gör d*öö) is the Mongolian equivalent of the English 'Fuck off!' and is a frequently heard phrase in Southern Mongolia, especially from the

foul mouths of middle-aged and older people. Just like any profanity, this phrase could be delivered in various ways. My paternal uncle, who once accused me of killing his goat by giving its castrated testicle to a camp dog, was excellent at its delivery. Much like Al Pacino's character Tony Montana from the movie *Scarface* (1983), who delivered his profanity-laden dialogue with diverse intonations and tones, my uncle, during his moments of frustration, anger, or boredom, would often utter 'Get yourself shagged by a dog!' to both himself and others with varying intonations and tones, emphasizing nuances in his mood. This phenomenon, where the canine is used as a derogatory term, however, is not unique to Mongolia but is widespread in many societies where dogs are perceived to have human-like qualities.

Unlike shamanism, Buddhism, as pointed out previously, is a fundamentally anti-sex religion due to its belief that carnal pleasure chains humans to the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*), leading to worldly misery and an unenlightened existence. Given a dog's unrestrained sex life, which began to be viewed negatively, canines also came to be seen as impure or polluting. As beings straddling the realms of humans and the supernatural, dogs were also considered dangerous, potentially bringing spiritual pollution from the realm of hungry spirits.

To distill the three points—related to 'uncontrolled sexuality', 'dirt', and 'spiritual pollution'—that contribute to the exclusion of dogs from *ger*s, it becomes apparent that the accusations leveled against dogs today, often presumed to have ancient origins, can be traced back to Buddhism, a relatively recent religion among the Mongols. One can infer that dogs were expelled from human habitats not because they behaved wrongly or in polluting ways, but because humans began to see dogs—as well as themselves—in a new light through the lens of Buddhism, which, in the case of dogs, was not very flattering. If a Mongol from the Yuan period were to appear today, he would be greatly surprised witnessing dogs being disparaged as impure creatures and kicked out of human dwellings by his descendants.

Once it became an established dogma that dogs are 'impure animals' and a hazard to keep within human dwellings, it was only a small step to impose further restrictions on them. Mongol groups implemented such restrictions in different ways. As mentioned earlier, in Western Mongolia, for example in Mönh-Hairhan *sum* (village) in Hovd

Province, a tradition exists that forbids dogs from living in proximity to Mönh-Hairhan Mount. This prohibition stems from a concern about displeasing the jealous *sabdag* ('spiritual guardian') of this sacred mount. Allegedly, this *sabdag* disapproves of impure animals running around and marking their territory. Consequently, nomadic households dwelling on the slopes of Mönh-Hairhan Mount abstain from keeping dogs altogether. In contrast, herders from Bulgan *sum* in Bayan-Ölgii Province, residing on the other side of the same mount, do keep dogs and do not buy into the belief in the *sabdag*'s aversion to dogs, despite worshipping and communicating with this deity as fervently as their counterparts from Mönh-Hairhan *sum*. This is one example of how cosmological elements change over time and how related groups differentiate among themselves by slightly modifying shared stories and practices.

Generally speaking, throughout history and across diverse societies, the concepts of purity and pollution have played pivotal roles in the subordination and exclusion of not only animals but entire human groups from places, positions, rituals, and activities deemed 'pure' or of 'high social status'. Thus, in the context of a patriarchal Mongol society, women found themselves relegated to an inferior status in comparison to men, primarily fueled by the notion that women are impure beings. Menstruating women, in particular, have been prohibited from engaging in various activities due to the fear that they might not only pollute those around but also incur the wrath of the gods. Even when not menstruating, women have been prohibited from ascending sacred mountains, participating in certain high-value rituals, or behaving in ways that could potentially belittle their husbands or elders. This systematic subordination of women illustrates a broader pattern: convincing society that certain groups of people or animals are sources of *pollution* becomes a powerful technology to maintain the subordination and exclusion of these groups. Given our natural inclination to avoid polluting substances, often accompanied by feelings of revulsion towards them, this method has been effectively employed throughout history to organize social hierarchies in nearly all societies.

Part II

The History of Human-Dog Relations

Before delving into the heart of the matter, I'd like to recount a true recent story, not a cosmological *bolson yavdal* one. This story involves two dogs—a young one and a middle-aged one—that developed a habit of attacking sheep.

A nomadic household adopted a young puppy that initially barked at the family's herd animals. However, this barking escalated into chasing, ultimately culminating in the young puppy taking the life of its first lamb victim. Despite the family's attempts to dissuade the destructive behavior through kicks and punishment, the puppy persisted. Filled with both guilt and frustration, the father of the family made the difficult decision to put the puppy down. However due to a belief that deems it inauspicious to kill a dog—a belief that extends to the rifle used for such purposes, as it is thought to become faulty during hunting—the father chose not to use his own rifle. Instead, he enlisted the help of an unconventional neighbor who paid no heed to such omens and promptly shot the culprit dead.

Several years later, the same family's middle-aged dog, previously loyal and protective of livestock, also began attacking the herd animals. Feeling betrayed and heartbroken, the family decided to sever their relations with the dog and get rid of it.

Reciprocity, a fundamental social principle among social species like humans, sustains friendships and relationships through a mutual exchange of support, favors, and kindness. Reciprocating positive actions reinforces trust and cultivates a resilient bond through a sense of obligation. The cessation of reciprocity severs this special bond. The reciprocity between dogs and nomads in Mongolia mirrors the reciprocity humans have with one another. Dogs support the nomads by guarding their camp and livestock and showing loyalty. In return, nomads support dogs with food, shelter, and affection, reinforcing the relationship over time. However, if a dog betrays the nomad's trust by attacking livestock, humans withdraw their support, favors, and love for the dog. In human relationships, such severance can be resolved by avoidance, but the

nomad-dog bond presents a dilemma because a nomad cannot simply ask the dog to leave the camp. The most commonly adopted solution nowadays is to physically sever the bond by killing the dog.

A Short Overview of the Dog in History

Let's ponder the time and manner in which humans and dogs might have first bonded. One of the oldest dog burials in Eurasia dates back to the late Pleistocene, an epoch that ended about 12,000 years ago.[14] However, dogs might have joined the human pack thousands of years earlier. Over millennia of cohabitation and interaction, humans and dogs co-evolved to communicate with each other so effectively that they not only shared the same camp in life but were also sometimes buried together for eternity in death, as will be discussed later.

Besides sharing eternal resting places with humans, dogs in their earthly existence served as loyal companions during hunting expeditions from early times on. Mongolia boasts an array of petroglyphs sites which were created through carving and painting with ocher. These petroglyphs reached their zenith during the Bronze and early Iron Ages, spanning from approximately 1500 to 500 BCE. Among these ancient artworks, Bichigtiin Am in Bayan-Hongor Province stands out as one of the most abundant and visually striking sites. These petroglyphs predominantly portray scenes of men using bows and arrows to hunt ibex and elk, often assisted by dogs.[15]

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, dogs feature in the earliest Mongol source, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, a thirteenth-century chronicle in which a heavenly dog plays an intimate role in the story of Alan Goa's pregnancy. It also notes that the baby Temüjin, the future world-conqueror Genghis Khan, was afraid of (other people's) dogs—a fear still common among Mongol children and grown-ups today, as dogs have been trained by their masters to attack strangers. The imperial annals suggest that dogs had the power to prophesy bad omens by barking 'in evil ways'.[16] In addition to their divinity, virility, and ferocity, dogs are extoled in *The Secret History of the Mongols* for their unwavering

14 Losey, 'Canids as persons'.
15 Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia*, 436.
16 *The Secret History of the Mongols* §66, §189.

loyalty. This loyalty is exemplified when Genghis Khan's four most devoted and formidable generals—Jebe, Kubilai Noyan,[17] Jelme, and Sübedei—are referred to as his 'four dogs'. Described as 'raised on human flesh' and 'shackled in chains',[18] they were likened to voracious predators, ceaselessly attacking their master's foes.

Dogs also played a practical role in Mongol society, guarding nomadic encampments, participating in hunting, and even courageously marching—as historical sources from the Yuan and Ilkhanate periods attest[19]—into military campaigns. During the era of empire-building, the Mongols were not only known for organizing grand hunting events with large numbers of dogs but also for demanding tributes from their vanquished peoples across Eurasia and beyond. Among these tributes, the most burdensome were *tangsug*s, or 'delicacies', which included hunting dogs, fine horses, falcons, and gold cloth, highlighting the Mongols' appreciation for both canines and luxury items.[20] Plano Carpini, who traveled to Mongol lands between 1245 and 1247, reported seeing 'ten greyhounds' at the Mongol court, brought by the envoys of a Sultan of India. He noted that these greyhounds were 'trained to sit on the back of a horse like leopards'.[21]

Marco Polo, another European who spent an extended period at the Mongol Yuan court, provides detailed insights into the role of dogs in hunting. He uses the example of Kubilai (1215-94), who indulged in elaborate hunting expeditions. According to Marco Polo, the Great Khan employed two 'masters of the hunt', brothers Bayan and Myangan, who were entrusted with organizing these imperial hunting endeavors and overseeing the imperial dog keepers:

> Each of these two brothers has ten thousand men under them controlling the dogs… And among these ten thousand there are two thousand of them who each has a great mastiff dog or two or more, so that they are very great multitudes.[22]

17 This is not Genghis Khan's grandson Kubilai, but Kubilai Noyan, who was a captain of a thousand (myangan).
18 *The Secret History of the Mongols* §195.
19 Gonchigiin, *Nüüdelchdiin Nohoi*, *II Devter*, 77, 78.
20 Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia*, 196.
21 Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 202.
22 Polo, *The Description of the World*, 228.

Following the establishment of the Mongol Empire, Mongols implemented a horse relay system known as *yam* that connected all corners of the expanding empire. The official organization of this system occurred during the reign of the second Grand Khan, Ögedei (1229-41), Genghis Khan's third son. The system comprised relay horse stations with attached households established every 28 miles. While horses were the primary animals used in these relays, in certain remote areas of Manchuria and Siberia, dog sled relays were employed.[23] It is likely that the Mongols adopted this practice from the indigenous populations. In the eyes of the Mongols, dogs thus held significance as both totemic animals and valuable working beasts, whether in guarding camps, hunting, or pulling sledges.

In many traditional societies, totemic or sacred animals are not only revered but are also sometimes used as sacrificial animals to gods or slain for utilitarian purposes, as in the Mongol case where dog's fur was used to make winter gowns, especially by the poor.[24] One shamanic rite involving dogs was recorded as having been performed during the Yuan dynasty. Carried out at the end of the year, the ritual consisted of shooting arrows at straw and grass models of people (symbolizing enemies) and dogs (their loyal companions), followed by chants of shamans.

But as history marched on, times changed. Following the fall of the Yuan dynasty in 1368, the Mongols returned to their ancestral land.[25] However, it did not take long for them to fragment among themselves and engage in bloody civil war. There is a saying that when the going gets tough, the tough get ritualistic. In ancient Mongol traditions, a unique oath-ritual was performed among warriors before battle, designed to strengthen their bond. This ritual involved sacrificial animals, including

23 For example, during the Mongol Yuan dynasty, around 1330, the Mongol dynasty maintained 1400 relay stations, of which 15 in Manchuria were dogsled relays equipped with 218 dogs. These dogsled post stations were used by tribute collectors. In the Golden Horde, another Mongol state established by Genghis Khan's grandson Batu, similar dogsled stations operated in Siberia. Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia*, 259, 342, 503.

24 Rubruck, *William of Rubruck's Account of the Mongols.*

25 According to *Erdeni-yin Tobchi* (*The Bejewelled Summary*, 1662) by Sagan Setsen, of 400,000 Mongols in the Yuan, 60,000 followed the last Yuan Emperor Togon Temür to Mongolia, and the remaining 340,000 remained in China. Krueger, *The Bejewelled Summary*, 86.

a male dog (symbolizing loyalty and divinity), a stallion (symbolizing divinity, speed, and endurance), and a bull (symbolizing strength), which were slain to demonstrate to the shamanic gods that if the oath-makers failed to keep their pledge of unconditional loyalty to one another, the gods should punish them, just as the warriors killed the sacrificial animals.[26] Symbolically, these animals represented the oath-takers themselves, but in a parallel dimension where they had failed to remain true to their oath. As the Mongols in the post-Yuan period found themselves embroiled in incessant civil war, bloody rituals like these, aimed at securing the favor of the gods, became increasingly prevalent. Just imagine the sight of cavalrymen arriving at the battlefield with a sacrificial dog, stallion, and bull—a spectacle that would have undoubtedly struck fear into the hearts of their adversaries!

In 1640, the temporarily-reunited Mongol groups proclaimed Buddhism as the state religion, at the expense of traditional shamanism, and introduced a new code of laws, the *Mongol-Oirat Regulations* which, among other things, forbade killing certain animals including nomads' furry companions that had been used in shamanic rituals.[27] The spirit of the *Mongol-Oirat Regulations*, including its dog-friendly rulings prohibiting the killing of canines, was reiterated in the *Halha Jirum* code of laws of the eighteenth century.[28]

But whatever the reason behind prohibiting the killing of canines in these two early Mongol codes (*Mongol-Oirat Regulations* and *Halha Jirum*), the real beneficiary was the dog, despite losing its elevated shamanic position. Not only was the dog's life protected by the law, but it also assimilated new Buddhist virtues alongside its ancient shamanic powers. It is worth noting that in subsequent legal codes of Mongolia, there is a conspicuous absence of any mention regarding the prohibition of killing dogs. This absence likely arose from the fact that people had abandoned this practice, making it unnecessary to explicitly forbid an act that had faded into obscurity. As previously mentioned, the legal ban on killing dogs became an inherent part of religious mythology and a taboo, which was only lifted in the socialist era.

26 Radhid ad-Din, *Sudryn Chuulgan*, 267.
27 Golstunskii, *Mongolo-Oiratskie Zakony 1640 Goda*, 93.
28 Zhamtsarano, *Khalkha Dzhirum*, 34.

Dogs Under the Qing Rule

After centuries of internal squabbles and civil wars in the post-Yuan era, sporadically interrupted by moments of peace and unity, the Mongols found themselves woven into the fabric of the expanding Manchu Qing Empire, centered in Beijing, following the Great Doloonuur Convention of 1691. This pivotal moment in Mongolia's history opened the floodgates to a wave of Chinese male migrants who poured into the country in such staggering numbers that, by 1918, Mongolia hosted 100,000 Chinese men as opposed to the local population of 645,000. Eighty percent of these Chinese belonged to the merchant class, while the remaining cohort comprised a colorful mosaic of laborers, artisans, farmers, officials, and professionals from diverse walks of life.[29]

Owing to the gender restrictions imposed by the Manchu Qing administration, Chinese women were prohibited from setting foot in Mongol territory. Consequently, these colonies of single Chinese men resembled and behaved like temporary guests at a lively party—complete with services rendered by women in the world's oldest profession—always planning to pack their bags and head back home to their families once they had filled their pockets with enough lucre, making room for the next wave of adventurers and fortune seekers.

These enterprising Chinese were the architects of trade, meticulously constructing a sprawling web of commerce that manifested in the form of shops, trading firms, brothels, and dining halls, which sprouted in nearly every settlement. Individual Chinese traders, fueled by unbridled ambition, traversed every nook and cranny of the vast country. Imagine them as the trailblazing pioneers of door-to-door sales, peddling their wares from one *ger* to the next. They did not do this alone. Embedded as integral cogs in the machinery of commerce were dogs that served as four-legged couriers in a world that had not yet discovered the convenience of telegrams.[30]

In the absence of a proper sanitation system, especially in settlements, dogs also played an essential role in maintaining cleanliness by feeding on human excrement, food leftovers, and remains from slaughtered animals. In this context, they functioned as four-legged sanitation

29 Maiskii, *Sovremennaya Mongoliya*, 70-72.
30 Lattimore, *The Desert Road to Turkestan*, 72.

workers. Urga, the capital, stands out as a case in point. The presence of roaming dog packs, coupled with the country's dry and cold climate, contributed to keeping the town relatively clean.

However, the responsibilities of Mongol mutts extended far beyond their humble role as messengers and reliable cleanup crew. Some dogs were destined for higher roles. During the imperial period, Mongols demanded hunting dogs as tributes from their vassals, but under the Manchu Qing dynasty, Mongols themselves began to offer hunting dogs as tribute to the Manchu Emperor[31] who adopted many practices from the Mongols.

Serving as guardians for camel caravans was not a new duty for dogs either; in fact, this duty dates all the way back to the thirteenth century when Mongols held sway over a vast portion of the Silk Road, an ancient highway bustling with camel caravan traffic protected by dogs.[32] During the era of the Manchu Qing dynasty, the entire trade operation in the territory of Mongolia, however, fell under the monopoly of Chinese firms who assumed the role of the caravan operators and kept the wheels of commerce turning.[33] Regardless of the period, these canine protectors were indispensable for caravans, defending against the threats of wild beasts and the mysterious shadows of unfamiliar travelers and ghosts.

The Dog's Role in Funerary Rites

The fear of death and responses to it are deeply personal experiences, yet they are profoundly influenced by cultural factors. Different cultures shape individual perspectives on death, leading to varied attitudes, coping mechanisms, and rituals. In Mongol society, particularly since the introduction of Buddhism in the sixteenth century, Buddhist concepts of karma and reincarnation have profoundly influenced views on life and the afterlife. Although Buddhism openly addresses death through religious liturgy, dances, and art displayed in monasteries, discussing or mentioning death in daily life is considered taboo because of a belief that this may hasten one's demise. When death does occur, cultural

31 Gonchigiin, *Nüüdelchdiin Nohoi*, *II Devter*, 81-95.
32 Ibid., 133-44.
33 Lattimore, *The Desert Road to Turkestan*, 69.

norms encourage restrained expressions of mourning, as excessive grief is thought to potentially harm the soul of the deceased.

Mongol funerary rites serve several purposes, including marking the individual's passing, aiding the soul of the deceased transition from the living world, purifying the relatives from spiritual pollution associated with death, and reestablishing the boundary between the realms of the living and the dead, which becomes unsettled upon someone's death. However, these rites evolve as society changes.

Dogs, as the closest companions to humans, have reflected changes in Mongol society, including the evolution of funerary rites. As these rituals have transformed over time, so too has the role of dogs within them. To understand the foundational principles of modern burials and their historical origins, we must look back at the sixteenth century.

During this period, with the spread of Buddhism among the Mongols, the practice of open-air burials gained popularity. In this tradition, the deceased are placed on the steppe, exposed to the elements and wildlife, including stray dogs. The speed at which the body is consumed by scavengers is believed to reflect the virtue of the deceased: a swift consumption indicates a virtuous life, while those deemed less virtuous face a slower rate or may even remain untouched by the scavengers.

Open-air funerals are typically overseen by monks, whose expertise is crucial for conducting the associated rituals. One of the monk's initial duties is to select an appropriate day and time for the funeral. Additionally, he must approve the direction in which the funeral procession should leave the *ger* and the path it should follow when returning after laying the deceased on the steppe. This practice is intended to confuse the soul of the deceased and prevent any malign spirits present during the funeral from following the procession back home. Throughout these stages, the monk recites mantras and performs various rituals to guide the departed soul on its journey to the afterlife. Once the monk's rituals are completed, the rest is left to dogs.

In pre-revolutionary Mongolia, open-air burials were not limited to rural areas; they also took place in bustling urban centers like Urga. These urban areas had designated open-air cemeteries on their outskirts, where residents laid their loved ones to rest. These locations were often inhabited by packs of feral dogs grown accustomed to a diet including human remains. Living in or around Urga, these dogs lacked socialization with humans, perceiving them as either threats or

potential meals. British explorer Beatrix Bulstrode made the following observation about the local dogs during her visit to Urga at the beginning of the twentieth century:

> A lasting impression of Urga is that of a city strewn with bones, and horrible, ghoulish, and terribly savage dogs prowling among them. You may count these dogs sometimes in hundreds about the refuse heaps that surround Urga. Often they may be seen silently gnawing, gnawing away at something which makes you shudder as you ride quickly past. One never ventures outside one's door unarmed, for in winter the dogs are very fierce with hunger, and in summer there is always danger of meeting a mad brute. Only a few months before we stayed there a young lama from the temple just outside our compound was torn to pieces by these pariah dogs. He was a fine strong young man, but had gone forth alone one winter's day and was without a weapon. A number of dogs attacked him and before anyone could respond to his cries they had dragged him away to a neighboring refuse heap and there torn him limb from limb.[34]

Mongols, however, did not perceive dogs and their cosmological role negatively. Even those critical of traditional ways of life, such as Natsagdorj Dashdorjiin (1906-37), one of the founding fathers of modern socialist Mongolian literature and an advocate for the abandonment of superstition and old practices, approached the connection between dogs and open-air burials with a melancholic contemplation. In his philosophical poem titled 'Eventually We Will All End Up Feeding Dogs' (1935), Natsagdorj penned these lines:

> What joy to live as a human being,
> On this earth, under the sun, we're seeing.
>
> How splendid to rejoice in gatherings bright,
> Growing up in health, a pure delight.
>
> How swiftly time passes, and nature shifts and turns,
> It's interesting to observe beauty as she grows old and yearns.
>
> How tragic to yield to illness' cold seize,
> Heart-wrenching to end up feeding the feral dogs in Northern Valley's breeze.[35]

34 Bulstrode, *A Tour in Mongolia*, 206
35 Dashdorjiin, *Zohioluud*, 143.

The practice of leaving a corpse for dogs and wildlife shares similarities with Tibetan culture, a connection not surprising. The sky burial, known as *jha-tor* in Tibet, is an ancient funerary ritual where the deceased person's body is placed in an open area, often on a mountaintop or high plateau, exposed to the sky, elements, and various scavengers including vultures, dogs, and other carrion eaters.[36] Before the ritual, the body is typically dismembered as an offering to these scavengers. This act symbolizes the belief that the deceased person's remains return to nature, becoming part of the ongoing cycle of life, highlighting the impermanence of life and the interconnectedness of all living beings with the natural world.

While sky burials in Tibet and open-air burials in Mongolia share similarities, these traditions emphasize different scavengers. In Tibetan sky burials, it is the vulture that is revered as a messenger of the gods, whereas in Mongol open-air burials it is the dog that is regarded as an animal closely connected to humans in the cycle of reincarnation.

It is worth noting that while Buddhism popularized open-air burials in Mongolia, it also preserved or introduced various other forms of burial practices. These included stupa burials, where the embalmed remains of monks were placed inside Buddhist stupas, as well as cremation, inhumation, and rock burials.

In pre-Buddhist Mongol society, a variety of burial practices existed. *The Secret History of the Mongols*, a primary historical source from that era, does not mention open-air burials in the steppe. Instead, it provides accounts of other burial methods, such as rock burials (involving placing corpses in elevated locations like rocks), water burials (submerging corpses in water), and inhumation (burying corpses underground). In certain circumstances, such as during military conflicts when transporting a corpse was impractical, decapitation of the deceased was customary. This decapitation allowed for a subsequent funerary rite in which the head symbolically represented the entire body.[37]

Shamanic burials from the imperial period differed from those of the later Buddhist period in another notable respect: the inclusion of dogs in burial sites. As mentioned earlier, a few shamanic burial sites include dogs interred alongside humans. Such burials have been found

36 Martin, 'On the cultural ecology of sky burial on the Himalayan Plateau'.

37 Amarmend, *Mongolyn Nuuts Tovchoon Dahi Yos Zanshil Zan Uiliyn Tailbar Toli*, 185-91.

at two inhumation sites in Chandmani Har Uul, Southern Mongolia and at one rock burial site in Har Uul, Western Mongolia. The origin of this tradition can be traced to the Early Bronze Age (4000 to 3000 BCE), when the oldest known burials in Mongolia containing both human and dog remains were discovered. However, the most significant findings of human burials accompanied by dogs are linked to the later Xiongnu period, as previously noted.

Within Mongolia's borders, twenty Xiongnu burials have been found so far showcasing dog remains interred alongside both adult humans and children. Considering the vast territory historically occupied by the Xiongnu, dog burials associated with this culture have also been found beyond the borders of present-day Mongolia, notably in areas such as the Baikal Lake region in Russia's Siberia.

Further excavations conducted between 1985-91 in the Jundu Mountains north of Beijing in China revealed burial sites belonging to pre-Xiongnu nomadic communities. These excavations unveiled 600 burials containing remains of livestock animals and dogs. Remarkably, a staggering 1448 pieces of dog bones were recovered from these sites.[38]

Successive nomadic states following the Xiongnu tradition continued the practice of dog burials. However, by the time the Mongol Empire was established in the thirteenth century, dog burials had become rare and certainly disappeared by the sixteenth.[39]

Dogs Under State Socialism

Up to this point, I have presented an account of the traditional perspective on dogs, closely intertwined with religious institutions and practices facilitated by occult specialists. Now, let's examine the fate of canines during the socialist era, a period marked by the suppression of religion and the dismissal of traditional cosmological beliefs as mere superstition.

Previously, I noted that human cultures are products of human imagination and that their primary function is not to represent reality accurately or seek the truth, but to connect and unite people. This applies to all cultures, whether they are underpinned by powerful religious institutions, nationalist ideologies, or Marxist-Leninist dogma. They are

38 Gonchigiin, *Nüüdelchdiin Nohoi*, *II Devter*, 70-85.
39 Ibid., 103-72.

all based on myths and fiction whose primary goal is to inspire people, unite them, and instill common values and goals. Seen in this light, communism may have suppressed institutionalized religion and its myths as the regime's primary adversary, but it never got rid of myths; it only replaced the old religious myths with new ones about building a paradise on earth populated with perfect humans.

In 1911, Mongolia declared independence from the Manchu Qing Dynasty, but the young Mongol theocracy soon faced invasions. In 1919, Chinese nationalist troops, driven by the myth of China's territorial integrity that encompassed Mongolia, occupied the country. Shortly afterward, the eccentric White Russian General Baron Ungern-Sternberg—also known as the 'Mad Baron' for his erratic behavior, extreme brutality, and mysticism—expelled the Chinese nationalists with the aim of restoring Mongolia's theocracy and using it as a springboard for anti-Bolshevik operations in the region. Ungern's actions were fueled by his fierce anti-Bolshevik stance and a mystical belief in Mongolia as a sacred battleground akin to the legendary Shambhala—a Buddhist kingdom symbolizing a utopian realm of spiritual purity where forces of good gather to resist moral and spiritual decay.[40] The Mad Baron's activities drew the Bolsheviks mad and prompted them to support Mongol revolutionaries in establishing a people's government and army. With substantial Bolshevik backing and pregnant with new revolutionary mythology, Mongol revolutionaries successfully delivered liberation to the country in 1921.

The rise to power of Bolshevik sympathizers in Mongolia led to a series of relentless yet highly effective measures aimed at overturning the existing social order. Shortly before the revolution, Mongolia boasted an astounding 750 monasteries. However, by the onset of 1940, not a single one remained operational. The monastic community had been disbanded, and many of its members found themselves behind bars or in even graver situations. Other religious practitioners, including shamans and astrologers who operated without formalized institutions, were not spared either; they, too, were forced underground by the atheist state.

One of the fundamental aims of communist dogma was ethno-engineering, intended to cultivate new, atheist, ideologically pure citizens

40 Palmer, *The Bloody White Baron.*

to populate the communist paradise. However, the regime, pathologically suspicious of ordinary people, never trusted their wisdom or needs. It firmly believed it knew what was best for the people, whether they liked it or not. Despite its idealistic beginnings, the revolution soon began to devour its own children, with rival factions within the Party and government vying for control, and the regime resorted to an orgy of senseless violence, exterminating its own people. This reached its climax during a dark period from late 1937 to mid-1939, during which approximately 36,000 Mongol citizens, half of whom were monks, were executed in cold blood.[41] Concurrent with the Stalinist Great Purges in the Soviet Union, these mass executions were predominantly based on fabricated counter-revolutionary charges, often involving torture. All these measures were taken in a fanatical pursuit of the grand myth that the country could create an earthly paradise by cleansing society of any remnants of the old regime's beliefs and practices. In other words, representatives of the old regime, including monks, aristocracy, merchants, and anyone who did not believe in the communist myth, were cast not only as sources of pollution but also as obstacles to social evolution.

Armed with new myths and knowledge and motivated by anti-Buddhist ideology, the People's Revolutionary Party initiated a broader cultural campaign known as *soyolyn dovtolgoon*. This campaign aimed to eradicate superstition while simultaneously improving sanitation, promoting secular education, and spreading a socialist worldview among the population. Within this context, revolutionaries banned open-air burials and viewed dogs, particularly strays, as potential carriers of zoonotic diseases such as rabies, ringworm, brucellosis, and others. While Buddhist dogma primarily regarded dogs as spiritually impure beings, socialist dogma asserted that dogs were contagious biological species, with mouths teeming with harmful bacteria. Thus, the state embarked on a mission to exterminate dogs in the name of public health. Between 1950 and 1960, a series of dog-killing campaigns were carried out, resulting in a staggering decline in their numbers. In the 1920s, the estimated canine population ranged from 200,000 to 300,000. However, by the end of these decade-long campaigns, these numbers had plummeted to a mere 10,000 to 20,000, according to

41 Kaplonski, *The Lama Question*.

some sources.[42] Unlike the mass executions under 'Mongolia's Stalin', Choibalsan, which ceased in the late 1930s with the threat dissipating after the dictator's death in 1952, the dog-hunting operations continued throughout the socialist era, albeit not to the same extent.

While the state's dog-hunting campaigns were framed as a public health measure, they inadvertently intersected with Mongolia's deep-rooted hunting traditions. Unlike these mass exterminations driven by socialist ideology, traditional hunting had long been a respected practice, embedded in Mongolia's cultural fabric. Traditionally, hunting has been a predominantly male pursuit, closely linked to practical endeavors such as procuring food, protecting livestock from predators, and fostering camaraderie among fellow hunters. Beyond these practicalities, hunting was also viewed as a romantic adventure, where a hunter could uplift his spirits, sharpen his manly skills, and sing melancholic songs of a distant beloved. This sentiment is beautifully expressed in the popular 'Hunter's Song', composed by the renowned writer Damdinsüren Tsendiin (1908–86), who drew inspiration from folk motifs. This song can be performed with the techniques of throat singing, where the singer generates two pitches simultaneously—both high and low—mimicking sounds from nature. In this way, the sentimental lyrics become part of the natural world, enveloped by the sounds of wind, water, or birds chirping:

> Many-colored flowers, blooming
> On Northern Mountain slopes,
> Are beautiful;
> My dearest, sweet girl,
> You are more beautiful than they.
>
> Brightly-colored flowers, thriving
> On Southern Mountain slopes,
> Are beautiful;
> My beloved, my girl,
> You are more beautiful than they.
>
> Many antlered deer, wandering
> On Hangai slopes,
> Are beautiful;
> My sweet girl, lovely girl,
> You are more beautiful than they.

42 Terbish, 'The Mongolian dog', 152.

Despite this traditional image, the socialist-era dog-hunter was far from the romanticized figure one might expect. It was incomprehensible for many, even those deeply enchanted by state ideology, to imagine hunters serenading love songs while slaughtering stray dogs in the dozens. The populace at large could not perceive the dog-hunters as anything but lowly, albeit necessary, killers. The childhood memories of many people from my generation, or those older than me who grew up in socialist Mongolia, include witnessing periodic dog-killing campaigns. During these campaigns, state-appointed hunters shot dogs dead and callously broke the necks of whining puppies, all before horrified onlookers.

With no religious specialists left to protect and impose knowledge about the disrupted occult order, dogs were stripped of their spiritual significance, especially in urban areas that were closely monitored by the state. As a result, people's apprehension about mistreating them waned. Growing up in an environment marked by atheism and an anti-sex ideology, and influenced by the brutal tactics exhibited by state-funded dog hunters, many teenagers and children engaged in acts of violence against dogs, often targeting stray or mating dogs in particular.

Anthropologists have extensively studied how cultures worldwide are in a perpetual state of change. Every culture harbors inherent contradictions that give rise to transformation, innovation, and exceptions. A general rule of thumb suggests that the more utopian and idealistic a culture or society appears on the surface, the more concealed contradictions it tends to harbor. Contrary to the image it projected, socialist Mongolia never exerted complete control over the population. Despite its professed image, the People's Revolutionary Party never held complete sway over the minds and hearts of the toilers and herders.

Much like certain animals that, when confronted by rivals, inflate themselves to appear larger and more intimidating than they truly are, the Party projected an image of omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience. Especially in remote regions where the Party's influence was limited and ideological indoctrination remained partial, many individuals felt little pressure to conform to politically correct behaviors and worldviews. For instance, despite being banned, people in the farthest corners of the countryside continued to practice open-air burials up until the 1960s, in which dogs retained their cosmological role of disposing of human remains. When their dogs passed away,

many herders continued to place a piece of fat or ghee butter in the dog's mouth and cut off their tails as part of the old belief.

Previously, I discussed how in traditional societies like Mongolia, the concepts of culture, religion, and cosmology are intertwined, similar to Mexican nesting dolls where smaller figurines fit into larger ones. Each layer reflects elements of Mexican folklore, historical themes, and more. Consequently, removing one element inevitably impacts the others. In the case of socialist Mongolia, the state sought to remove Buddhism from the equation, surgically replacing it with a political ideology imported from the Soviet Union, while also attempting to alter aspects of national culture through a 'cultural campaign'. However, these efforts did not yield the clean results the state had anticipated. Not only did the state fail to eradicate Buddhism, but it also introduced new communist myths that coexisted with the cosmological thinking of the population. As a result, nomads continued to secretly view dogs through the lens of cosmological beliefs.

This coexistence of new and old beliefs and myths allowed a broader pattern where taboos and superstitions continued to be observed on a daily basis by socialist citizens. Here is a shortened list of such taboos: holding ones' arms behind the back, resting one's jaw on the hand, crossing one's arms, lifting legs upwards to the sky, spitting into fire, whistling inside the house or *ger*, washing hair after sunset, leaning against the door, singing or crying in bed, and discarding nails and cut hair on the ground. If Mongol citizens were unwilling to relinquish these and many similar superstitions from their daily lives, there was no real chance for the atheist state to fully control the people.

However, this does not mean that the phenomenon of socialist non-conformism inherently aimed to subvert the regime, nor did those who practiced forbidden rituals or followed taboos in daily life necessarily desire the overthrow of the state. On the contrary, socialist Mongol culture was a testament to the simultaneous existence of popular loyalty and resistance within the system, as was the case in other socialist countries. Socialist citizens displayed a remarkable capacity to adapt to the demands placed upon them for survival.

My father was one of many citizens who embodied this duality. As a loyal member of the People's Revolutionary Party, he diligently studied books on dialectical materialism, worshipped the Founding Fathers of

the communist movement, and believed in the Party's myth of building an earthly paradise in Mongolia. Simultaneously, as a devout Buddhist, he conducted Buddhist rituals at home, recited mantras, performed simple Buddhist ceremonies, adhered to many daily taboos, and was a fan of folk medicine.

Sharik the Dog

Before continuing with the topic of the treatment of dogs in socialist Mongolia, I wish to share the story of one particular dog, who serves as an example of my father's belief in folk medicine involving dogs.

During my early teens, I had the misfortune of encountering a heap of white industrial fuel waste that had been dumped alongside the railway, which illustrated the authorities' disregard for the health and safety of the people. I mistook it for a pile of sand and joyously ran into the middle of it, only to realize what it really was, screaming in painful agony. As a result, both of my legs suffered severe burns, and I spent a couple of months unable to walk. My treatment regimen involved visits to a modern socialist hospital for dressing changes, but it was complemented by a folk remedy that my father administered at home. To carry out this alternative treatment, we enlisted the help of a male mongrel that lived outside our apartment block, whom I fed and played with. In fact, I had known the mongrel from its puppyhood—when it was just a few days old, my siblings and I sheltered it, along with other pups from its litter, in our flat during a dog hunting campaign. Due to its yellow fur and ball-like complexion, we named it Sharik, the Russian word for 'ball'. As Sharik grew up, it became a yard dog, treating our apartment block and its vicinity as its territory by marking it through urination, chasing away other dogs, and playing with the local children. When my father decided that I needed a traditional treatment involving dog's blood, Sharik was the obvious choice. Using scissors, my father carefully cut Sharik's ears, collecting the blood in a cup. He then applied this blood to my wounds, reciting Buddhist mantras during the process. After several sessions, the treatment concluded, and I began to recover. Sharik, who played a crucial role in this folk remedy, became a possessor of ears drooping like a mop.

After donating blood for my treatment, Sharik assumed a new role as caretaker for our youngest baby brother. Diligently, it guarded our brother's stroller, standing watchful and protective. Despite its services, our father, a deeply traditional man, never let Sharik inside our flat, though I would sneak the dog in whenever my parents were out. The only other time Sharik was allowed into my father's office was during another round of a dog-killing campaign, when it was wounded in the head and lost its right eye. My father and I nursed Sharik back to health. In order to protect Sharik from future threats, my father made a crucial decision: he sent Sharik to live with his elder sister in the administrative center of Dundgobi Province in Southern Mongolia. In retrospect, it was a wise decision, as all of Sharik's siblings who stayed behind were killed one by one in consecutive dog-killing campaigns, leaving Sharik as the only survivor from its litter. In Dundgobi Province, Sharik endeared itself to my aunt's family, becoming their cherished companion and protector of their *ger* for several years until it was tragically struck by a car on its right side, where the poor dog had lost eyesight. One of my aunt's sons took Sharik to the countryside, where he performed the final ritual owed to Sharik by his family—cutting its tail and placing it beneath the head as a symbolic pillow for its next reincarnation as a human.

Dogs, Ghosts, and Socialism

My father also cut the tails off dead dogs. I witnessed him doing this several times after dog-killing campaigns. After cutting the tail, he would send the carcass to his elder sister in Dundgobi Province, who had adopted Sharik. One of her other sons suffered from a respiratory disease. In Mongol folk medicine, dog meat is believed to be beneficial for respiratory conditions like tuberculosis, bronchitis, and pneumonia. After receiving the meat, my father's sister would prepare food, usually dumplings, in an attempt to cure her son. However, despite consuming numerous dogs, his condition never improved.

From these examples, it should be evident that my father also believed in ghosts, omens, wrathful places, and the afterlife just as strongly as he believed in the communist myths about perfect humans, social evolution culminating in communism, and the power of Lenin's tomb. He was

also an avid listener and storyteller of *bolson yavdal* tales, and he saw no contradiction in embracing seemingly opposing worldviews. Similar to many members of his extended family, with whom I was well acquainted, my father possessed the ability to compartmentalize his religiosity from his communist convictions. In social sciences and psychology, this cognitive approach is also referred to as 'cognitive dissonance', where individuals simultaneously accept two or more mutually contradictory beliefs or behaviors as valid. While this might be perceived as a failure of human reasoning, cognitive dissonance should, in reality, be celebrated as one of the most crucial strengths of human cognition. Not only does it help individuals to stay sane, but it also enables us to sustain societies and cultures that are inherently self-contradictory.

Considering the circumstances, it is understandable that many dogs in Mongolia continued to receive traditional treatments from socialist families who believed in ghosts, reincarnation, and the supernatural. These traditional views toward dogs were more pronounced in rural areas, where herders were more committed to traditional values compared to their urban counterparts. This divergence in attitudes and practices not only reflected the urban-rural divide but also underscored generational differences, with the older generation adhering to a more traditional lifestyle and the younger generation embracing new communist ideals.

Factors such as social status, geographical location, and personal aspirations played significant roles in shaping how people perceived and treated animals, even within a supposedly classless, egalitarian society like socialist Mongolia. In this society, there was no official distinction between the rich and the poor, no ideological differentiation between the urban and the rural, and everyone was equal when they pledged their unwavering loyalty to the communist cause. If we were to peel back this façade, in urban areas, including Ulaanbaatar, a majority of citizens resided in traditional *ger*s in proletarian neighborhoods. These households, characterized by limited resources, educational opportunities, and patriotic ambitions compared to their better-off counterparts in more upscale apartment blocks, typically kept one dog for purely utilitarian purposes like protection from thieves. In fact, theft was just one item on a long list of things that were not even supposed to exist in a proletarian paradise but nevertheless persisted.

This non-comprehensive list included black markets, prostitution, corruption, rampant alcoholism, income inequality, oppressive bureaucracy, shortages of consumer goods, dissent and opposition, political repression, and economic inefficiencies. Rather than grabbing the bull by the horns, the socialist state often chose to sweep this extensive array of embarrassing issues under the rug, maintaining the façade that they did not exist. As a result, dogs in these downscale *ger* neighborhoods were not pampered pets but rather served as walking alarm systems against thieves and intruders, always on high alert and often just as hungry and angry.

Yet, it is important to highlight that not all urban dogs, whose treatment was heavily influenced by state ideology, endured hardships during this period. The post-World War II era marked a period of rapid urbanization in Mongolia, increased cultural exchange with the Soviet Union, and the arrival of Soviet specialists en masse who brought their pets with them. These developments prompted young, cosmopolitan Mongol families, often educated in the Soviet Union and enjoying more spacious apartments and financial resources, to welcome dogs into their modern, secular households. In doing so, they copied the behaviors of Soviet specialists, who were not only respected for their technical expertise but also seen as cultural trendsetters. Having pets at home became a hallmark of being 'cultured', 'sophisticated', and 'atheistic'. Socialist Mongol culture among these elites in Ulaanbaatar was a Soviet copycat. These lucky dogs now enjoyed lives akin to those of Party officials, without any need to aspire to reincarnate as humans in their subsequent lives. They shared living spaces with humans, dozed off in rooms warmed by centralized heating, dined on cooked meat, bathed in running water, reveled in affectionate kisses from their owners, and even had the privilege of tasting divine ghee butter— activities that would have been utterly unimaginable just a few decades earlier.

State socialism also placed a strong emphasis on the value of collective, productive labor, and loyalty to the Party, demanding that every citizen be dedicated to the communist cause and contribute according to their abilities. This principle extended to a degree to working dogs as well. The practice of employing dogs as working animals was nothing new in Mongolia, as their historical roles as message carriers and caravan alarm systems dated back to the pre-revolutionary era. However, it was

during the socialist period that specific breeds, most notably the German Shepherd, gained widespread recognition for their roles in the security and military sectors, including the people's police, national prisons, and armed forces.

To lionize military dogs and showcase their contribution to safeguarding the socialist Motherland, the state organized *Public Dog Shows* starting in 1963, which continued throughout the socialist period. These shows served as a platform to celebrate the vital contributions of these canines and their human handlers to the collective welfare and safety of the nation.[43] Many organizations involved in state security and policing proudly displayed propagandic paintings at their entrances depicting patriotic servicemen alongside their loyal dogs. Among these professions closely tied to security, the most clandestine, indoctrinated, murderous, and feared was that of the secret police. Their roles encompassed suppressing dissent, instilling fear in the population, keeping an eye on the country's moral climate, and counteracting foreign ideology. Under the leadership of 'Mongolia's Stalin', Choibalsan, the secret police became the primary organization responsible for carrying out tortures and mass executions modelled after the Soviet Union's Great Purges. It was no coincidence that, as a group doggedly loyal to the country's leadership and perceived as constantly poking their noses around to make a kill, they were despised and commonly referred to by the populace as 'dogs', a tag that endures to this day.

State of Dogs After State Socialism

Mongolia's sagacious leadership held an unwavering belief throughout the socialist era that the gravest threat to their cherished socialism stemmed from nefarious Western imperialists and their minions. Little did they know that they were barking up the wrong tree. The mortal danger they faced did not emerge from foreign adversaries but from the very beating heart of the communist world—the Kremlin itself.

While initially planned as a quick restructuring of the centralized socialist system, *perestroika*, initiated by the country's leader Mikhail Gorbachev, quickly spiraled out of control, paralyzing the entire system

43 Shürhüü, *Mongol Ulsyn Tsagdaagiin Erelch Nohoin Albany Tüüh.*

and hastening its demise in the Soviet Union. This reverberated across the entire socialist bloc, including Mongolia, opening the doors to a resurgence of traditional ideas and practices. In Mongolia, leading this revival were nationalists and religious specialists who had emerged from the underground, closely followed by dogs, whose spiritual significance experienced a renaissance of its own.

Amidst the post-socialist chaos and against the backdrop of a religious revival, in 1998, a documentary film titled *State of Dogs* (*Nohoin Oron*) was screened in cinemas. This groundbreaking creation garnered international recognition, winning two dozen prestigious film awards. However, it was received less favorably in Mongolia, where many patriotic viewers felt the film portrayed the country in a denigrating light.

Set against the haunting backdrop of post-socialist Ulaanbaatar, the film tells the heart-wrenching story of Basar, a dog slain in cold blood by a dog hunter. In the wake of its death, Basar embarks on a roller-coaster journey through the maze of its own memories, seemingly uninterested in progressing to a human life.

As Basar steps through the threshold into the afterworld and embarks on a chaotic journey through the maze of its memories—leaping back and forth between the realms of the dead and the living—the ambiguous conclusion of the dog's soul's odyssey coincides with another event: the birth of a baby. This follows a striking scene in which a female contortionist twists and bends her body into extraordinary positions. This convergence raises three compelling possibilities for viewers to ponder.

Firstly, Basar's soul may have ultimately resolved to reincarnate as a human being (a message the filmmakers described as their goal in interviews). Alternatively, the film's surrealistic narrative might suggest that there is no intrinsic link between Basar's passing and the birth of the baby, with the dog's death symbolizing the end of state socialism and the birth of the child representing the emergence of a new post-socialist society. However, the third interpretation, the most intriguing of all, proposes a departure from convention. In this interpretation, Basar's journey culminates in a decision that defies norms: disinterested in embracing human life, the dog opts not to be reborn as a human.

In the last interpretation of the film's conclusion, Basar's choice not to return to post-socialist Mongolia can be perceived as a poignant

commentary on the devaluation of human life during an era when the country grappled with a profound economic, social, and identity crisis, marked by widespread poverty, soaring unemployment, and an escalating issue of alcohol abuse and general violence. This raised a thought-provoking question: Was this human existence truly superior to that of a dog? Many Mongols, myself included, interpreted the film in this pessimistic manner.

To offer a glimpse into life during the early 1990s, let me share a personal experience. During that period, Mongolia grappled with unprecedented food shortages and rationing. One summer, during my teenage years, I visited my paternal aunt and her family in Dundgobi Province—a place I had often frequented, not least because I was always eager to see Sharik the dog. Hosting guests, even relatives, was a significant burden for everyone. My hosts, accustomed to having just one meal a day, left me eagerly anticipating that single daily meal. To bridge the gap between morning tea and a modest dinner, I began visiting the local dining hall every noon, where very few could afford to dine out. I kept my visits a secret, as my hosts playfully teased me, believing I managed well on their meager offerings. That summer, my aunt's family openly increased their dinner portion only when they slaughtered a sheep. They consumed the meat themselves but sold the sheep's intestines to a man named Mr. Muunohoi (meaning 'Bad Dog'), who had a large family of seven or eight young, hungry mouths to feed. With melancholic, mischievous eyes and a big smile infused with angelic charm that lit up his face, Mr. Bad Dog must have been a good-looking man in his youth, somewhat resembling the British actor Hugh Grant. Grant, among his accomplishments, as many would know, made headlines in 1995 when he was arrested in Los Angeles at the height of his fame for engaging in sexual activity with a prostitute in a car in a residential area. In retrospect, when I saw Mr. Bad Dog in the early 1990s, he resembled the Hugh Grant of the 2020s, who, having developed deep facial wrinkles recently, raised many eyebrows by jokingly calling himself 'basically a scrotum' onstage at the 2023 Oscars. Unlike Hugh Grant, Mr. Bad Dog could never afford to purchase lean meat, and local families sold him the less expensive intestines as a gesture of support for his struggling family. While most families lived from hand to mouth, every neighborhood had their own Mr. 'Bad Dog',

who were even worse off. So, let me reiterate a question that was in the minds of many: Was it worth it for any dead dog to reincarnate into a human with the possibility of becoming a Mr. Bad Dog or Mrs. Single-Meal-A-Day in its next life? If only a few years ago, most Mongols had proudly believed they were living in an earthly paradise for toilers and herders on the steppes, it was unimaginable that they would now find themselves eking out an existence in the desolate State of Dogs.

The film was produced during a period when Mongolia had overcome some of the most challenging years of its post-socialist transition but was still caught in the space between historical epochs. It was also a time when the country embarked on a mission to revive its pre-revolutionary customs, notably the practice of open-air burials resurrected in certain remote parts of Mongolia, including Western Mongolia. In contrast to pre-revolutionary times, in post-socialist Mongolia, dogs were no longer designated as human corpse scavengers. Many nomadic families who embraced this traditional burial practice laid their loved ones to rest far from human settlements, ensuring that no dogs, whether stray or those living in nomadic camps, could access these burial grounds. The documentary film, while not delving into all the intricacies of these developments, subtly hinted at broader transformations by showcasing people's open acknowledgement of the dog's spirituality.

What made the film truly exceptional, in my view, was its skillful use of allusion. It artfully raised yet another profound question without explicitly stating it: Would the dog killer face supernatural consequences for his actions? This question held significant weight, given the resurgence of *bolson yavdal* stories linking misfortune to dog killings during that era. Remarkably, the film refrained from directly addressing this question, allowing viewers the space to reflect and form their own interpretations.

Resurging Beliefs and Stray Dog Management

The 1990s was a time when the state's ability to consistently fund stray dog-hunting operations was severely limited, leading to a proliferation of the canine population across the country. However, since the mid-2000s, with an improving economy, these operations have resumed uninterrupted. Although many people continue mistreating dogs, a

legacy of the socialist past, the resurgence of fear surrounding actual dog killings has the potential to disrupt them. For instance, the municipality of Darhan, a town with a population of around 75,000 people, found itself in a situation where it struggled to find enough local individuals willing to carry out stray dog control measures, even when offered payment. The municipality offered a generous MNT 5000 (USD 4) for each dog killed, while the average monthly salary for civil servants was MNT 300,000 (USD 250). To address this 'pest control' problem, the town had to invite a dog-hunting brigade from Ulaanbaatar, making headlines in 2011. In Ulaanbaatar itself, a city with a population of roughly two million, the municipality employed eleven contracted dog hunters in 2012. These hunters, self-styled as 'dog executioners', claimed to have exterminated a staggering 69,000 stray dogs in the capital in 2012 alone, though this number was likely inflated.

Ulaanbaatar is unique in the region because approximately half of its residents live in nomadic *ger* districts, lacking streetlights and resembling labyrinths, which provide ideal breeding grounds and hiding places for stray dogs. Today, the city municipality receives support from private dog-hunting firms bearing ominous or grandiose names like Bazalt Negdel ('Squeeze Cooperative') and Mönhbuyan Orgil ('Eternal Blessing Summit'). These firms have stepped in, motivated both by financial incentives[44] and a sense of patriotic duty. In the first half of 2023, city authorities reported culling 29,671 stray dogs and cats combined, a more realistic number.

As of 2023, an estimated 160,000 stray dogs roam Ulaanbaatar, a stark contrast to the 48,128 registered home-owned pets. Around 70 percent of these strays inhabit *ger* districts, with 20-25 percent in industrial and commercial areas, and the rest scattered across high-rise districts. This sizable population of stray dogs, surviving on discarded waste and uncollected garbage, highlights the severity of the problem. Despite government-led dog control campaigns, the stray dog population continues to increase, primarily because the general populace is unwilling to resort to killing.

The presence of a large number of strays has strained the relationship between dogs and humans. Every year, hundreds of people fall victim

44 In 2013, the fee for each dog culled was raised to MNT 7500; in 2016, it increased to MNT 12,000; and by 2023, it had reached a further MNT 24,000.

to dog attacks. In 2021, Ulaanbaatar alone recorded 1421 dog bites, including 266 cases involving children aged five to nine. Although there have been extensive dog culling efforts nationwide, the number of serious misfortunes linked to dog killings, as recounted in *bolson yavdal* stories, remains relatively low. This disparity can be attributed to the fact that these campaigns are orchestrated by the faceless state with the assistance of a handful of hunters. The main characters in such stories are often dog hunters themselves, drivers involved in accidents with dogs but who didn't undergo the necessary purification rituals, or foreigners unfamiliar with Mongol ancestral wisdom. Acts like beating or kicking stray dogs in self-defense are not perceived as sins or offenses, resulting in a scarcity of stories depicting suffering due to self-defense actions against dogs.

Here is a relevant *bolson yavdal* story that reportedly unfolded in the early 1990s in Töv Province of Central Mongolia. In a certain locale, there lived an abandoned female dog. During a recent operation, the dog hunters, known for their ruthless methods, subjected the bitch to a barrage of gunshots, stabbings, and even skinning. Yet, the cunning canine miraculously survived and thrived, much like the protagonist Sarah Connor in the movie *Terminator*, who escapes the relentless pursuit of a killer machine played by Arnold Schwarzenegger. The bitch's astonishing display of survival endowed her with an aura of supernatural power and invincibility, earning her a place of reverence among the local elders. Whenever they witnessed the bitch's presence, the elders would ritually offer her a libation of milk as if to a deity. The bitch, now considered divine, roamed around freely, occasionally playing with other dogs and even copulating with wolves at will. Given the situation, none of the local residents dared to harm or interfere with this extraordinary canine, except for a newly arrived Chinese man with a peculiar culinary taste. He saw an opportunity to satisfy his appetite by partaking of the exotic, 'undead' dog's meat. The Chinese man was seen walking down the street, quite pleased with himself, much like a cat that had swallowed a canary. However, soon he became uneasy and restless, like a cat on a hot tin roof. Upon his return to Ulaanbaatar, the man was subjected to divine retribution and began exhibiting even more erratic behavior, including barking and growling like a dog. It wasn't long before he found himself in an asylum after returning to his homeland in China. As for the survivor bitch, locals observed her casually sniffing

and urinating on the vegetable plot of the Chinese man, mere days after she had apparently been served as a hotdog on his plate.

In this *bolson yavdal*, a remarkable transformation unfolds as an abandoned and mistreated bitch triumphs over adversities, rising to a divine status. Yet, a crucial message of this moral tale is that not only are those who harm dogs punished, but it also sheds light on the shaggy-dog stories that many Mongols are willing to accept at face value. Belief in *bolson yavdal* stories, though seemingly illogical to some, often originates from deeply personal experiences. Growing up in or being exposed to a religious environment lays the foundation for accepting the existence of miraculous beings and supernatural powers. This upbringing provides comfort and explanations, rendering tales of divine canines and extraordinary beings entirely plausible as one matures.

When someone has faith in miracles, divine beings, and supernatural occurrences, it becomes less psychologically challenging for them to accept less peculiar nationalistic myths, such as a nation's divine destiny, spiritual superiority, chosenness, and the purity of nationalist bloodlines. In fact, the stronger one's belief in miracles and cosmic fate, the more likely they are to embrace toxic nationalism. Historically, societies dominated by religious institutions often fostered a sense of exceptionalism, believing in their superiority and the exclusivity of their way of life. Notably, some modern secular societies, such as the Soviet Union and socialist Mongolia, mirrored this mindset due to their adherence to totalitarian ideology (I'll revisit the subjects of Leninism-Stalinism in Chapter 3). In post-socialist Mongolia, where efforts to instill democratic values coexist with the resurgence of religious dogmatism and idealization of its socialist past, a fertile ground has emerged for toxic nationalism to thrive, a topic we delve into next.

Nationalism and Xenophobia in Democracy

In Mongolia, as in many post-socialist states, the collapse of state socialism led to a complex resurgence of nationalism. This phenomenon, though democratic in its resistance against authoritarianism and its myths, was also deeply conservative, aiming to revive pre-socialist customs and myths. This duality created a contradiction: the state, while ostensibly championing democratic principles, simultaneously fostered

toxic ethno-nationalism and intolerance toward cultural diversity, falsely attributing these values to pre-socialist Mongolia. This stark contradiction undermined the democratic ideals it claimed to uphold.

One significant challenge that Mongolia's democratic aspirations face is the pervasive xenophobia, particularly Sinophobia—a fear and suspicion of the Chinese that often borders on hatred—which permeates various sectors of society, including nationalists, politicians, academics, and the general populace. This xenophobic sentiment often stems from a myth portraying the Chinese as primordial adversaries aiming to exploit and subjugate Mongolia. However, contemporary Sinophobia, whereby all Chinese are regarded as a monolithic mass plotting to undermine Mongolia, did not emerge from prehistoric origins, as nationalists claim, but has a more recent and nuanced genealogy.

To recount the origins of modern nationalism in a nutshell: the Mongol aristocracy long considered China a part of Greater Mongolia, after losing control of it in 1368. After subsequently submitting to the Manchu Qing in 1691, Mongolia became part of a larger empire that encompassed China, Tibet, and Xinjiang. Within the empire, Mongolia remained a separate administrative region, maintaining relative autonomy in internal affairs, which allowed traditional ways of life to continue uninterrupted. To support this, restrictions on movement across the Mongolia-China border kept the Mongols largely segregated from the rest of China. However, in the early twentieth century, the Qing government reversed this policy, permitting unrestricted Chinese settlement in Mongolia. This alarmed Mongol elites who were concerned about their pastureland and way of life, which were crucial for their power and legitimacy. Despite grievances against rapacious Chinese merchants, Mongols generally did not view ordinary Chinese as inherently malicious, inferior, greedy, or 'stinky'. Notably, unrestricted Chinese settlement never materialized, and the Qing collapsed in 1912.

During the first half of the socialist era, Mongolia actively fostered friendship with its southern neighbor, communist China, promoting proletarian internationalism despite occasional bilateral strains. However, this policy changed during the Sino-Soviet rift in the 1960s. Anxious to tiptoe the official Soviet line, Mongolian authorities vilified China and its people as 'revisionist' and traitors to the true spirit of communism as envisioned by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

As a result, Soviet troops were stationed in Mongolia to protect the country from a potential Chinese aggression.

The term Pavlovian conditioning (or classical conditioning) comes from the famous experiments of Russian scientist Ivan Pavlov, who discovered that dogs could be taught to associate a neutral sound, like a bell, with the arrival of food. Before long, the dogs in his lab started salivating at the sound of the bell alone, without any food in sight. Humans aren't all that different. Pavlovian conditioning plays a major role in how we pick up social behaviors and form emotional responses, whether positive or negative. During the Soviet era, Mongols, exposed to a steady stream of Soviet propaganda, began associating the Chinese with negative ideas. Just like Pavlov's dogs responded to bells, Mongols were led through repeated messages to develop negative stereotypes about China and its people.

Although anti-Chinese sentiments and stereotypes simmered beneath the surface like a distant Pavlovian bell during the socialist era, they blared uncontrollably like a fire alarm after the collapse of state socialism. While the new democratic government tried to turn down the volume, attempting to improve economic and political relations with China, the newly liberated nationalist media acted like a deafening loudspeaker, amplifying these negative feelings. China's increasing regional posturing, coupled with Mongolia's growing economic dependence on China, has only intensified Sinophobia, adding fuel to the fire.

The Mongols' apprehension toward China, however, is not merely a product of imagination, or Pavlovian-type conditioning, or false memories implanted by Soviet propaganda, but also has tangible foundations that made Soviet propaganda effective in the first place. In Chinese political thinking and historiography, periods of imperial unity under a single dynasty are typically presented as golden ages of order and unity, while times of political fragmentation are characterized as dark ages of chaos and disunity. This perspective significantly influences Chinese historical interpretation, not only viewing foreign-originated dynasties like the Yuan Mongols (1271-1368) and Manchu Qing (1644-1912) as 'Chinese' but also encouraging efforts to reunify territories after an empire's collapse.

After the collapse of the Yuan, the succeeding Ming dynasty claimed most territories previously under the Yuan, although they primarily tried to keep the Mongol barbarians north of the Great Wall by strengthening it. Dubbed the Ming Great Wall, this part forms the most visible sections of the Great Wall today. In contrast, following the Manchu Qing's demise in 1912 and Mongolia's declaration of independence a year earlier, modern China, which sees itself as the heir to the Qing, regarded Mongolia as part of its territory and attempted to reunify Mongolia with mainland China. Chinese nationalist troops occupied Mongolia in 1919, and it was not until 1949 that China, under Soviet pressure, grudgingly recognized Mongolia's independence. However, this did not stop China from opposing Mongolia's 1955 application to become a member of the United Nations, citing the grounds that China viewed Mongolia as part of its historical territory. Mongolia managed to join the United Nations in 1961 after the Soviet Union intervened by using its formidable political and bargaining firepower.

Many Mongols are aware of this recent history and harbor deep concerns about China's growing ambitions and presumed long-term goals of annexing Mongolia. While the idea of annexing Mongolia has been voiced by Chinese nationalists since 1912, Mongols widely believe that China's plans to annex the country and humiliate the Mongols have been a longstanding 'secret' policy dating back to ancient times.

Sinophobia influences how Mongols in Mongolia perceive other related groups living outside the country. Beyond Mongolia, various Mongol communities are scattered across several countries, including China, Russia, and Kyrgyzstan. China has the largest Mongol population, estimated at six million, followed by over three million in Mongolia, one million in Russia, and a smaller group of around 20,000 in Kyrgyzstan. Mongols in Mongolia often harbor suspicions about the authenticity of Mongols in China, viewing them as less 'genuine' due to the lasting impact of Chinese influence and intermarriage over generations. These sentiments are particularly strong among those Mongols in Mongolia who lack direct interactions with their counterparts across the Mongolia-China border, often leading to deeply ingrained negative perceptions.

Given the situation, it is not difficult to guess that in Mongolia, Sinophobia has placed mixed-race individuals, especially those born to a Chinese father and a Mongol mother, in a precarious situation.

Referred to as *erliiz* in Mongolian, these individuals are perceived as having 'impure' blood, making them prone to stabbing the Mongolian Motherland in the back in service of a foreign nation.

Erliiz people are often juxtaposed against 'real Mongols'. In the nationalist imagination, 'a real Mongol woman' is idealized similarly to the Madonna in Western culture, symbolizing purity, beauty, compassion, loyalty, and submissiveness. In a similar vein, 'a real Mongol man' is hyper-masculinized, imbued with superior mental qualities, a strong body, patriotism, and sexual propriety and virility. However, it is not only *erliiz* who are measured against these idealized images; any Mongol person who does not fit these propaganda standards can also be excluded and have their Mongolness questioned. One method used in this exclusion is the 'No True Mongol' fallacy (modelled after the 'No True Scotsman' fallacy). This fallacy can be illustrated in the following imaginary scenario: *Bazar opens a newspaper and reads about a Kazakh sexual maniac detained by the police in the town of Mörön in Western Mongolia. During the interrogation, it was revealed that the maniac not only raped young women but also engaged in lovemaking with his dog. Shocked, Bazar exclaims, 'What a moron! No Mongol man would do this!' The next morning, while enjoying his tea, Bazar opens a newspaper and reads an even more bizarre story—this time about a Mongol sexual maniac arrested on the other side of the country, in the village of Mörön in Eastern Mongolia. Before the police even could interrogate him, the man admitted not only to brutally raping many elderly women but also sexually terrorizing local ewes, goats, and dogs, making the actions of the Kazakh maniac seem almost saintly by comparison. Bazar exclaims, 'Well, no real Mongol man would do this!'*

It goes without saying that the 'real Mongol man' or 'real Mongol woman' in nationalist myths don't represent flesh-and-blood individuals with diverse interests, backgrounds, moral values, and weaknesses. Rather, both are one-dimensional, mythical figures embodying a set of idealized characteristics, much like the *erliiz* embodies an imaginary figure with vilified traits.

Given the situation, nothing is more revolting and dangerous to Mongol nationalists, as well as many ordinary citizens, than the prospect of sexual relations and marriage between Mongol women and Chinese men. Real or suspected instances of sexual intercourse

between these two groups often elicit vehement emotional reactions among many good Mongols, escalating at times into outright physical violence. A particularly prominent ultra-nationalist group, known as *Dayar Mongol* ('Universal Mongolia'), distinguished itself in the 1990s by actively disseminating Sinophobic articles in newspapers and organizing controversial press conferences, issuing stern warning to Mongol women against engaging in romantic relationships with Chinese men. In 2009, the ultra-nationalists unleashed their 'inner chimps' and carried out their long-delayed threat by releasing a YouTube video in which a member of the group is shown forcefully shaving the head of a Mongol woman with an electric shaver, claiming she was a whore who had fornicated with a Chinese man. The group used this act as a form of public naming and shaming. Similar to other groups of its kind, *Dayar Mongol* members are virulently patriarchal and advocate aggressive Sinophobia and the protection of the purity of Mongol blood. Unlike many nationalist movements, the group venerates Adolf Hitler, wears Nazi attire, and gives the Sieg Heil salute to each other. Despite their spine-chilling uniforms and rituals, these Mongol Nazis come across more like a bunch of incessant chatterboxes and undisciplined loiterers. Their 'wonder weapon' arsenal includes nothing more than noisy threats, electric shavers, graffiti sprays, and ultra-nationalist fists. However, given the present circumstances, these Hitler worshippers should exercise maximum caution not to attract the attention of Russia's President Vladimir Putin, nicknamed 'Vladolf Putler', who, having invaded Ukraine since February 2022, might be tempted to invade another post-socialist neighbor in a similar fashion, using the pretext of *Dayar Mongol* to 'denazify' and 'liberate' Mongolia.

The apprehension and skepticism directed towards *erliiz* individuals, understood to have 'impure' blood and being somewhat 'degenerate', not coincidentally, found a parallel in the post-socialist era's treatment of dogs. Consequently, an increasing number of people are now advocating for measures to protect the 'pure' Mongol dogs, mirroring their calls to preserve the 'pure' ethnic blood from perceived contamination.

Dogs in Nationalist Discourse

An episode from the radio series titled *Tengeriin Güür* ('Heavenly Bridge'), broadcast in 1993, provides insight into this nationalist mindset. Dedicated to the preservation of the 'pure' breed of Mongol dogs, the program's host began her broadcast with this assertion:

> There is evidence to suggest that the Mongol dog is the oldest breed. In other words, there is no dog like the Mongol one in the world. The Mongol dog has a deep and strong voice, beefy flesh, a big head and muzzle, hanging ears and round eyes. Its neck is thick, its chest is wide, and it has a powerful and big body. Its tail is hairy and its paws are big. The dog has only two colors: The first is black with a white patch on its chest, and the other is what we call *dörvön nüdtei* ('with four eyes').[45]

According to the program's host, the Mongol dog not only boasts an aesthetically pleasing appearance but also exhibits the following admirable moral characteristics:

> It not only looks after the livestock and protects the household, but it also does not leave young animals, such as lambs and goat kids, without protection. In stormy weather, the dog leads its owners and livestock back to the safety of the household. Wolves are afraid of its barking.[46]

The entire program unfolded as an animated contest among its participants, each vying to outshine the others in their praise of Mongol dogs. Among the guests was Tömörjav, the passionate director of the Agricultural Institute, who ardently advocated for the visual and auditory prowess of Mongol dogs. He emphatically pointed out, 'European dogs can only see up to 300 meters, whereas the Mongol dog boasts an eye-popping vision range of 500-700 meters'. Following a prerecorded interview with another enthusiast extolling the virtues of Mongol dogs, the host gracefully concluded the program. She reminded listeners that 'it's widely believed that dogs of pure lineage are a rare find anywhere, and the Mongol dog is a shining example of pure breed'.[47] This broadcast captured the nation's attention, especially considering

45 Terbish, 'The Mongolian dog as an intimate other', 156.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.

that every household was equipped with a mandatory radio, which was customarily kept turned on at all times to receive news and directives from the people's government.

In subsequent radio and television programs as well as newspaper articles, Mongol dogs continued to receive lavish praise. This adoration showed no signs of diminishing as time passed.

Historically, as previously noted, the first written reference to domesticated dogs can be found in *The Secret History of the Mongols*. According to modern nationalists, the domesticated dogs mentioned in this historical account were a 'pure' breed of Mongol dogs. However, the imperial annals do not provide specific details about whether Mongols kept different breeds. It only makes mention of 'Tibetan dogs' (*tobudut noqat*), characterized by their large, shaggy coat and ferocious nature, bred in the Tibetan mountains to guard livestock from predators.[48] The imperial annals underscore the reputation of Tibetan dogs for their ferocity in the expanding Mongol empire.

Interestingly, the dog known today in Mongolia as the *banhar*, often considered a 'pure' Mongol breed, does not appear under its name in historical records. Nevertheless, this absence does not necessarily imply that this breed, possibly under a different name, did not exist. In fact, there is some evidence from later periods suggesting that this dog was kept by the Mongols in the Ilkhanate state founded by Hülegü.[49]

Furthermore, *The Secret History of the Mongols* sheds light on another breed of wild dog known as *tsoovor* or Asiatic wild dog (Cuon alpinus).[50] Mongols recognized these creatures for their strong sense of social cooperation and their collective defense of their lairs. Notably, Genghis Khan's grandson, Kubilai, the founder of the Yuan Dynasty in China (a period not covered in *The Secret History of the Mongols*), maintained an extensive collection of canines. Marco Polo documented Kubilai's possession of a diverse array of dogs, including hunting dogs, retrievers, greyhounds, and the formidable mastiff dogs (essentially Tibetan dogs). Additionally, among these working dogs, the Great Khan also kept a 'little dog' as a companion, likely a Pekingese.[51] It is worth emphasizing

48 *The Secret History of the Mongols* §141.
49 Gonchigiin, *Nüüdelchdiin Nohoi, II Devter*, 24-27.
50 *The Secret History of the Mongols* §78.
51 Polo, *The Description of the World*, 227.

that throughout history, particularly in the imperial era regarded as the Golden Age by today's nationalists, Mongols kept a diverse range of dogs, with no evidence supporting the classification of these dogs into categories of pure or superior breeds versus mixed or inferior breeds.

In more recent times, pre-revolutionary Mongols held the Pekingese breed in high regard without attaching notions of disloyalty or inferiority to them. Pekingese dogs were celebrated as some of the most charming and faithful canine companions,[52] challenging the contemporary nationalist perspective on 'non-Mongol' dog breeds.

In today's Mongolia, amidst ongoing discussions concerning purity and contamination, numerous societies, clubs, and enterprises are dedicated to preserving the 'pure' Mongol dog.[53] Dog enthusiasts also annually host the prestigious *Mongol Dog Competition*, exclusively for dogs of 'pure' Mongol lineage.[54] Dogs that deviate from the 'pure' Mongol breed standard are referred to as *erliiz nohoi* ('hybrids') or dogs with 'impure' lineage. In nationalist discourse, these *erliiz* dogs are often depicted as the antithesis of the 'pure' Mongol breed. They are deemed unsuitable for the challenging Mongolian climate and are considered lacking in bravery, loyalty, clairvoyance, physical endurance, and the instinct to care for livestock.

However, this contradicts my own experiences with *erliiz* dogs, of which Sharik is a typical example. He was a simple mongrel with short legs, a long body, and yellow fur. Despite his 'inferior' physical appearance and humble pedigree, he not only had iron balls, bravely confronting and often overpowering much larger dogs, but also proved exceptionally loyal to his owners. Additionally, he adapted remarkably well to Mongolia's harsh weather conditions. If he had lived in a nomadic camp close to livestock, I am certain he would have excelled as a guard dog, displaying strong instincts to protect his household, including both humans and livestock.

52 Humphrey, 'Some notes on the role of dogs', 14-15.

53 Notable organizations include The Society for the Study of the Mongol Dog, Mongol Nohoi Banhar, and Arslan, alongside dog-related businesses such as Ih Mongol, Alma, Asar Basar, Hotoch, Has, Goviin Haltar, and Dornod Mongol.

54 Dog enthusiasts also run a less prestigious event, the Champion Dog Competition, where participants are non-Mongol breeds. For instance, the 2018 show featured 403 dogs representing 30 different breeds.

Erliiz dogs parallel *erliiz* citizens, who are portrayed in a similar nationalist discourse as physically weak, conspiratorial, and worst of all, as possessing dual allegiances, thus serving as a soft underbelly of the Mongol nation. Their loyalty is believed to lie not with mighty Mongolia, protected by the Eternal Blue Sky, but with foreign nations, particularly China.

Conclusion

Humans, as primates possessing a bicameral (divided) brain with a small frontal lobe and large hormonal glands, exhibit a fascinating ability to hold mutually contradictory beliefs, a phenomenon known as 'cognitive dissonance'. Humans can also simultaneously be 'irrational' (or to nurture an 'inner chimp' to use Steve Peters' concept) and 'rational' as well as harbor conflicting emotions, such as love and hate, toward the same individual. This is eloquently depicted in the song 'I Hate You Then I Love You' by Celine Dion and Luciano Pavarotti.[55]

However, this inherent cognitive duality, far from being a weakness as some might argue, is a testament to the complexity of human reasoning, incorporating both our long evolutionary heritage in the animal kingdom and the 'humanizing' effects of culture. Rather than a failure, this unique ability to embrace conflicting beliefs and emotions serves as a vital mechanism, enabling humans to navigate the complex jungle of social interactions. It allows individuals to forge deep connections and sustain relationships despite contradictions and conflicts.

Just imagine a world where we lacked the power of cognitive dissonance and the ability to be both rational and irrational, and to

55 Here are some excerpts from the lyrics:
I'd like to run away from you
But if I were to leave you I would die
I'd like to break the chains you put around me
And yet I'll never try
No matter what you do you drive me crazy
I'd rather be alone
But then I know my life would be so empty
As soon as you have gone…
I hate you
Then I love you, I love you more
For whatever you do
I never, never, never
Want to be in love with anyone but you.

feel both reverence and ambivalence towards others. We wouldn't have soulful songs like 'I Hate You Then I Love You', no fictional stories or myths essential for literature and art, and definitely no religions or ideologies that hold together large, complex societies. In short, there would be no culture as we know it. We would be just another primate species, like our distant forebears, scrapping for survival, food, and the chance to copulate, competing with other members of the animal kingdom.

What fundamentally sets *Homo sapiens* apart is our unique ability to imagine and create a shared complex reality, sustained by our exceptional storytelling power. Our stories, reflective of our cognitive duality and rich imagination, can lead to diverse practices, the meanings of which can easily be lost in cultural translation.

Take love or esteem for others as an example. These emotions often result in admiration for the loved person. Love and admiration can be expressed differently across cultures, shaped by various stories and traditions. In European societies, love and admiration might manifest through romantic gestures such as heartfelt poetry, giving a guinea pig as a birthday present, or sharing good wine, food, and laughter. In Papua New Guinea, however, these emotions could be expressed in a vastly different way, such as through cannibalism.

In some societies that historically practiced cannibalism, including Papua New Guinea until the latter part of the twentieth century, this act was not performed out of a belief in the inferiority of the consumed. On the contrary, those consumed were often seen as fellow humans, frequently possessing superior qualities and powers. The stories told within these cultures justified the act by suggesting that one could acquire the powers of others by ingesting their flesh. It is not surprising, then, that forensic anthropological studies show that cannibalism was widespread in ancient human societies across the world.[56]

Symbolic cannibalism, which is another form of cannibalism, encompasses rituals where human remains or their representations are metaphorically consumed for various purposes. A notable example can be found in the Christian ritual of Communion, where the ingestion of bread and wine symbolically represents the flesh and blood of the

56 Gibbons, 'Archaeologists rediscover cannibals'.

God-turned-Sapiens entity. This ritual is rooted in a biblical story of divine love, where God, omnipotent, compassionate, and wise, endeavors to redeem humanity from its sins by no other means than by subjecting his son to crucifixion, a gruesome ordeal of limb impalement and agonizing death. Recognizing this act of violent sacrifice as a gift of divine mercy and love, and by symbolically partaking in the body of the crucified, believers seek salvation and eternal life.

This raises a question: If humans can simultaneously love and hate other humans and consume them, both literally and symbolically, why not extend these complex emotions and practices to animals perceived as human-like, half-human, or human-originated? The answer, unequivocally, is affirmative.

A Tale of Love and Hate?

This chapter shows the contradictory treatment of dogs in Mongol culture, where these animals are perceived as 'transitional beings', embodying both human-like and animal qualities. Cosmologically, they exist in a state of perpetual transformation, inching closer to becoming one of us. Hence, dogs are treated by humans in a manner reminiscent of how we treat one another. Not only is dog meat believed to have the power to give humans the vital breath of life by curing respiratory diseases, but these animals evoke a complex interplay of emotions, encompassing both love and hatred, reverence and ambivalence. However, unlike human-to-human relationships, where conflicting emotions often arise from shared history, interests, and unresolved issues, the love and hate directed towards dogs are largely ritualized and cosmologically compartmentalized. In Mongol culture, the love and reverence for dogs stems from their companionship, invaluable assistance in economic activities such as protecting livestock, aiding in hunting, and serving as alarm systems, as well as their perceived spiritual powers and human-like qualities. On the other hand, the hatred and ambivalence towards dogs finds its roots in beliefs surrounding their impurity and potential danger, concepts often defined within a cosmological framework.

During the socialist era, when cosmology was ridiculed as superstition and the cosmological bond between humans and dogs was severed, emotional and physical intimacy with dogs persisted, especially for

pets and working dogs. Amidst this change, previously imposed bans and restrictions were lifted, allowing domesticated dogs to share living spaces and meals with people.

In stark contrast, stray dogs, stripped of their spiritual significance, were systematically hunted down in the name of public health and hygiene, labeled as impure animals from the perspective of modern veterinary science. This example demonstrates that the concept of impurity can be both cosmologically and 'scientifically' justified, and in both cases, it serves as an effective technology to mark certain beings as inferior or dangerous, channeling hate and fear towards them.

Viewed through a broader lens, this duality also serves as a metaphor for humanity's tendency to exploit and commodify what it reveres, highlighting the inconsistencies in how humans value nature and non-human beings. As explored in the following chapters, Mongols exhibit this duality in their relationships with other animals, such as marmots, cats, and camels.

If we return to state socialism, it was also during this period that canines ceased to be perceived as transitional or spiritual beings and were ideologically categorized as either 'good' (domestic) or 'bad' (stray), mirroring the divisive classification of the human population itself into two antagonistic classes—pro-revolutionaries/the people versus anti-revolutionaries/the enemies of the people.

Changing attitudes towards dogs in Mongolian society serve as barometers of political and cultural shifts, offering insights into the evolution of societal values. When religious beliefs are suppressed, dogs lose their spiritual significance; conversely, with the resurgence of religion, the spiritual importance of dogs is reinstated. In fact, this dynamic applies to other animals as well, as will be explored later.

In today's Mongolia, where hybridophobia (fear of individuals with mixed Mongol heritage) is prevalent, dogs have been categorized into three distinct groups in nationalistic narratives: (1) dogs of 'pure' Mongol lineage, (2) dogs with foreign ancestry, and (3) dogs with 'polluted' or 'impure' blood, referred to as *erliiz*. The distinction between dogs with foreign blood and *erliiz* hybrids is often blurred. Many dogs not conforming to the traditional Mongol appearance are indiscriminately grouped together, contrasting sharply with the 'pure' Mongol breed. These 'non-Mongol looking' dogs, especially hybrids, are perceived as

inferior and are often targeted by thugs and violent individuals who don't believe in the bad karma resulting from mistreating dogs—a legacy of state socialism. This violent behavior towards stray animals is also indicative of today's low cultural tolerance intertwined with aggressive masculinity, where a man's willingness to use his fists in response to an insult or to prove his point is perceived as a sign of respectability and having balls. The transition from violence against allegedly inferior men to violence against animals or vice versa is distressingly swift. The inferiority associated with hybrid dogs also aligns with the skepticism directed towards hybrid individuals, who are often viewed as having a dual nature and being untrustworthy and unpatriotic.

A lesson that can be drawn from this is that the discourse surrounding *erliiz* (hybrid) dogs and people parallels broader conversations about inclusion, purity, and the fear of 'contamination' in human societies. What emerges is the destructive potential of purity myths and the importance of embracing hybridity as a source of resilience and diversity.

The collapse of state socialism in Mongolia not only unleashed a powerful wave of nationalism and religious revival but also introduced freedom of speech alongside a free-market economy. However, this transformation didn't erase socialist-era beliefs; instead, it created a diverse marketplace consisting of old, new, and mixed ideas for people to choose from. This variety of ideas and worldviews is often produced and peddled by diverse actors, including the state, religious groups, NGOs, businesses, public figures, and social media.

For example, social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter, widely used in Mongolia, became a melting pot of local traditions, culture, and global influences, notably from the West. Western concepts, especially popular among the younger generation, seeped into Mongolian social media trends. The anthropomorphism of dogs took distinctive forms in Western countries like the United States, Canada, and the UK, where there is a fast-growing canine-focused industry. Dogs are welcomed with open arms in accessory shops, canine daycare centers, and doggie spas. Beyond this, dogs have even become social media influencers, accumulating followers, merchandise deals, and movie appearances. When their time comes, there are specialized dog cemeteries where they can rest in peace. Another interesting trend is the growing popularity of 'neuticles', prosthetic testicles for neutered

or castrated dogs. Interestingly, the demand for these artificial balls stems from dog owners' concerns about preserving their pets' self-esteem post-surgery.[57] While in Mongolia, there are many people ready to spoil their pooches as badly as their Western counterparts, there are only a handful of places in Ulaanbaatar where dog lovers can purchase special treats, accessories, and toys for their four-legged companions. Public spaces such as restaurants, pubs, medical centers, and shops are often closed to dogs. The country also might need a nudge to catch up with the growing 'neuticles' culture in the West, but as the saying goes, 'every dog has its day', even in a remote place like Mongolia.

Shamanic Stories, Zoophilia, and Sexuality

Inter-species mating, also known as cross-species reproduction, involves sexual interactions between individuals from distinct species. This phenomenon is relatively rare in the animal kingdom, especially among unrelated species, such as between sea lions and penguins, though it occurs more frequently among closely related species, like different species of doves or dolphins. Factors driving such interactions may include displays of dominance, social bonding, mistaken identity, scarcity of suitable mates within one's own species, or environmental pressures. While these interactions are observable, the motivations behind them are often inferred by researchers and can be challenging to prove definitively.

Bonobos—our closest evolutionary cousins alongside the chimps—are renowned for their highly sexualized behavior. They frequently engage in sexual activities with individuals of the same sex, opposite sex, and even with other primates as a means of reducing tension, resolving conflicts, and strengthening social bonds. Hence, their reputation as a peaceful species. For bonobos, engaging in sex is as casual as a handshake for humans. Their sexual repertoire is wide-ranging and strikingly familiar, including passionate tongue kissing, deeply staring into each other's eyes, practicing oral sex, playing with each other's genitalia, masturbating, and even fashioning sex toys. When engaging in heterosexual sex, bonobos also often adopt the face-to-face 'missionary

57 Bell, *Silent But Deadly.*

position'—a behavior not observed in any other primate, including chimps,[58] who perceive staring as an act of aggression and typically adopt a ventro-ventral copulatory position, which is a fancy way of saying that the male mounts the female from behind in the 'doggy style'. However, despite their seemingly unrestrained 'make love not war' behavior, there is no documented instance of bonobos engaging in sexual activities with animals from entirely different species, such as elephants, antelopes, or reptiles. We can only speculate that bonobos refrain from attempting initiating sexual contact with elephants, antelopes, and reptiles, partly because they do not encounter social conflicts or alliances with these groups of animals that would necessitate such behavior. In contrast, human sexuality is fundamentally different from mating behavior in the animal kingdom; it is an extraordinarily fluid phenomenon shaped as much by human culture as by psychology.

Human sexuality is intertwined with layers of political, religious, social, economic, aesthetic, fetishistic, and carnal dimensions. Humans are also unique in their propensity to categorize, penalize, and establish moral standards around their sexual desires and activities. Hence, various cultures, as documented by anthropologists, not only exhibit a variety of marriage patterns (monogamous, polygamous, same-sex, group, endogamous, exogamous, temporary) but also lay claim to a staggering array of sexual positions, techniques, rituals, values, ideas, fetishes, fantasies, phobias, identities, rules, roles, and prohibitions. Engaging in sex with animals, also known as zoophilia, is just one among many activities on the extensive list of human sexual behaviors. No wonder, humans have surpassed even our hyper-sexualized bonobo cousins—or any other species, for that matter—by copulating with an even wider range of creatures, from chickens to dogs to donkeys to dolphins. Since sex with animals can provide valuable insights into human behavior and societies, let's conclude this chapter by looking at Mongol society from yet another intimate angle—exploring how, throughout their history, Mongols have perceived sex with animals in general, and dogs in particular.

In Mongol culture, the first allusion to what a modern reader might interpret as sexual activity with a dog appears in *The Secret History of*

58 Cooke, *Bitch*.

the Mongols in the story about Alan Goa's pregnancies, as introduced at the beginning of this chapter. The imperial annals note that she was impregnated by a supernatural entity ('a yellow man') that entered her *ger* through the roof opening in the form of a ray of light and left in the morning in the shape of a dog. The story vaguely describes what occurred inside the *ger* during the reproductive nights by putting the following words into Alan Goa's mouth: 'a shining yellow man… stroked my belly; and his brilliance dissolved into my womb'. When this supernatural entity left, 'he would crawl out with the beam of the sun and moon like a yellow dog'.[59] Many Mongolists who have studied *The Secret History of the Mongols* agree that the primary protagonist of this impregnation story was 'a dog'. To understand its meaning, we must step into the shoes of the Mongols' shamanic ancestors and attempt to set aside our contemporary values and identities.

In the shamanic traditions of this region, the relationship between humans and animals has been marked by deep respect and a belief in spiritual interconnectedness. This is manifested through the ability of shamans or humans to transform into animals and vice versa, as well as through the practice of interspecies unions. These unions, as described in shamanic stories, can lead to the creation of unusual offspring, hybrid beings, powerful individuals, or even entire clans. Such narratives are largely symbolic rather than indicative of zoophilia as it is understood today. They also suggest a fluidity of shamanic identity, which stands in stark contrasts to modern Mongol notions of fixed identities.

Although shamanic traditions are diverse, with various indigenous groups across Eurasia having their unique stories and rituals, one common theme that unites them is the incorporation of beliefs attributing spiritual qualities to animals, which in turn are interconnected with human life. Thus, in various shamanic stories, certain animals could be associated with human fertility or serve as progenitors to clans, as in the story of Alan Goa, where her pregnancy results in the establishment of the Borjigid lineage. According to this reading, in this particular story, the dog is to be understood as a symbol and instrument that connects the world of the mortals with that of the gods. It is most certain that in the past, many Mongols took the story of Genghis Khan's ancestry at

59 *The Secret History of the Mongols* §21.

face value and believed that his legendary ancestress was impregnated by a celestial dog. In this context, this particular scene of impregnation would have been regarded as sacred rather than zoophilic in the modern sense. This story, rich in animal symbolism, was likely employed to legitimize the Borjigid lineage, specifically Genghis Khan's authority and divine rule. Given this powerful canine symbolism, it is not surprising that, in the thirteenth century, Mongols also genuinely believed in the existence of a nomadic tribe where women were beautiful humans and their husbands were dogs. Plano Carpini noted a Mongol saying from that time: 'Your father or brother was killed by the dogs'. In this story, the dogs referred to were the canines from the tribe, living alongside human women, who were said to have defeated the otherwise invincible Mongol cavalrymen.[60]

However, it is important to recognize that the presence of shamanic stories involving dog-progenitors does not necessarily imply that all Mongols viewed these tales solely as metaphysical expressions of the divine human-animal union and refrained from engaging in actual sexual intercourse with dogs. Shamanism, as was practiced among the Mongols, after all, did not explicitly prohibit sexual interactions with dogs or other animals. The absence of recorded accounts or written materials detailing such affairs should not be taken as evidence that such encounters did not occur. Quite the opposite, it is highly plausible that shamanic stories featuring dog-human offspring or tales about tribes where women shared their beds with dogs, not to mention the high status of canines in shamanic cosmology, could have inspired certain nomads—whose identities are now lost to the sands of time—to engage in lovemaking with canines. Moreover, it should be noted that certain zoophilic acts, particularly in the context of shamanic traditions, could symbolize rebellion against societal norms or attempts to claim spiritual or supernatural power.

Indirect evidence suggesting that some Mongols, whether out of rebellion, spiritual ambition, or pure carnal desire, engaged in sex with animals can be found in the *Mongol-Oirat Regulations* of 1640. This set of laws officially established Buddhism as the state religion among the Halha Mongols and Oirats, at the expense of other religions, particularly

60 Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 23.

shamanism.[61] Notably, this historic code of laws includes a provision that expressly prohibits sexual acts with animals, with a prescribed penalty of a 'fine of five heads of cattle'.[62] Although the code does not specify which animals are forbidden for such activities, it is evident that dogs, goats, and sheep were of primary concern, being the most commonly associated animals in such practices. In other words, the existence of this prohibition implies that there were instances of individuals engaging in sex with four-legged beauties, prompting the need for such legal regulation.

It is intriguing to observe a unique aspect of this prohibition within a code of laws influenced by Buddhism. Notably, Buddhism, at its core, does not explicitly address the issue of going to bed with animals in its teachings. Instead, it casts all forms of sexual desire in a negative light, linking them to worldly suffering. From this perspective, sex in any form or shape is viewed as an obstacle to achieving complete awakening or Buddhahood, considered the ultimate goal for every human being. However, Buddhism also recognizes that most humans may get their teeth into worldly pursuits and not necessarily achieve *nirvana* in this or even in many future lifetimes. Therefore, it promotes ethical principles with a focus on alleviating suffering and shaping relationships and moral conduct. The overarching Buddhist principles of compassion and non-harm extend to all living beings, including animals. Consequently, these principles can be applied to view zoophilia as an activity that not only inflicts harm and exploitation upon animals but is also considered morally inappropriate.

Given that Buddhism does not explicitly address zoophilia, one might wonder why the *Mongol-Oirat Regulations* of 1640 specifically prohibited sexual intercourse with animals. In my view, the inclusion of zoophilia in these regulations can be attributed to a combination of factors. First, Buddhism, which had been declared the state religion among the Halha Mongol and Oirat fiefdoms, played a role in discouraging the mistreatment of certain animals, including dogs,

61 Despite the official prohibition of shamanism, Buddhism incorporated a myriad of local shamanic deities and spirits, who, having donned a Buddhist mantle, continued to oversee their localities and address the specific needs of local populations.

62 Golstunskii, *Mongolo-Oiratskie Zakony 1640 Goda*, 86.

which held significance in shamanic rituals. Second, if unions with certain animals, such as dogs, were believed to enhance one's shamanic powers and divinity, Buddhism had every reason to suppress practices that sustained shamanic cosmology and worldviews. Third, during that period, some Oirat groups embraced Islam, particularly those living on the fringes of Muslim-majority areas in Central Asia, where they became aware of the prohibition of zoophilia under Islamic law (*sharia*). This awareness and concern may have contributed to the inclusion of zoophilia in the *Regulations*. These three explanations can complement each other, providing a more nuanced understanding of the historical context surrounding this prohibition.

It is worth noting that the *Mongol-Oirat Regulations* were a unique set of laws promulgated under exceptional circumstances, containing distinctive bans, notably zoophilia. This distinctiveness can be discerned when we compare the *Mongol-Oirat Regulations* to later codes of laws that were formulated under more typical circumstances, after society had become firmly oriented toward Buddhism. None of these subsequent laws make any mention of zoophilia. This absence is not necessarily an indication of its existence or non-existence but rather implies that zoophilia was *not* a matter deemed significant enough to warrant legal attention or concern during those periods. The only other code of laws that specifically addresses zoophilia is the *Zenzeli Regulations* of 1822, which were designed for the Kalmyks (Oirats) in Russia. These regulations aligned with Russian law, where zoophilia was prohibited. The prescribed penalty for zoophilia in both the *Zenzeli Regulations* and Russian law was a fine of one head of cattle, accompanied by 50 lashes administered with a whip.

The transition from shamanism to Buddhism in Mongol society, as discussed in this chapter, led to the demotion of dogs from heavenly creatures to earthly entities due to their incorporation into Buddhist cosmology. Appreciating this shift, which might not sound terribly sexy, is crucial to understanding how canines became anthropomorphized in the modern sense. This shift resulted in dogs' ambiguous status and their use as insults, attributed to their newly perceived human-like qualities. Hence, in today's Mongolia, implying that a dog had sexual relations with someone's ancestors is considered an insult, whereas

from a shamanic perspective of the thirteenth century, such references would have been complimentary.

Historical Mongol laws and shamanic stories suggest that zoophilia was never a significant concern for Mongols, which explains its notable absence from all Mongol legal codes, with the exception of the extraordinary *Mongol-Oirat Regulations*. Allow me to elucidate this point with another example. In certain societies, engaging in sexual intercourse with animals is sometimes perceived as an initiation rite for young men. A contemporary example can be found in Turkey, where I lived for several years until 2006. Particularly in rural regions, some teenagers and young men reportedly experience their first sex with donkeys. During my stay in the country, I got to know several young men from rural Anatolia who claimed to have witnessed their peers penetrate donkeys, although, tongues in cheek, they denied personal participation. Instances of this behavior indeed occasionally make headlines in Turkish national newspapers and social media. Not surprisingly, there are also reported cases of middle-aged or older men, well past their teenage years, who continue to engage in such practices, suggesting that the desire they harbor for jackasses remains steadfast and doesn't necessarily diminish over time. When we engage in sexual intercourse, we fuse together our senses of touch, sight, smell, and sound, catapulting ourselves, if only for a moment, to cosmic heights and divine happiness that transcend this mortal existence. In that instant, we feel connected to the entire universe and the cosmic divinity itself. Just as beauty is said to be in the eyes of the beholder and desire in the heart of the seeker, sexual pleasure too is a subjective experience that can be derived equally—so the argument goes—from a moaning human soulmate or a squeaking rubber doll or a braying donkey. Notably, during my time in Turkey, certain sex shops in Istanbul even offered inflatable donkeys for sale to accommodate citizens with such preferences.[63]

By contrast, in Mongolia, engaging in sexual acts with animals has never been considered a rite of passage for teenagers because sexual relationships outside of wedlock were permitted, which enabled

63 In my humble opinion, Turkey should be granted full entry into the EU, a door that Turks have been patiently knocking on for several decades. I believe that the inclusion of Turkey in the EU would undoubtedly enrich the diverse tapestries of Europe's cultural and social life.

teenagers to engage in intimate relationships with human partners. Mongolia's traditional values have long supported sexual activity without attaching any social stigma to sexually active individuals. Additionally, it should be noted that Buddhism's anti-sex doctrines primarily target the Sangha, the monkish community, and not necessarily the laity, upon whose reproduction, donations, and labor the Sangha has historically depended for its survival and prosperity. In fact, the more the laity procreates, donates, and toils for the monks, the better. This stands in stark contrast to Muslim-majority countries like Turkey. Consequently, zoophilia has remained an exception rather than the norm in Mongol society, rarely necessitating specific legal regulations.[64]

In matters of sexual intercourse, Mongols with a preference for animals typically go for either a dog or a sheep or a goat, as mentioned. If Mongols had kept donkeys, there might have been those among them who would have approached jackasses as well. After all, as members of the *Homo sapiens* ('wise men') species, humans are quite similar, and irrespective of their country of origin or religious beliefs, people tend to find imaginative ways to satisfy their sexual urges and fantasies. Let alone sleeping with flesh-and-blood animals, Sapiens can even imagine having sexual relationships with fictional entities such as gods, spirits, and the like. To the best of our knowledge, only humans can do this with entities that they have never seen, touched, smelled, or kissed.

A contemporary example from Mongolia illustrates this aspect of human behavior. In Mongolia, some men observe sexual abstinence before embarking on hunting trips. This practice is rooted in the belief that, by symbolically marrying the enchanting daughter or sister of the shamanic Lord of the Forest, the act of hunting becomes a temporary 'marriage alliance' between the hunter and the female shamanic spirit. To demonstrate his commitment to this spiritual 'bride' and ensure a successful hunting expedition concluded with a bloody kill, the hunter refrains from engaging in sexual intercourse with a human female. This concept of hunters simultaneously having wives in both the spiritual and human realms—which necessitates the temporary separation of these two categories of females through sexual abstinence with humans before the 'hunting-marriage' with spirits—not only reflects ancient

64 Terbish, *Sex in the Land of Genghis Khan*.

polygamous patriarchal norms from the era of shamanism but also underscores the remarkable creativity of our species. Similar myths and rituals involving humans flirting or forming sexual unions with fictional entities can be found in cultures worldwide, spanning from Ancient Egyptian and Greek civilizations to Hinduism.

Such myths can be categorized alongside zoophilic myths involving animals as agents of divine intervention, reflecting humanity's aspiration to transcend ordinary boundaries and merge with powerful forces of nature or divinity. In the Alan Goa story, for example, the celestial dog symbolizes divine fertility and transcendence, rather than merely physical union. This parallels humanity's broader impulse to mythologize desire as something that connects the mortal to the divine.

Human cultures excel at both nurturing sexual fantasies and suppressing them, frequently invoking religious reasons. For instance, Abrahamic religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are founded on the doctrine of original sin, positing that humanity inherited a sinful nature due to humanity's mythical progenitors Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden. This concept of original sin has often been linked to human desires, including sexual ones, resulting in the discouragement of premarital or extramarital relations as sinful. By stressing sex's procreative purpose exclusively within marriage, certain denominations also advocate celibacy for specific groups of humans, such as nuns and clergy members.

During my time in Turkey, I came to know numerous young men who took Islamic teachings about the sinful nature of sex and desire very seriously. One of them, my friend Fatih, was a genuinely good-natured person but often appeared deeply unhappy and spiritually tormented despite his devoutness. He performed the prescribed prayers five times a day, steered away from Western music, and promptly switched off a movie if a male protagonist approached a woman too closely (something Fatih interpreted as an impending romantic kiss)—all of which were meant to keep Turkish Muslim men out of trouble and supposedly make them happy. Fatih also strongly disapproved of some of his fellow countrymen indulging in homosexual fellatio or copulating with donkeys, a topic that made him as sick as a dog, not only because these activities violated sharia law but also because they were unproductive sex and had a perverting influence on those involved. Once, Fatih confided in me about his desire

for a family and a couple of children to continue his lineage. Given his puritanical view on sex, unsurprisingly, he told me of his intention to have sex with his future better half only twice (proportionate to the number of planned children), viewing it solely as a mechanical means of procreation rather than a source of pleasure. Aside from his apparent lack of basic knowledge about human reproduction (a couple may need to engage in intercourse more than once to achieve pregnancy) or female psychology (women also have sexual urges and would expect physical intimacy with their husbands), what struck me about Fatih's attitude is that when I questioned his steadfast anti-sex stance, he would gesture upwards in consolation and roll his sorrowful eyes in pleasure, indicating that in Allah's paradise, he believed he would have eternity to enjoy the companionship of seventy-two beautiful virgins. It is in moments like these that one truly appreciates Karl Marx's description of religion as 'the opium of the people'.

It is not only religious doctrines that can shape societal attitudes toward sex and exert a profound influence on people's worldviews and carnal desires. In totalitarian regimes, ideologies such as Leninism-Stalinism—which seek to exert total control over all aspects of human life, and which can be described as 'the sedative of the masses'—can also leave a lasting impact not only by numbing people's critical thinking but by suppressing their sexual urges and behaviors. This influence was clearly visible in socialist Mongolia, which embraced an anti-sex worldview not very different to that of Fatih's.

Guided by the principles of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, the People's Revolutionary Party of Mongolia regarded sex as a strictly utilitarian act, primarily viewing it as a mechanical means of procreation confined to the institution of marriage. The Party effectively stripped citizens of their sexuality, particularly women, and reduced them to a proletarian force within society. Consequently, sexual intercourse was expected to be mechanical, devoid of any experimentation, overindulgence, or deviation such as the 'doggy style' and other dodgy positions. In public discourse, there was no space for the genitalia to rear its shameful head either, even in the pages of biology textbooks on human anatomy, where human reproductive organs were explained vaguely by drawing parallels with those of other animals.

Ironically, this stringent stance unintentionally gave birth to a certain type of personality shaped by the political system: the citizenry was sexualized—albeit in a de-romanticized and vulgarized manner that reduced sex to its most basic function. As a result, sex became a preoccupation for many individuals who publicly demonized it but secretly cherished and intensely fantasized about it, seizing every opportunity to engage and indulge in it. Thus emerged the stereotypical socialist citizen who thought one thing, said another, and did yet a third. One might call this person *Homo Sovieticus Mongolicus*, a mirror image of *Homo Sovieticus* but adapted to Mongolia's pastoral life and deep-rooted Buddhist cosmology and heritage.

One of my cousins was a vivid example of this political species. He was the youngest son of my paternal aunt in Dundgobi Province and the one who performed a funerary rite for Sharik. He might not have been exactly the mold from which the People's Revolutionary Party would have cloned model citizens to populate the proletarian paradise on the steppes. Nevertheless, he was a humble and exemplary laborer with a special fondness for military songs and sausages, which he carried in his pants pocket much like Westerners carry snacks or chewing gum in theirs. Despite acting in public as if he was asexual, he was, at heart, a bonobo-style libertine—the kind who wouldn't take 'no' for an answer. In his private life, he pursued female members of the proletariat with unrelenting determination, always wearing a perpetual grin that seemed to work wonders. Unlike the well-off sugar daddies in the People's Revolutionary Party, who could financially support women in exchange for intimate favors, he was broke and always on the lookout for casual encounters that wouldn't cost him a penny. Once, after it rained 'cats and dogs' for several days in Ulaanbaatar, the road leading to the bus stop in our neighborhood became submerged in floodwaters. Having paid a visit to my father and quickly self-medicated with penicillin in our bathroom for a sexually transmissible disease, my cousin noticed a young woman struggling to navigate through a muddy puddle on his way to the bus stop. Grinning like a Cheshire cat, he offered her assistance by giving her a piggyback ride to a dry area, not out of kindness of his heart but because he saw this as an opportunity to initiate an affair with her. Later, he told me that he managed to arrange a 'doggy style' rendezvous with her in a public park. My cousin was what

people call *jingeriin nohoi*, literally meaning 'the male dog of the bitches'. This term is used to describe a promiscuous man who single-mindedly pursues women for sexual encounters, regardless of consequences, even if it means becoming a real pain in the ass. His favorite anecdote was as follows: *A single woman gives birth in the countryside to a baby boy. Immediately after entering the world, the boy looks angrily at his mother's lover and starts poking the man's forehead repeatedly with his tiny fingers, saying, 'How does it feel when someone pokes you every night like this?'* One day, my cousin and I decided to explore the National Art Museum in Ulaanbaatar, where a series of paintings, *One Day in Mongolia*, depicting various parts of the country in different seasons, created at the turn of the twentieth century by the renowned Mongol artist Sharav the Joker, caught his attention. As we carefully examined the pre-revolutionary masterpiece depicting various daily activities of nomads, my cousin turned red with embarrassment and struggled to contain his giggling for quite a while. His reaction was easy to follow—he poked his finger at the couples engaged in passionate sexual intercourse depicted in the artwork. Although he lived a secret life as a womanizer, the mere sight of sexual images and symbols in public displays was enough to trigger conflicting emotions in him.

It would be unfair to pin the label of *Homo Sovieticus Mongolicus* only on men—many women were equally skilled at leading double lives that didn't quite match their public image or communist modesty. Take another of my distant relatives, for example. She was a libertine with a flair for romantic drama, who had a talent for attracting men as easily as a magnet attracts iron balls. A single mother, she dated men like it was a sport—only to fall disastrously in love every time. Compared to her, even Halle Berry's character, Leticia Musgrove, from *Monster's Ball* (2001)—with her troubled personality and uninhibited sexuality—would seem like a picture of innocence. One evening, I overheard her on a date. She began with awkward silence and nervous giggling, which soon progressed into her puissantly demanding that the man 'eat her pussy'. At some point, she mounted her lover and started ferociously jumping on him, moving with the same intensity as a woman riding a horse at full gallop. Apparently, she hurt his manhood, and he moaned in what seemed like a mix of pleasure and pain. She pledged eternal loyalty to him, chirped X-rated profanities, and passionately copulated

all night long, only to transform into a political animal the next morning, pretending she had never met him before.

One can anticipate that in this puritanical socialist regime, practices viewed as hindrances to the social duty of procreation, such as homosexuality, masturbation, and zoophilia, were condemned as unnatural, immoral, unhealthy, unpatriotic, and anti-ideological activities. Decreed as contrary to the innate nature of *Homo Sovieticus Mongolicus*, homosexuality was not only stigmatized but also criminalized on ideological grounds, positing that there was no legitimate place for anal sex in the annals of the socialist Fatherland. Masturbation was also deemed a dangerous perversion of solitary self-gratification and believed to lead to various health-related issues, including impotence, memory loss, and genital and back pains.[65] However, the truth is that if the supposed harms attributed to masturbation were fact-based, my cousin, who believed that the keys to happiness were in his hands and was also a frequent masturbator, would have been an impotent weakling suffering from memory loss and back pain, which was far from his actual condition. Both the anti-homosexuality law and anti-masturbation views were copied from the Soviet criminal law or imported from the Soviet code of ethics. In a similar vein, although the authorities did not emphasize this topic, engaging in sexual activities with animals was considered unproductive and selfish, believed to jeopardize the mental health and sanity of those who engaged in this 'unnatural' vice.

In Mongolia, societal perspectives on zoophilia, much like views on other forms of sexual activity, have undergone significant changes over time. Initially, the ideas of human-animal union had their roots in ancient shamanic stories and hunting rituals. Later, within the context of Buddhism, zoophilia was seen as an activity attaching the fornicator to the chain of rebirth and suffering. Eventually, under state socialism, which was ideologically sustained by the Leninist-Stalinist 'sedative of the masses', it was medicalized as a psychological disorder. This example suggests that human desire is culturally framed and can either be suppressed or liberated based on prevailing ideologies.

65 Ibid.