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Treasure Underfoot and Far Away: Mining, Foreignness, and Friendship in Contemporary Mongolia

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TREASURE UNDERFOOT AND FAR AWAY:
MINING, FOREIGNNESS, AND FRIENDSHIP IN
CONTEMPORARY MONGOLIA

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A DISSERTATION
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ADVISERS: RENA S. LEDERMAN AND JOHN W. BORNEMAN

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Abstract

This dissertation concerns relations of international friendship in Erdenet, Mongolia. Erdenet was established in the mid-1970s by the Mongolian People's Republic and the Soviet Union, planned and built with one of the world's largest copper mines. The Erdenet enterprise was never fully privatized and Mongolian-Russian relations are strong in Erdenet, while the enterprise also involves many relationships reaching beyond the Eastern Bloc.

The description and analysis are based on participant observation conducted from 2010 to 2012, primarily with engineers involved in training programs and research projects with partners from outside Mongolia. As Erdenet was settled by people from across Mongolia as well as the Soviet Union, residents hail from multiple nationalities and often also reckon relationships among themselves in terms of nationality. Using the concepts of accretion and erosion, the analysis draws together various practices of developing relations across and of difference, which are coded as national but also in terms of profession and age. Associated with the continuity of the mining enterprise, these systems of relation are available to people in Erdenet in ways they are not elsewhere in Eurasia.

Proper relations with foreigners as well as nonhumans including the Buddha are also critical to access and control of eternally reproducible *erdene* valuables, which include future generations as well as ores. Mongolia has long been involved in international socialism and its common projects of nationalism and internationalism, science and technology, education and professionalism. Mongolian concepts and practices are however foregrounded here, practices such as the construction of *ovoo*, physical structures where earthly, animal, and human substances are regularly placed and accrete as ever-growing friendly communities of humans and nonhumans called *nutag*. The social consumption of alcohol is another modality of accretion, as is speaking another's national language. *Ovoo* practices (including mining), drinking

and feasting, and language-switching are creative and dangerous in ways that only shamans master, but directors also engage widely in the multiple kinds of relation associated with different nationalities, professions, and ages.

This ethnography also comprises a first-person account in which the anthropologist accounts her own accretion in Mongolia, risking erosion while trusting in friendship.

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This project is also the result of relations between elders and youth, teacher and student, at Princeton. Rena Lederman and John Borneman have been with me at Princeton since the beginning, always taking seriously my commitments to Erdenet and Mongolia as well as my continued involvement in my communities of origin based in the American West, while also continually encouraging me to further explore and situate these relationships in the production of anthropological and ethnographic knowledge. Rena and John have always not only taught but enacted anthropology as a collaborative practice that takes others and their concerns, as well as one's own concerns, seriously, never shrinking from the difficulties of difference and continuously demonstrating the great potential of anthropology. While John brought perspective on issues of socialism and postsocialism from the other side of the Eastern Bloc, Rena has always supported my interest in and engagement with Melanesianist literature and Melanesianists. Carol Greenhouse has taught and demonstrated much about how to communicate concisely and effectively, warmly and generously. I also thank Carol for helping me to begin and continue work on the forth chapter of this dissertation,

in which I attempt to engage not only the extensive work of Mongolists on political morality and law, but also that of Weber and Durkheim. Serguei Oushakine has not only always encouraged and engaged my work but also encouraged and helped me to engage formally and informally with members of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures and the Kruzhok of Eurasianists scattered throughout Princeton. Jim Boon has always provided instruction and inspiration in contrarianism and creative association. Larry Rosen contributed to this project throughout my time at Princeton, and I also thank him for giving me the opportunity to hone my skills as a teacher under his mentorship. I also thank Isabelle Clark-Deces and Abdellah Hammoudi for their part in my apprenticeship as a Princeton anthropologist, committed to the practice of ethnography as skillful reading, writing, and the work of encounter and relation of and between difference. Carol Zanca has always been there to make everything, inside and outside of Princeton, cohere. I also thank Mo Lin Yee and Gabriela Drinovan.

I have been fortunate to also acquire many friends among my agetates, older and younger, at Princeton. Eva Harman, Erin Raffety, and Pablo Landa formed a writing group with me that was instrumental in getting my dissertation underway and creating a new kind of belonging at Princeton and as an anthropologist after a lengthy period away in Mongolia among engineers. Saul Schwartz has been a friend and intellectual companion for over a decade now – at Beloit as well as Princeton. Daniel Polk has always been a calming and encouraging, while consistently intellectually challenging and stimulating, presence. Megan Steffen visited me in Erdenet and I benefit greatly from conversations with her to work out our very different perspectives and experiences had together in Erdenet and Mongolia. I am grateful that Celeste Alexander, Joel Rozen, and Sebastian Ramirez returned from fieldwork in time for us to continue our friendships and conversations as dissertation writers. I also thank friends I met through living at the Graduate College, particularly anthropologist Gregory Finkelstein of the Department of Geosciences as well as many friends in the

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Grandpa with the Thunderbirds in Korea

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Introduction

The autumn sun was bright but the air had already reached subzero winter temperatures when my friend Serik¹ told me that he had weekend plans to prepare *kazi*, a Kazakh specialty much in demand by his Mongol friends and coworkers. The procedure involves encasing much of the meat and fat of an entire horse inside the animal's own intestines. When I replied with surprise – “You're going to do it outside?” – Serik assured me that he and his father were planning to slaughter the horse and work in a “sheltered place,” which he elaborated as meaning well out-of-doors but against a hillside.

The discussion of plans like these to “go to the countryside” (*khodoo yavakh*)²³ were common at our workplace, though the coworkers there were, for the most part, mining and chemical engineers conducting metallurgical research and teaching bachelor's and master's degree students the fundamentals of mineral processing. When the summer came the research and teaching laboratory received mining specialists working in academia and industry from Finland, Canada, and Australia as well as undergraduate and master's degree students from Poland and Switzerland on a trainee exchange

¹Throughout the dissertation I use pseudonyms that correspond to the person's gender and nationality. For persons of mixed parentage, whose national identity shifted contextually as I discuss in chapter three, I use a pseudonym indexing the same nationality as that of their given name.

²Excepting three key concepts central to the descriptive and analytical work of the dissertation (*ovoo*, *nutag*, and *erdene*), I only use Mongolian, Russian, and Kazakh words when I first deploy them in each chapter, associating them with an English word that stands for these afterwards. I append a glossary of all of these terms that includes the English counterparts I use throughout the dissertation. I indicate where these do and do not correspond to the English words often used in Mongolia.

³I append a glossary of Mongolian and Russian terms to the end of the dissertation.

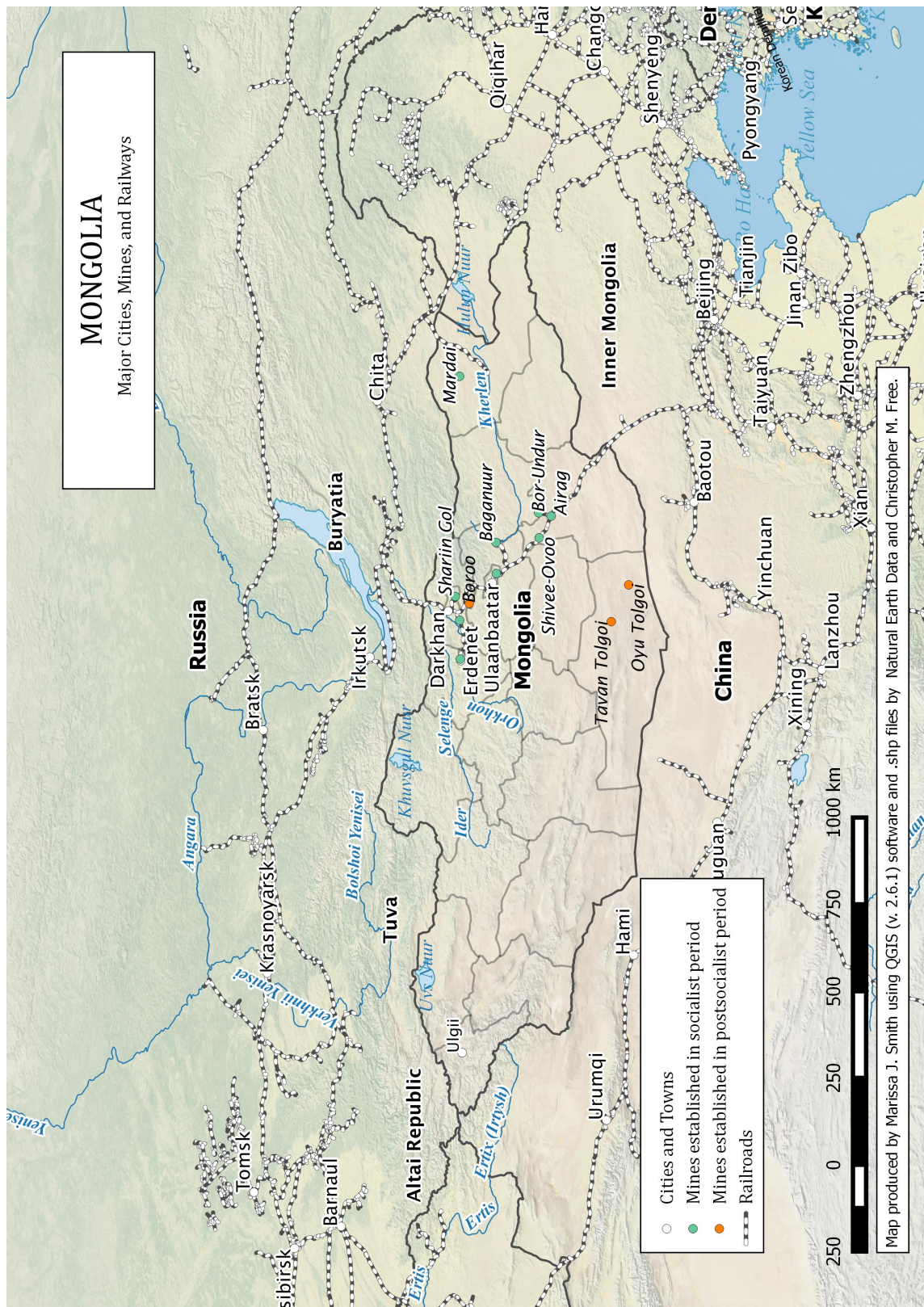


Figure 1

program. Meanwhile, Serik's brother, who like Serik holds a PhD from a prestigious Moscow institute besides an English certificate from Singapore, was visiting relatives in Mongolia's furthest western province, Bayan-Ulgii.⁴ The previous summer he had conducted a caravan of trucks to deliver a specialized breed of cattle developed during the socialist period in northern Mongolia to these herding relatives, travelling a distance of over one thousand kilometers.

Serik often told me that he hoped more of his cousins would come from the countryside in Bayan-Ulgii province to "develop" themselves and their country through urban education as well as work with the new animals and winter shelters they were also developing. In Mongolia today, over half of the population currently lives in or around the capital city Ulaanbaatar, and the city's population has more than doubled since 1990. The second cities of Erdenet and Darkhan have also doubled in population, but are often considered of the countryside by residents of Ulaanbaatar. Nomadic pastoralism is a symbol of both national pride and national shame, both at home and abroad (Marin 2008).⁵ With mixed pride and frustration, Serik also told me again and again a story about how fellow students reacted to him while he completed his PhD studies in Moscow. "Did you ride your horse to the airport to catch your international flight?"

It is a question I myself have also received from friends at my own graduate school in the United States. The image of Mongolia as what Anna Tsing (2005) has labeled a "resource frontier," populated by isolated people who have never known industry or internationalism, is one replayed in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*,

⁴In transliterating Mongolian, Russian, and Kazakh words and names from the Cyrillic alphabet into Latin I use the Library of Congress/ALA-LC standard for Russian but without diacritical marks (for example, an apostrophe for the soft sign or *miakii znak*). Mongolian and Kazakh Cyrillic include letters for back and front vowels; I also do not differentiate between these letters in my transliteration. For example, I indicate the Mongolian front "o" as well as the front and back "u" with a the letter "u." All three sounds often sound the same and are difficult to produce for a native English speaker unfamiliar with Turkic and Mongolic languages.

⁵While Andrei Marin (2008) contextualizes this in terms of the postsocialist period beginning in 1990, I would trace it back further, even before the People's Revolution in 1921.

and *The Atlantic* in articles that friends and colleagues in the United States have drawn my attention to again and again.

In 2013, some of Serik’s “tribe” of Mongolian Kazakhs appeared alongside a number of other mostly Inner Asian and Melanesian peoples in the photography project “Before They Pass Away” (Nelson 2015). Like the earlier BBC production *Human Planet* (British Broadcasting Corporation 2011), this project’s portrayal of Mongolian Kazakhs revolves around fur hunting for foxes and wolves with trained eagles in Bayan-Ulgii, which Serik and his family are directly involved in. After the *Human Planet* episode aired on a channel aired by Serik’s cable provider, he told me excitedly about it and we shared ideas as to how the BBC had gotten the striking “eagle cam” footage. I decided to write to my high school broadcast journalism teacher, who had also recently emailed me about the program. I asked my teacher about the “eagle cam” technique, and he passed the question on to a contact at the BBC. Hailing from rural Montana and teaching at a small public high school in Wyoming, my teacher was proud of this contact, as was I. We soon found out that the filmmakers had simply affixed a Hero GoPro to one of the eagle’s heads. Both my teacher and Serik proposed that we do our own “eagle cam” experiments with Serik’s uncle’s eagle in Bayan-Ulgii.

This dissertation explores these desires and practices to assert one’s distinctive value and valuables and have them recognized by others, from both nearer and further away, as valuable in relationships of friendship (Mng. *nairamdal*, *naiz*, *nukhursug*, Rus. *drujba*, *drug*, *podrugai*) that produce further value, often while in the position of being placed on the margins or outside of social fields of common action such as “the nation” or “the world,” even “passing away” from these. This orientation guides what I call the *accretion* of, rather than the successive replacement of, systems of value and relation and the people carrying them that are associated in Mongolia, the former Eastern Bloc, and beyond with nomadic pastoralism, industrial mining, particular

nationalities, shamanism, Buddhism, and professionalism. By accreting others and the relations they are involved in, relations of professionalism, for instance, that are coded nationally, Mongolians make those relations available to themselves to engage with in a creative play of structures and categories that are more particularly “Mongolian,” for instance hierarchies between youth (*zaluu*) and elders (*akhmad*), younger (*duu*) and older (*akh*). However, as I discuss, this work is done at the considerable risk of what I call *erosion*, when some relationships of *accretion* expose, threaten, and may cut off others.

Other Others: the Central and Peripheral, the Shamanic and the Socialist

In May 2009 I initiated an ethnographic fieldwork project to explore how employees of the Erdenet Mining Corporation (*Erdenet GOK*) integrate mining and mobile pastoralism in the context of expanding international involvement. Erdenet is one of Mongolia’s three cities, all centers of industrial production established in the socialist period with the Soviet Union, Warsaw Pact countries of Eastern Europe, and (before the Sino-Soviet Split) the People’s Republic of China. Over the course of my fieldwork I tracked the movement of people and their practices between the city (*khot*) and countryside (*khodoo*), noting and becoming absorbed in relations, particularly forms of kinship and other kinds of belonging and care (Borneman 1997), work, and property common and particular to the workplaces (*khamt olon* of the mining enterprise, multiple-household herding groups (*khot ail*, and households (*ger bul*, *urkh*) in Erdenet, Ulaanbaatar, and the countryside.

I was drawn to study Russia and then Mongolia, beginning with their languages, largely because I was intrigued by configurations of rural and urban, agricultural and industrial. I am from a different rural place between agricultural and industrial,

fitting uneasily in categories such as “working” and “middle class,” intersecting with race or ethnicity and gender differently, than as defined in the United State’s urban centers and structuring academic discourse emanating from Ivy League and other Research I universities. As told Serik, members of my family also gathered to butcher large ungulates during the coldest time of winter, though generally in my maternal grandparents’ garage heated by an antique cast-iron wood-burning stove rather than “outside in a sheltered place.”

My paternal grandfather was raised by a night-watchman at a copper mine in northern Michigan. He retired from his position as a nuclear engineer at a national research laboratory in Idaho (where he had worked since studying on the GI Bill after fighting in Korea) shortly after I was born. My father, who studied at Montana Tech in Butte, Montana, site of an international mining corporation (Finn 1998) and copper mine similar in scale to Erdenet’s, had wanted to be a mining engineer, but during the American mining industry’s crisis in the late 1970s and early 1980s (see chapter five) he had decided to pursue petroleum engineering instead. This took my father to Wyoming, where he met my mother, the daughter of central Montanans migrating away from the marginally productive wheat fields that had been recently mechanized and needed fewer hands (Bennett 1969) describes this phenomenon from another part of the region, from the perspective of southern Alberta and Saskatchewan). My maternal grandfather worked first in production (as a kind of “blue collar worker,” that is) at a gypsum quarry, and then in the oil fields where my father later also worked as an engineer. My mother was then working as a secretary and bookkeeper, as her mother also continued to do at that time, for local banks and the major multinational oil company Husky, and its then its successor Marathon, that in some ways transformed an agricultural town founded by Buffalo Bill into a industrialized company town. My father and grandfathers taught me about the technical as well as social aspects of mining from multiple “professional” perspectives and took me to

mine sites throughout the West and Michigan. My grandfather also shared with me his love of genealogy. My maternal grandparents took me to central Montana, and with their siblings have continued to help me think more about relationships between rural and urban, agricultural and industrial.

I began studying Russian through a video-conferencing system that linked my high school to Wyoming community colleges. When I studied abroad on an exchange between a university in Moscow and my undergraduate institution I had studied Russian for five years and was able to study contemporary Mongolian with the first-year cohort in the department of Mongolian and Tibetan. The following spring, in 2007, I participated in a study abroad program for undergraduates (the School for International Training's Mongolia program), when I began my research on Erdenet as a term project and lived there for several weeks with a local family. After beginning my doctoral studies at Princeton I spent two summers in Ulaanbaatar, the far western provinces (*aimag* of Khovd and Bayan-Ulgii, and Erdenet for additional language study and preliminary fieldwork in 2009 and 2010. I had found much to engage with in terms of relations between urban and rural, agricultural and industrial, and framed my dissertation research proposal as the investigation of the presence of what is usually associated with Mongolian rural herding contexts, principally forms of property and work linked to the herding of animals and seasonal migrations, in urban industrial workplaces, as well as organizations of the universe, often tagged as Soviet as well as shamanic, that many have taken as alternatives to counterparts in the Anglo countries and Western Europe.

These developed as key components of my project, but over the course of my fieldwork I was drawn into other kinds of relations, and gradually came to understand their importance not only to the people I was working with and the relationships I established with them, but for my more long-established concerns. More specifically, it was during my fieldwork that I came to realize the importance of systems of

nationality (*undesten*, *yastan*) and profession (*mergejl*) that crosscut distinctions of rural and urban, industrial and pastoral, as in other contexts throughout the former Eastern Bloc. The ways that these categories and systems operate in Erdenet and Mongolia, however, are in many ways profoundly Mongolian, and I emphasize those aspects in the dissertation.

For example, the project that I proposed, even after preliminary fieldwork with the people I came to work with most closely in Erdenet, included living and working in the countryside near Erdenet as well as in the city and within the mining enterprise. In the summer of 2010, before presenting my fieldwork proposal in Princeton, I travelled with members of the workplace I continued to work within and visiting students from the United Kingdom and Germany, participants in IAESTE (International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience) which I also continued to work throughout my fieldwork, to visit a group of herding households. I participated in other such visits to herding relatives of workplace members with IAESTE students, but in this visit I explicitly discussed staying for a few months in the future with the herders (*malchid*).

After I began my main period of research, working longer term with herders seemed to be more and more unlikely and then inappropriate. The member of the workplace who had supported and facilitated discussions with his herding relatives had left to work for another mining company when I returned to Mongolia to begin my main period of participant observation in May 2012. Though other members of my workplace and associated workplaces within the Erdenet mining enterprise discussed their involvements in herding and relationships with more full-time herders in the countryside with me at length, I was not invited to travel with them to visit these herders in the countryside, despite my being careful to express my desire to make these visits and their importance for my research project (which was also highly valued in

terms of my distinct professionalism bringing value to Mongolia, Erdenet, and my workplaces).

The exception to this was in the case of visits that were of the workplace together. As I had suspected, it turned out – though to an even greater degree than I had expected – that workplaces are in many ways like households and groups of households that herd together and live alongside one another, sometimes for a season and sometimes more indefinitely. These are characterized by openness to engaging outsiders in specific practices of inclusion, that gradually come to involve stronger and more lasting bonds and mutual engagements across difference, a process which I term accretion. Processes that determine whether one is allowed to begin processes of accretion guard against imbalances across these differences, as do processes of accretion themselves. Those not accreted, for instance, may be labeled as having “layered minds” (*davkhar ukhaantai*) rather than being *naidvartai* or “friendly,” possessing “good intentions” (*sain setgel*) and “calm stillness” (*amar taivan*) that may be used to explicitly praise the accreted (as I was myself on several occasions).

However, all people are involved in multiple such inclusive groups of accretion, which makes them valuable as well as risky. Outsiders bring valuables from outside, but once insiders must be prevented from taking valuables away. This is because, more specifically, the outsiders are themselves valuables as well, their value is due to the particular relations of which their outside accretions are formed, and how these interact with the relations of the accretion they are being included in. Thus outsiders’ leaving and taking away of valuables is also the taking away of shared substance; once accreted, the departing individual might also take away, “steal” or otherwise inhibit access and control over, the valuables and substance of other individuals. This I refer to with the term erosion. As for geologists, erosion reveals a great multiplicity of relationships, but only through the breaking apart of accreted substances. This destruction, however, is often only temporary, and the discrete parts (in the case of

workplaces, households, and other “social” accretions, persons and groups of persons) are recombinations of what all of the parts were before they were involved in the processes of accretion.

As time drew on and my accretion with my workplace proceeded, I began to hear some complaints about the former coworker with whom I had been moving to stay with a group of herders related to him. These included specific accusations about shared substances, or property (*ed zuils*), that he had taken with him. I realized that my staying with his relatives would have been a great risk to the workplace – my value and valuables, particular relations of the outside that I was involved in (which, for instance, my knowledge and relationships that would aid people’s efforts to study and work in North American universities), substance I had come to share with the workplace, might be lost to one of the coworkers alone and another of his groups of accretion – the camp of herders who were quite indirectly linked to the workplace.

The erosion of the workplace involved with the departure of the coworker revealed the character of these other relations – as if a rock were broken off of a boulder and the broken off edge revealed the rock to be mostly a different color and texture than the boulder, but like that of a separate, neighboring boulder that appeared completely different on its surface, but like the inside of the rock taken from the other boulder. The relationship of the rock to both boulders is revealed, and though in a sense broken, these relations continue as does the potential for reaccretion to either boulder through processes of weathering, for instance, which might break apart both rocks, wash them away into a riverbed where they might accrete to one another in ways related to their particular and shared mineralogical makeups. The quality of this colleague’s continued relationship with the workplace and myself is indexed by my inability to be more explicit about the complaints and accusations made about him, which were imparted to me discreetly and with the disclaimer, “don’t tell anyone.” Shame, embarrassment also part of the feeling of betrayal. I am linked to all those

involved with continued obligations and senses of warm closeness, insideness, the feeling and desire that we will meet and exchange our substances, the relations making them up, again.

In colloquial Mongolian, visitors from other countries are most often referred to with the term *gaadad khumuus*, literally “outside people.” Best friends refer to one another as *dotno naiz*, “inside friend,” and a common term of endearment between lovers is *dotoor min*, “my inside [one].” Aspects of these inside-outside qualities of Mongolian sociality have been discussed at great length recently by Rebecca Empson (2007, 2007, 2011, 2012) and Morten Pedersen (2011).

Focusing on practices often associated with herders, such as the production and sale of dairy and other animal products and the mobility of people away from and back to households, whether they leave to study or work for a time in the capital or pass away to reincarnate within the household as an infant that will depart or as an enlightened and benevolent former human that will be inside and outside, Empson emphasizes practices that ensure proper “dispersal” – practices which guarantee that shared substances do not leave with departing substance and individual persons and that these substances and persons will return. Empson gives the example of milk poured back into the seller’s bucket by a buyer, hairs pulled from cow’s tail as it is being turned over to a new owner which are then tied to a supporting rope of the yurt, the umbilical cords of children kept within family chest-altars and the photo-montages and images of enlightened Buddhist entities displayed on top of them (2007, 2007, 2011, 2012). As my British friend Brian told me his Mongolian wife had done for their newborn and explained to Brian, Empson (2011) describes how felt foxes are hung above infants to keep them from wandering back from where they came, following other foxes that call them back “outside.”

In his work on shamanism and “not quite shamanism,” Morten Pedersen discusses the dangerous and desirable power of those with *davkhar ukhaan* (“layered minds”) –

shamans (*boo*, *udgan*, *zairan*) are those who can control this power of being both outside and inside, being many persons (in the sense of managing many sets of relations), though many other “not quite shamans” also claimed or were attributed this quality and the potential ability to wield it. However, even when associated with various ideal types of people, for example “business people” and all members of the Darkhad nationality, the potential of mastering this ability was often questioned and critiqued by not only others but these people themselves. Only shamans claimed and were recognized as being potentially able “to personify as many relations as possible ... there is no limit to the number of humans, and nonhumans that Darhad shamans can embody” (2011:165).

This dissertation is thus in dialogue with what I will call Mongolist ethnography, which emphasizes the distinctiveness of Mongolian practices that pique the interest of latter-day Edward Curtises as well as anthropologists working within and beyond the framework of cultural salvage. This body of work includes much about practices of shamans and their clients, and tends to be situated among herders living in the countryside, associated with members of minority nationalities living in Russia-China-Mongolia border region: the Darkhad (Badamxatan 1986, Dioszegi 1963, Hangartner 2011, Pedersen 2011, 2007, 2001 2001, Sandschejew 1930), who were also featured by the BBC in an episode of the revealingly-named *Tribe* (British Broadcasting Corporation 2013), the Dukha (Badamkhatan 1962, Dioszegi 1962, Kristensen 2004, Pedersen 2009, 2013, Wheeler 1999, 2000), the Buryat (Buyandelger 2013, Buyandelgeriyn 2007, Delaplace et al. 2007, Empson 2007a, 2007, 2011, 2012, 2012, Hojer 2009, Humphrey 1998, Swancutt 2012), the Daur (Humphrey et al. 1996), the Dorvod (Charlier 2012, Delaplace et al. 2007, Delaplace 2009), the Altai Uriankhai (Plueckhahn 2014) in Mongolia, as well as Mongol groups living deep in ethnically heterogenous western China (Dulam 2009, Humphrey et al. 2013, Hurelbaatar 2006).

Much of this work has been done by students of Caroline Humphrey, who in contrast to many of her students has focused as much on the cosmopolitan (and urban as well as rural) context of all kinds of things and persons Mongolian (Humphrey 2002b, 2012) since her dissertation project situated around collective farms near the border of the Soviet Union and Mongolian People’s Republic (Humphrey 1998). My aim has been, in this latter vein, to convey ethnographically exciting, often shocking and frightening, distinctiveness, but distinctiveness as complex situatedness characteristic of all human life rather than as a product of isolation, whether in the form of purity that has yet to “pass away,” or the extreme stress of being without influence or control in a changing world system (in which sense distinctiveness in Ulaanbaatar has also been framed by Mongolist ethnographers (Empson 2012a, Hojer 2007, 2012, Pedersen et al. 2008, Pedersen 2012)).

Erdenet, home to Mongolia’s largest industrial complex where the “social infrastructure” (Bazar et al. 1998) of the Mongolian People’s Republic and the Soviet Union has remained in many ways intact while proliferating international connections also involved in volatile world copper markets, is home to shamans, cursing and curse-breaking practices (*kharuul*, *kharuul zasakh*), divinatory mathematics and astrology (*zurkhai*), and interaction with local nonhuman entities and energies as much as the Darkhad Depression a day’s drive to the northwest, fenced in by mountains standing against Buddhist and Communist incursion, or the steppes between the river Onon and Lake Baikal two days’ travel to the northeast and east, for centuries bisected by imperial borders, site of Chinggis Khaan’s birth and final struggles of subjugation, Stalinist purges, and some of the Soviet Union and Mongolian People’s Republic’s most ambitious collective farms now in conditions of postsocialist abandonment.

Shamans are present in Erdenet, but the character of their presence is revealing of the character of conditions of socialism and postsocialism there. While in Ulaanbaatar (Delaplace et al. 2014, Merli 2004, Shimamura 2014) and in other parts of Mongolia

(Buyandelger 2013 Buyandelger 2013, Hangartner 2011 Hangartner 2011, Shimamura 2014 Shimamura 2014) there has been a proliferation of shamans and shamanic activity that is often quite public, in Erdenet shamanism was present (and absent, also following Hojer's (2009) characterization of several forms of power in Mongolia) mainly in the ways it was spoken of, ways quite like the complaints and accusations made in my workplace towards the departed coworker.

While watching television within a household that was accreting me and my relations, I saw among the advertisements for cars and small plots of land running on a banner along the bottom edge of the screen a shaman's advertisement to "fix curses" (*kharuul zasakh*). This "fixing," perhaps cursing as well as protecting from curses, was how shamanic activity in Erdenet was described to me in hushed tones – again, I will not give particulars beyond that members of Erdenet mining enterprise workplaces told me some people hired shamans to curse employees in order to steal their jobs while their (named) coworker had hired a shaman for protection, and one person of mixed Mongolian and Soviet parentage told me of how when she was child, a shaman had described her multinationality in ways my friend took as depreciating (as I discuss below and in chapter three, people born of parents with different nationalities were, in Erdenet, a major kind of what Pedersen (2011) terms "not quite shamans").

These characteristics of shamanism in Erdenet reveal that people connected to the mining enterprise at least, have access to other modalities of navigating and capitalizing on multiplicity than do many other Mongolians and former Soviets. For all of these, nationality is the key register of proper identity and relations, but in Erdenet professionalism and the roles of the workplace have remained as well as accreted kinds of relations that people can involve themselves in to access and control their own and others' value and valuables. People in Erdenet, at least those working for the mining enterprise, do not so much "need" shamanism (or Buddhism – and as I describe in chapter one relations between the mining enterprises' employees and

the local Buddhist monastery were fraught). They have other systems of relations, particularly professionalism and age, as others with which to position themselves multiply in an essentializing system of nationalities.

As Thomas Wolfe observed almost a decade and a half ago, anthropology of the former Eastern Bloc countries of Eurasia includes as much work on “the cultural practices of groups on the margins of modernizing state projects” as on “how communities are shaped by systemic changes in the political economy of states” (2000:195). My work here to describe the systems of relation of nationality and professionalism in and around Erdenet, like that of John Borneman (1992), Uradyn Bulag (1998), Chris Hann (1993), Alaina Lemon (2000), Dale Pesmen (2000), Douglas Rogers (2006, 2009), is very much in conversation with both bodies of literature. However, work on “the anthropology of postsocialism” that focuses specifically on urban middle classes or “mass intelligentsia” (Shevchenko 2008, Oushakine 2009, Rivkin-Fish 2005) and factory workers (Ashwin 1999, Dunn 2004, Kideckel 2008) as much of that on the denizens of former collective farms (Humphrey 1998, Verdery 2003) and Mongolian pastoralists (Murphy 2011), is often strongly situated in intellectual traditions such as political economy (and political ecology), which while recognizing and drawing on for providing important critiques of the framing of “transition from communism” still prevalent in many academic as well as non-academic circles, I have found too oriented to locating causal factors and power beyond the site of the ethnography, challenging agency, and focusing on the work of despair (“dispossession,” “exclusion,” “getting by,” “loss,” and “crisis” also feature in the subtitles of the books and articles just cited).⁶

Though this project has been undertaken as primarily ethnographic rather than textual (Borneman et al. 2009), considering work on postsocialism not only alongside the Mongolist ethnography outlined above but also with recent historiography (Brown

⁶See Patico 2009 for a critique of how many anthropologists have framed the action of postsocialist actors as “strong moral resistance to ‘the market.’”

2013, Paretskaya 2010, Raleigh 2012, Ward 2009) and oral history (Konagaya et al. 2011, Konagaya et al. 2012, Konagaya et al. 2014, Namkhainyambuu 2000, and Sneath et al. 2015) of “late socialism” in the Soviet Union and Mongolia have been helpful in understanding the complex situatedness of Erdenet, and how people there, as Katherine Verdery put it in her study of “peripheral” Romanian intellectuals writing about the nation, “have taken advantage of these crosscurrents [from powerful “cores”] to produce rival images [...] while competing to be [...] acknowledged [...] representatives” (1991:4-5). Since I began this project in 2006, though much work on the former Eastern Bloc continues to concern Stalinism (and in 2015 anthropologist Christopher Kaplonski (2015) published a new book on the purges in 1930s Mongolia), historians have been increasingly turning attention to and publishing social histories of “late socialism,” the period from the mid-1960s through 1990, which I urge other anthropologists working in the so-called former Eastern Bloc to familiarize themselves with. Reading this work helped contextualize my experience in the field, where dynamics of class and nationality did not fit well with, on the one hand, global or regionally-situated political economic models of “worker” or “peasant” and “intellectual” cum “neoliberalization” that have structured much “anthropology of postsocialism” since its beginnings in the 1980s, nor on the other hand with the “postcolonial” analogies (currently often about “infrastructure” and “materiality,” determined from the outside, before, and hierarchically above) that have become more predominant recently (Collier 2011, Liu 2012, Rogers 2012).

Other Relations: Nutag and Erdene, Mongolian Post-Soviet Enterprise and Anglo Multinational Mining House

In this ethnographic work I focus on specific “local” (Geertz 1983) concepts, practices, and terms (Geertz 1976, Strathern 1980), and connect the frequent use of categories of nationality and profession in Erdenet not only with their Soviet, Eastern European, and “Western” counterparts, but also with Mongolian concepts. Each of the chapters are built around particular practices that, as with Clifford Geertz’s (1973) discussion of the Balinese cockfight and Gregory Bateson’s (1958) analysis of and with the *naven*, demonstrate how these multiple concepts and practices are not only alike one another but interrelated and co-constitutive, while I also use the concepts of accretion and erosion to explain and index how the concepts and practices are related to one another. I also analyze and emphasize three particularly Mongolian concepts, *nutag*, *ovoo*, and *erdene*, and also use them to do analytical work.

Nutag references communities of humans and nonhumans as well as “their” particular pastureland or territory and is applied to the full range of administrative units established before and during the 20th century, from the contemporary “county” or *sum* that comprised herding collectives (*negdel*) in the socialist period, provinces (*aimag*) that now also include among them the territories of the cities of Erdenet and Darkhan (Bayan-ovoo and Darkhan Uul provinces), up to the multi-“tribal” (*ovog*) empires of the khans and the modern nation-state (both known as *uls*). As groups of accretion and erosion as well as proper kinds of separation, *nutag*⁷ are like workplace collectives that are similar and often equivalent to households and groups

⁷*Nutag*, *ovoo*, and *erdene*, like most Mongolian terms referring to nonhuman objects and persons, do not have singular and plural forms.

of households who work together but maintain distinctions between each household's human members, herds, and property,⁸ facilitating eventual separation and return.

As I explain in chapter one, *nutag*, as has long been established in Mongolist ethnography as well as studies of Mongolian religious texts (Bawden 1959, Heissig 1980, 1953, 1953), are associated with *ovoo*, what Rebecca Empson (2011, referencing Hildegard Diemberger's (2007) work on similar structures in Tibet) calls "heaps" and "accumulations." While much of the literature has emphasized *ovoo* as points of political contestation over communities that are reproduced at formal *ovoo* ceremonies, like Empson I emphasize that *ovoo* are the *nutag* in ways that make way for engagements that also differentiate members and groups comprising the *nutag*. I describe how kinds of *ovoo* and *ovoo* practices in Erdenet are about accreting different kinds of outsiders, and thus how Erdenet is itself part of many different *nutag*, and composed of multiple accretions (including *nutag* in both the sense of Mongolians of various nationalities from various provinces and non-Mongolians, as well as workplaces and households) that must interact in "friendly" ways.

Erdene are the valuables (human persons as well as nonhuman objects) that are obtained through the interaction of these various accretive groups with outsiders of various kinds and the accretions they are a part of, the interactions of the different sets of relations that compose these persons and their accretions that are inside and outside to one another. These include not only living humans, but also the deceased, the unborn, nonhuman entities and energies that are not always distinguished into separate categories as wild animals, mountains, healing springs, the forces that make plants grow more in some places than in others. This analysis pays particular attention to the interaction of Mongolian and non-Mongolian outsiders, foreigners that may literally call one another "outside people" – particularly people from other

⁸The accretion of the household's humans and nonhumans is indexed by the terms *ger bul*, "all of a yurt," and *urkh*, the flap that closes the smoke-hole or chimney of the yurt. Both terms are also used by and for households living in apartments, even at this point several generations.

international and intranational *nutag*, but also people from other households and workplaces.

As Morten Pedersen 2013 has recently argued, *erdene* is an undertheorized but very productive concept for not only Mongolists but social theorists in general. Pedersen characterizes *erdene*, as I do, as that which comes from the outside of a given set of relations, i.e. what I call an accretion (I do not engage his points about whether *erdene* come from a “void” of un-relation). I point out that *erdene* are eternally reproducible – *erdene* are herd animals (the Five Erdene), human persons (including who are often named “Erdene,” and the Nine Erdene who are the government or council of a king), precious gemstones and metals (another Nine Erdene), and knowledge (Academicians are *erdemted*) – and no matter “where” *erdene* come from or how they originate or transform, they are accessible only through the maintenance of proper relations between accretions and their outsiders, the inside-outside relations that compose all accretions in layers of different households, workplaces, international and intranational *nutag*).⁹ *Erdene* require collaborative or friendly work to produce, or more specifically to access and control, the work of relating across difference, making outsiders insiders while also maintaining their outsidersness, keeping the other relations composing them and the other accretions they are a part of separate so that they may be creatively engaged with other more inside relations.

In terms of Erdenet and its mining enterprise, these outsiders are Russians as well as newer foreign partners, whose insideness is indexed by how they are often referred to by their specific nationality rather than as “outside people” in the way tourists who may visit a household only once often are. Another important other for the access

⁹I thank Kip Hutchinson for pointing out how be *erdene* may gendered and thus already internally differentiated or “layered” as Pedersen (2011) terms it. When used in people’s names, as is particularly common in Erdenet, the Nine Erdene that are precious gems and metals are used in a gendered fashion: *munqu* (“silver”), *khurel* (“bronze”), *tumur* (“iron”), and *gan* (“steel”) are generally used in men’s names, while *oyu* (“turquoise”), *nomín* (“lapis”), and *suvd* (“pearl”) are generally given to girls. That *altan* (“golden”) appears in both masculine and feminine names however suggests how gold is often an *erdene* among *erdene* (see High et al. 2010 for considerations of the connections between gold and the authority of emperors and khaans).

and control of *erdene* in Erdene is the Buddha (*Burkhan Bagsh*), who is of course not only a benevolent enlightened person who has transcended his humanity, but also a foreigner of Indian origin. *Erdene* are that which must be accreted, received from the outside, through relations between different accretions, which are, at least in the cases in this study, very explicitly understood to operate with differing systems of relations (for instance, “national ways of life and characteristics” (*undesnii yos zanshil*) that make their interaction potentially dangerous or creative. Other accretions may, for instance, flee with *erdene* (as the *erdene* snuff bottle lost “to the void” in the story told to Pedersen was first stolen when its owner visited another household for a bout of drinking). As I further discuss in the next section of the introduction, Mongolians in Ulaanbaatar and on the train to Erdenet also told me that Russians had not stolen *erdene* of the Mongolian-Russian relation per se, but had buried it (specifically, gold mined in Mongolia) underneath the Mongolian *nutag* in bunkers (*sklad*, a word the same in Russian and Mongolian), making it inside the Mongolian *nutag* accretion but at the same time inaccessible to the Mongolian *nutag*.

In chapter one, I explain the role of *ovoo*-building as a process of accretion, particularly the accretion of *nutag*, to the access and control of *erdene*. This is crucial also for explaining the moral character of mining in Erdenet and throughout Mongolia, which does not align easily with Western environmentalism, and more particularly Erdenet miners’ engagements with international partners to develop new methods of mining and metallurgy. These involve turning what is conventionally understood in the mining industry to be “waste rock” into value-bearing ore, which is amassed in “heaps” or *ovoo* and leached with local kinds of bacteria. The mineral orebody of Erdenet is not a “nonrenewable” resource – it will run out (and the city will be ruined) only if relations with foreigners that would bring *erdene* as new knowledge as well as precious metal are improper, and/or – in a more recent and not widely shared view, and promoted by institutions other than and which have

been adversarial towards the mining corporation – the Buddha is angered by mining, and mining activity must be compensated for, perhaps by the provincial government and Buddhist institutions, who built a monumental Buddha near the mine during my fieldwork, who might intervene in the activity of the mining enterprise and its relations with various accretions inside and outside of Erdenet as a *nutag*. As is the case with relations of “international friendship” in mining, these relations to compensate for (i.e. create ways to access *erdene* that are other to) mining must be continually expanded as *nutag* are through the continual construction of *ovoo*, new relations with other accretions themselves accreted as in the building up of existing *ovoo* as well as creating new *ovoo* of other *nutag* inside *nutag*. As I describe in chapter four, the provincial government, for instance, supported the development of cashmere processing in Erdenet.

In the core chapters of the dissertation I situate social drinking, shifting between the Mongolian and Russian languages, skillful directorship, and science and engineering as practices of and beyond boundaries of nationality, profession or what Americans might identify at first glance as class, distinctions of rural and urban, traditional and modern. These are how persons of different accretions accrete persons of other accretions, and also the relations of these other persons and their other accretions, which then become available to them for creative (but dangerous) play. All in Erdenet are to some degree “not quite shamans” grappling with the ever-present multiplicities of any social context and the particular powerfully dangerous and creatively playable instabilities of postsocialism, which has been explicitly explained to me repeatedly by Mongolians as characterized by access to international partners and their distinct kinds of relation from beyond the Eastern Bloc and thus an improvement upon socialism.

This internationalness is also closely linked with one’s position amongst the array of professions, hierarchized in terms of power and wealth, that were generated during

socialism, moving Mongolians into a further elaborated organic solidarity (Durkheim 1984) that was challenged as well as charged with potential after socialism. While custodians and electricians to some degrees used their linguistic abilities to make themselves more valuable so to be accreted and to attract others to accrete in the access of *erdene* valuables (access to education as much as cellular phones), directors most, and must most, exemplify and often orchestrate the work of interacting with difference, most often international difference, to generate value for their household, workplace, and *nutag* accretions as a kind of those people Caroline Humphrey (Humphrey et al. 1996) termed “persons of prominence,” occupying the positions and using practices of “shamans and elders.”

In Mongolia, the mechanical solidarity of herding has seemingly for long been accompanied by the organic solidarity of various “kinds of persons,” including not only shamans, but blacksmiths, daughters-in-law, and horses (Delaplace et al. 2007). The pull after socialism towards mechanical solidarity as the institutions of socialism that were crucial to the relations creating the organic solidarity of professions disappeared was countered, even in Erdenet where socialist institutions continued, by these older forms of organic solidarity. This form of organic solidarity is associated with the complex interplay of Weber’s (1946) forms of authority in the context of a number of different “forms of association.”

These analytical approaches drive my focus on the distinctive forms of the work of hope (Miyazaki 2004) being undertaken in Erdenet, as people work to access, accrete, and control value, seeking worthy others and to be taken as worthy by others, in Mongolia, the former Eastern Bloc, and beyond, collaborations through which they can access and control new kinds of value, developing, for instance, innovative methods of bringing *erdene* valuables through the processing so-called waste (low-grade copper ores, byproducts of ore processing known as tailings, and outdated consumer electronics), as hardworking members of an improving nation and a global

professional community with distinctive local characteristics and interests. In the final chapter, I emphasize how the very different relations, demonstrated by particular “implicit meanings” (Douglas 1999) characteristic of various national partners are productive of the value that the people of Erdenet seek, in ways also characterized by Marshall Sahlins’ as “a structure of the conjuncture” (Sahlins 1985) by Anna Tsing as “friction” (Tsing 2005).

In the summer of 2012, I accompanied Serik and Andrew, an Australian professor of metallurgy, on a tour of Erdenet’s open pit mine and mineral processing factories. As we waited for a car to drive us the few kilometers back from the mining field into Erdenet city, Andrew remarked that the processing factory was the cleanest that he had ever seen, and while voicing some concern about lack of safety goggles, he stated he was struck by how there was a lack of young men and their associated dirty and unsafe “macho culture.” He continued in astonishment at the high number of “grannies” working on the processing lines. Indeed, during the tour I had been gently pushed away towards the edge of a catwalk by an elderly woman, her hard hat reaching only up to my shoulder, who, not allowing our presence to interrupt her routine, had passed us to collect some partially processed ore slurry for the regularly scheduled analysis of its contents.

Erdenet is similar in its scale, product and technical design to the much more widely discussed Oyu Tolgoi copper and gold mine that the gigantic Anglo-Australian mining house Rio Tinto and Canadian junior company Turquoise Hill Resources (formerly Ivanhoe Mines) have been in the process of opening in the Gobi for the past several years (see Figures 2 and 3). Erdenet is one of the world’s largest copper and molybdenum mines; it was the largest open pit mine in Asia when it produced its first copper concentrate in 1977, and until the end of my fieldwork in 2012 Erdenet was the most recently developed copper-producing mine in Eurasia. It continues to be the most productive, as Oyu Tolgoi has faced numerous problems related to



Figure 2: The turquoise blue mineral processing plants Erdenet (left) and Oyu Tolgoi (right). Erdenet has its own power plant, in the foreground, and city (not pictured) unlike Oyu Tolgoi. Left picture used with permission of Laura Bueldt, right picture by Sara Jackson.



Figure 3: Inside the mineral processing factory of Erdenet.

actually shipping its product now that the first stage of the open-pit mine and mineral processing factories have finally been completed (see chapter five).

Not unlike nomadic pastoralism, industrial mining and petroleum extraction have long been a focus for anthropologists taking a globally-oriented political economy or political ecology approach (Finn 1998, Nash 1993, Taussig 1980) but recently

these literatures have boomed (Appel 2012, 2014, Ferguson 1999, Golub 2014, Kirsch 2006, 2014, Sawyer 2004, Shever 2012, Welker 2014). Again, this dissertation is more in conversation with work on mining and petroleum industries that emphasizes local meanings and local action, and the interaction of different meanings and their associated actions. Much of this work has been done in Melanesia (Biersack 1999, Golub 2006, Jorgensen 1998, Weiner 1988) by anthropologists who have also been involved in revived conversations about the anthropology of so-called Christianity, that also take an approach exploring the balance of powers local and those local that have apparently become more global, rural and urban, agricultural and industrial, focusing on meaning in the context of intercultural encounter, and also challenge anthropologists to complicate the scenario of anthropologists in righteous exile from their social milieus of origin, fighting back against that origin with their interlocutors' critiques. These milieus are both too multitudinous and connected for that to be done without great care.

Erdenet is at once a peer to Anglo transnational mining companies and isolated from these companies, working in opposition to them and in cooperation with them. Erdenet is little known outside the former Eastern Bloc. In the 1980s, when it was producing most of the Soviet Union's copper ore, as well as molybdenum necessary for high-grade steel, Erdenet rarely appeared (and today still rarely appears) on maps made in Western Europe or the English-speaking world while the nearby provincial capitals of Bulgan and Murun, with only a few thousand people compared to Erdenet's then-population of seventy thousand, are often marked even on maps of the Soviet Union and Russian Federation.¹⁰ In 2009, the forty-nine percent Russian ownership of the mine was brought under control of Rostec (formerly Rostekhnologi), one of Russia's five new state corporations through which Soviet-era enterprises ranging

¹⁰Today Erdenet has around one hundred and fifty thousand people, making it neck-and-neck in terms of populations with earlier-built industrial city and neighbor Darkhan, and like other urban areas of Mongolia, Erdenet continues to grow.

from airplane and truck factories to Kalashnikov have been renationalized, and new international enterprises including that producing the world's first dual-screen smart phone have been created (Chemezov 2015).

Andrew's astonishment at the manners of all employees and the presence of women and elders at the mine site indexes the distinctiveness of mining operations at Erdenet related to Soviet policies as well as to Mongolian and more local contexts, however. Yet pastoralist agriculture (*khodoo aj akhui*) in Mongolia can no more be discussed than heavy industry (*aj wildver*) without attention to the relationship between Mongolians and counterparts from other Eastern Bloc countries throughout the Twentieth Century. During the period before the Mongolian People's Revolution in 1921 (*ardin khuvsgal*) and the end of World War II, Russian professionals began training Mongolians in literacy and Marxist-Leninism mostly through the army and dispersed yurt-schools. *Artel* were also established for training people, especially devalued former monks¹¹ without valuable animals, skill, or interest in herding, in extant Mongolian traditions as well as new methods of carpentry and metalwork (Rosenberg 1977). Mongolia's first and only university (*ikh surguul*) until the 1980s opened in 1945 with departments in Pedagogy, Veterinary Science, and Medicine. With Soviet direction, the Mongolian Party as well as state administration drew its ranks from these sources and slowly worked towards fully collectivizing Mongolian agriculture. The government offered fodder as well as veterinary, transport, and other services to collective members while drawing all herders into a commodity market, ensuring wide membership by the time collective membership was made mandatory in the late 1950s.¹²

¹¹As much as half of Mongolia's male population were Buddhist lamas (*lam*) at the beginning of the Twentieth Century. Many of them did not observe vows of celibacy, but they were nonetheless not generally in the position to form herding households. By the end of the 1930s and the implementation of Stalinist policies in now socialist Mongolia only one working monastery remained in the country, and all but three had been physically destroyed or at least had their buildings repurposed as storehouses, schools, and the like (Bawden 1968). Today many communities, including Erdenet, again have monasteries and lamas.

¹²There was an earlier failed attempt at collectivization in the 1930s, see Morozova 2009.

The 1950s is described as the beginning of industrialization, while the organization of collectives continued to change throughout the second half of the Twentieth Century as well. A huge influx of aid from the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc participants in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA or COMECON) launched this new period of industrialization and agricultural reform. As collectivization was made mandatory and nomadic pastoralism became a salaried job with bonuses linked to production optimized in relation to a herder's level of professional training, the system of secondary and higher education extended as new industrial enterprises were also launched. Independent "Higher Schools" (*deed surguul*) of agriculture, pedagogy, and medicine opened in the 1950s. As increasing numbers of Mongolians trained as engineers and scientists in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the University of Technology (in Ulaanbaatar) separated from the State University in 1969.

These reforms involved new ways of valuing and relating persons, creating new kinds of household, workplace, and *nutag* accretions. As Daniel Rosenberg (1977), who completed an ethnographic study of a large herding collective in the mid-1970s, observed, reforms undertaken in the 1970s were a final push in the gradual transition from centralized leadership of highly trained cadres of urban intellectuals over urban workers and rural herders to the "withering away of the state" as mass involvement of specialized technicians moving between, and with the same quality of life, in city and countryside. In this period a bureaucratic-rational system funded by the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries as the Council of Mutual Economic Aid (CMEA or COMECON) set plans for graduates in particular professions, training many abroad and guaranteeing them jobs, health care, housing, and a complete "social infrastructure," as a collection of articles about Erdenet's past and present described it (Bazar et al. 1998), in new industrial and agricultural enterprise-cities and neighborhoods like Erdenet and also the increasingly built-up herding collective centers, fodder stations, and seasonal pastures documented by Rosenberg (1977).

Thus, while industrial enterprises in Ulaanbaatar, Darkhan, and at nearby thermal coal deposits were established mostly in the 1950s and 1960s when Mongolia was focused on developing an industrial working class more familiar in terms of classic Marxism or Marxist-Leninism, Erdenet was built in the 1970s when the Soviet Union and Mongolia shifted towards the development of “specialists” (the term used in Mongolian, Russian, and English) that would combine the previously separated classes of workers and intellectuals (Paretskaya 2010, Rosenberg 1977) that had been coded in terms of nationality (i.e., Russians as a “vanguard people” or “older brother,” *akh*). Mongolia’s place in the Eastern Bloc division of labor had been securely as a producer of meat, wool and leather products, in keeping with its “national” or environmentally- and historically-determined cultural characteristics, but mining of not only copper and molybdenum but also fluorspar and uranium were also products produced by and for a globally connected and relevant present and future guided by science (*shinjlekh ukhaan*, “renewing knowledge”), were part of new accretions to a Mongolian core.

In 1991 Mongolians sought to continue “democratic” and “market” reforms that actually have great continuity with reforms throughout the socialist period, the latest and most well known in the West being *perestroika* and *glasnost* (Mng. *shinechlel* – a change in meaning from the Russian “restructuring” to “renewal” – and *il tod*, also meaning “transparency”). These continued a trend since the Brezhnev era towards pursuing a dictatorship of the proletariat-cum-technocrat (Paretskaya 2010), especially in the still-undeveloped regions of Siberia and Central Asia. Besides opening up and “realizing” new reserves of natural resources to replace exhausted ones further west, projects like Erdenet were undertaken as developing not a class of workers to lead future revolution against capitalism, but a whole national society of specialists, all different from but equal to one another, to transition from socialism to communism. Mongolians have followed a similar logic of

organic solidarity (Durkheim 1984) in establishing diplomatic, trade, and especially development assistance-oriented relations with most of the Western European and Anglo countries, whom they approach as counterparts in a collective of nations that, united in pursuing scientific and technological modernism and development (*uurchlult*), each maintain their own historically and environmentally-defined means of production. Mongolians seek members of other nationalities in exchanges that would be collaborative projects as much as appeals to wealthy patrons who should share their success with “less developed” countries.

While Mongolia has been subject to pressures from powerful agencies subscribing to neoliberal economic theories¹³, many Mongolians saw and see the end of the Soviet Union and the “democratic revolution” in Mongolia as the means of achieving this, in many ways also very Soviet, ideal of not only a national society of different-but-equal individuals, but also an an equal national society participating in a wider community of nations sharing professional expertise to develop all national communities and individuals together through, at least in part, market and private property principles. These had also been seen at various points in the unfolding of the Soviet project to be necessary for building communism: notably Lenin’s New Economic Policy (overturned when Stalin took power after Lenin’s death) and Alexei Kosygin’s economic reforms in the 1960s and 1970s, which were brought to my attention by Serik. In Mongolia, though the time before 1990 is known as “the socialist period” (*sotsialistiin uye*) the period after it is known, not only in negation of, as with “postsocialism,” but also possibly as a further realization of socialism, as “the market period” (*zakh zeeliin uye*).

¹³See Buyandelger 2013, Rossabi 2005, and Sneath 2003 in particular for discussions of policies of “shock therapy” in Mongolia at the levels of high politics as well as among rural and urban Mongolians who lost most of their “social infrastructure” after socialism. Manduhai Buyandelger conducted fieldwork at a state collective farm which, like the herding collective Rosenberg worked at in the 1970s, had been heavily mechanized by 1990, with high levels of division of labor between specialist drivers, accountants, milkers, and so forth. After 1990, these people lost their salaries and the means by which to maintain and even drive tractors and jeeps, let alone more elaborate agricultural machinery.

Mongolians and their foreign partners have however found much to critique as the transition from “socialist age” to “market age” has unfolded. The replacement of Soviet investment in Mongolia with money and advising by Western financial institutions and NGOs has had radically transformative repercussions for the practice of pastoralism and everything else in Mongolia, including how Mongolians incorporate and interact with foreignness in friendly relations to create development.

From 1959 to 1990 all herding, like all other professional activity, was practiced in the context of collectives that guaranteed salaries and bonuses, access to health care and education, the maintenance of wells and winter shelters, emergency fodder, transportation, and buyers for collectively produced as well as individually produced animals and goods. When these disappeared with the dissolution of the collectives after the Democratic Revolution, Mongolians as well as foreign advisors were hopeful that a new market system would allow for individuals to produce more animals for more buyers to further diversify the economy and also enrich the state’s coffers and social services. Thus, as Paula Sabloff (2013) has shown, while speaking of “markets” and “democracy,” both Mongolian herders and urbanites approach postsocialism as ideally a continuation of socialist development in terms of relations between state and citizens. Concern over increased losses of animals through catastrophic winter weather events (*dzud*), more conflict over pasture, and concentrations of herders near roads and population centers is widely expressed.

While mining companies large and small, junior explorers and transnational giants, from around the world hold exploration and exploitation licenses to sites across Mongolia’s territory and Mongolia was proclaimed “the fastest growing economy in the world” in 2011 by the World Bank, benefits from mining have been meager and not widely distributed despite government programs to redistribute the wealth. In 2012 the annual economic growth rate calculated by the World Bank had “decelerated” from 17.5 to 12.3 percent (World Bank 2013). Recently, just a few weeks before the

beginning of 2015, Serik told me that 2014 had been bad, and the next year would be worse. Erdenet remains the only large-scale mine operating at its full capacity and with a complete complement of power and transport infrastructure for mining activities, not to mention a city of over seventy thousand people.¹⁴

As Erdenet is the scene of considerable continuities with the socialist period that are not present elsewhere in Mongolia, relations between the people of Erdenet and others in Mongolia have changed since postsocialism. Changes to assure continued access to and control over a variety of *erdene* valuables, not just the precious metal of the mine and the knowledge to secure it in new ways, is required. I focus here on herd animals and human outsiders, future generations and people with more herding skill, the *malchid* who are opposed in the system of professions to “miners” (*uurchaichid*).

In worrying about the environmental impacts of the mine and the exhaustion of the ore deposit, Erdenet oldtimers also concerned about lack of jobs for new generations and newcomers, which are needed to accrete these and their relations to secure the *erdene* of more people, knowledge, herd animals, and precious metals. As I describe in chapter three, miners work to accrete herders who will bring them meat, dairy, and access to land, on which to not only build summer homes and to themselves herd on when they retire from the mining corporation, but through which to educate their children and younger relations in herding skills and further access to forms of *erdene* associated with herding. Herders and herding skills are highly evaluated by mining company employees, including directors, who send their children to live in the countryside during the summers and develop herding skills, both from family members and from newcomers to the mine who may be working “under” them in the vertical

¹⁴Erdenet, like Ulaanbaatar and Darkhan, currently has enough apartments for only around half of its population (in Erdenet, around seventy thousand out of one-hundred and thirty or forty thousand). After 1990, the numbers of people living in yurts (*ger*) or wooden houses on fenced-in plots (*khashaa*) beyond most city infrastructure expanded rapidly after socialist-era restrictions on internal migration were lifted. The mining corporation provides bus services into these districts (*denj, ger khoroolol*) and as I completed my fieldwork water lines and street lights were being laid out in some areas with sponsorship by the mining corporation.

hierarchy of the mining corporation. Thus, while the administration of Oyu Tolgoi, on the other hand, offers low-paying and low-skill positions to members of the herding households whose pastures and water sources the Oyu Tolgoi mine is impacting (Sara Jackson, email to author March 9, 2012), arguing that even these jobs will lead to better livelihoods than those provided by pastoralism, herding households that come to include mining corporation employees in Erdenet may even acquire apartments and access to private foreign language schools for themselves and the children of others still primarily engaged in herding. Thus, Erdenet is a community that its residents and employees carefully integrate into systems of Mongolian national as well as international networks to create and distribute the means of old (core or already accreted) and new (accreting or to be accreted) ways of living.

Other Possibilities of Relation: Xenophobia and Friendship

These relations among Mongolians are also affected by relationships Mongolians have as international. Erdenet is considered to be an international enterprise of great national importance well beyond Erdenet, while there are conflicting interpretations of and opinions about the relations of “international friendship” that involve and comprise Erdenet.

As among herding households, Erdenet miners’ work of accreting outsiders and their relations to engage in those relations is necessary but not done without great risk. Today, the mine is still one of the largest of its kind in the world, but it is aging and the future of ore production there, as well as that of the community producing it, is locally an object of great concern.¹⁵ To secure continued production

¹⁵Generally the portions of ore deposits nearest the earth’s surface are the richest in desirable heavy metals due to processes of weathering. As open-pit mines like Erdenet grow older, they grow deeper and their ore less rich in heavy, valuable metals.

and success, Erdenet miners look to relationships with human foreigners as well as nonhumans such as bodhisattvas, enlightened Buddhist entities that vow to forgo nirvana in order to aid other sentient beings' pursuit of enlightenment. The work of miners involves integrating technology from abroad with existing local equipment and methods and using it as a basis to create new, but still definitively local, kinds of mining, engineering, and science. Yet while Erdenet specialists of all professions distinguish the late socialist period from the current period and associate the latter one with new opportunities, they are cautious about drastic transformations.

Today, Erdenet concentrates are sold to companies that sell them on to Chinese smelters, but this arrangement came about only in 1995 when the Kazakh smelters that had received the ore concentrate throughout the socialist period defaulted on payments.¹⁶ As I describe further in chapters four and five, several new joint-corporations have been established with American and other international partners to increase production of “value-added products” such as refined copper cathode and small electronics including cables and electrical outlet extensions¹⁷ at Erdenet since the early 1990s.

The Mongolian government and other actors based in Ulaanbaatar have promoted these kinds of “value-added” industries, as against the risk of losing potential value when raw materials are sold to foreigners; among some of these (but never, that I heard of, in Erdenet) there is an ongoing series of arguments about the Soviet Union and Russian Federation having never paid Mongolia enough for copper and molybdenum concentrates that have always been the major product of the Erdenet mining and mineral processing enterprise.¹⁸

¹⁶Diener (2009) gives an account of the negotiations from the Kazakhstani perspective.

¹⁷Copper is the most widely used material for transmitting electricity, having the greatest level of conductivity of any metal besides silver, the cost of which is prohibitive for this use.

¹⁸The great value of ore concentrates themselves, which for example contain between twenty and forty percent copper, is demonstrated by the great care taken in their transfer. A number of signed and stamped documents were involved when these came to the laboratory where I worked, and I was told that one could be fined or even fired if ore concentrates went missing.

The new enterprises producing “value-added” products are under the control of the Erdenet Mining Corporation itself, whose directors are involved in the agreements and decisions, back and administer loans, and provide low-grade ore and waste from the main processing materials. Mongolians are thus cautious not only about outsiders from beyond the nation, but from within it, in part due to their various relations internationally, as well. Since the end of the socialist period in 1990, as the Democratic Party has supported privatization with the backing of the World Bank, IMF, and other international advisors, Erdenet has remained a bastion of support for the successors to the socialist era Party, the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party, and Mongolian People’s Party.¹⁹ Erdenet has lost its status as a special city and thus been subject to increased taxation, while the Erdenet Mining Corporation, continues to provide physical and social infrastructure for all of the city’s residents as well its almost six thousand employees (more than in the socialist period). These changes and threats of change are often understood locally as attempts by outsiders in the Mongolian capital of Ulaanbaatar and elsewhere to drain the company and community of wealth and thus its very substance of existence.

At the same time, Mongolians from outside of Erdenet, for example people whom I met travelling on the train between Erdenet and Ulaanbaatar, argued that Erdenet should contribute more to the Mongolian nation as a whole while associating it with Russians, whom more than one of these interlocutors accused of having secretly buried large amounts of Mongolian gold underneath Mongolian soil so that it was inaccessible to Mongolians. Between 2007 and 2014 I was told by Ulaanbaatarites that violence, including the death of a young Russian girl, attended the exodus of many of Erdenet’s Russians in the early 1990s. Rossabi (2005:20) writes of strikes in Erdenet on the eve of the Democratic Revolution at the beginning of 1990. I was not given such accounts

¹⁹During my fieldwork in 2010 former president Enkhbayar led a group within the Mongolian People’s Party, which had just dropped the “Revolutionary” from its name, to split off and take the name Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party. Both parties had many supporters in Erdenet.

in Erdenet itself, though friends of my own age did on a few occasions describe hunger, alcoholism, and related deaths in their families and classrooms during the early 1990s, and commented on social problems they linked with the presence of the Soviet Army.

Like people in Erdenet, however, these friends and interlocutors from Ulaanbaatar and elsewhere in Mongolia argued that international friendship, proper relations between and of accretions new and old, was necessary for Mongolian development. Discussions of Russian-Mongolian relations were different in Erdenet in key ways to those I had with people elsewhere in Mongolia, but they were also never concerned with removing Russians and Russianness, or other foreigners and foreignness, from Mongolia. Such removal and undoing of relations is indeed impossible, and the matter is one of how to relate properly.

Many ethnographers working in Mongolia recently have focused on nationalist xenophobia among Mongolians, particularly towards Chinese and other Asians as well as people of “mixed” descent (*erliiz*) (Bulag 1998, Bille 2010, 2013, 2014; Delaplace 2012b, Marzluf 2012). I was also told in Ulaanbaatar of the great beauty of people in Erdenet and Darkhan, many of whom were “mixed.”²⁰ Like Phillip Marzluf (2012) I found “fundamentalist” or “modernity-rejecting” (Marzluf cites Hardt et al. 2004) xenophobic nationalist movements and ideas associated with them to be present but not popular in urban Mongolia. Comparison with how another Russian-Mongolian enterprise, now defunct, was discussed by Mongolians is useful here. Gregory Delaplace (2012, 2015) writes about Mardai, a uranium mining city in northwestern Mongolia built to a similar scale and around the same time as Erdenet (fifty thousand residents in 1981 versus seventy thousand in 1976, respectively). Mardai, however, was secret, closed to Mongolian nationals while only

²⁰People I met travelling throughout the central Khangai region south of Erdenet also praised the city as “green,” “white,” and “clean.” One driver from Arkhangai province did so particularly enthusiastically after we were denied access to a new road associated with the Tavan Tolgoi coal mines in Umnugov province. Delaplace (2012, 2012) notes that locals also praised the ruined uranium-mining city Mardai.

Soviet citizens worked and lived there, the nearby mine even being part of the Soviet combine across the border where the ore shipped by rail for processing, while Erdenet was announced internationally (Bawden 1968, Rupen 1979) as a Soviet-Mongolian joint project where Soviets lived and worked alongside Mongolians. Mardai, after socialism, was depopulated and had been stripped by iron scrappers by the early 2000s. To Delaplace, locals praised the departed Russians – they had “left” Mardai for Mongolians. It was the Chinese they criticized in terms of “burial,” saying that the Chinese would have buried Mardai, leaving it unavailable to Mongolians.

Once accreted Russians (and Chinese) and their relations must always be managed, it is impossible for them to simply detach and leave, because they have shared substance and relations with Mongolians (see also Delaplace’s (2012) work on Chinese and Russian ghosts in Ulaanbaatar). “Burial” was not the only way that Russians, I was told, had left their and Mongolians’ mingled substance behind, continuing friendly relations. A friend based in Ulaanbaatar once told me of how Russian friends of his father, leaving suddenly how many of the Russians in Mongolia at the end of the socialist period were forced to leave, had not “left behind” their belongings, but specifically “given” them to my friend’s father as a gift.

Sergey Radchenko (2012) gives an account of the withdrawal of an entire Soviet army, hundreds of thousands of troops, from the Mongolian People’s Republic from 1986 to 1992, part of an attempt by Gorbachev to reboot Sino-Soviet relations while Mongolian-Chinese relations, almost nonexistent since the 1950s, were further worsening. While the Mongolians were surprised, at first alarmed and confused by the actions of the Soviet government, by the end of the withdrawal, there was also violence, part of the erosional process. Mongolia established diplomatic relations with the United States in 1987.

For those Russians who stayed in Mongolia, it is important that they carefully define themselves as Russian first, but engaged in friendship with Mongolians.

Paradoxes such as the riddle of Russian control over Mongolian substance within Mongolia, are carefully negotiated through work defining the “local” and the “foreign” that allows transformation through present accretion as well as potential separation and return. As I discuss in chapter three, characteristics of various nationalities were accreted and deployed in different contexts towards different ends, while individuals always maintained “core” nationalities (indeed, the Mongolian term “*undesten*” is related to “root” (*undes*), while “foreignness” is defined as “outside” *gadaad*).

By now, the reader has no doubt noticed how I characterize my own relation with many (but not all) people in Erdenet and Mongolia as that of “friendship.” This term marks how I myself was accreted into, and myself accreted, the members and relations of workplace, household, and national groups. I became involved in these processes at first rather unwittingly, when, unlike Russians living and working in Mongolia who are very careful to not speak Mongolian while clearly understanding the language, I freely engaged in language-switching between English, Russian, and Mongolian. This language-switching was how, as I gradually realized operated similarly to social drinking and feasting and was something I should assume similarly careful control over, I as well as others in Erdenet made relations with members of other workplaces and households as well as with people of other nationalities and professions.

When I first arrived at TIS, I was introduced to the Director. I attempted to explain my desire to conduct fieldwork at the school in English after the Director began the conversation in English, but I switched into Russian in order to get myself across more clearly, after which I was soon sent to the HRL, though as someone who could help the teachers and researchers there with English. At the HRL, knowledge of Russian was also enthusiastically received however, and I was given a seat in the office and a stack of technical conference papers mostly in Russian and Mongolian to peruse (including Erdenet Mining Corporation 2004b). Though my coworkers knew that I was not Russian nor a metallurgist, these categories and how they played with

categories of American and anthropologist often defined my role at the workplace, where I helped locate technical articles in English as well as helped coworkers and their students with English. When a visitor to TIS, whether from another section of the mining enterprise or from another country, asked “who is that Russian girl?” the story would be retold to me as a joke – renegotiating again how exactly I was involved in Russian relations; I may have been American first and at the “root,” but I spoke Russian and had lived in Russia, knew things (such as Boris Yeltsin’s history with the Ural State Technical University) that Americans (and perhaps non-metallurgists) didn’t often know. Accreted in terms of the relations people in Erdenet had as and with Russians, as much as in terms of “American” relations, I learned much about Russian-Mongolian friendship, how to be Russian in Mongolia. This included interactions, particularly in Ulaanbaatar, that required me to quickly switch to Mongolian and activate the relations of Mongolian, position myself as other or more-than to defuse violence.

As I discuss in chapter three and also demonstrate throughout the dissertation, speaking in Mongolian also revealed much when I attended to how others reacted to my speaking Mongolian, and drew me further into different relations, different kinds of friendship and belonging. I had already been learning Mongolian for a long time. I completed a semester of Mongolian in the fall of 2006 at Russian State University of the Humanities in Moscow when I was a student in the Department of Russian for Foreigners there. I then studied abroad in Mongolia with the School for International Training program which provided me with separate language instruction as an intermediate language learner and through which I stayed with several homestay families in Ulaanbaatar as well as in Khentii province in the east and Bayankhongor province in the south. Finally I studied intermediate Mongolian during a program run by the American Center for Mongolian Studies and the National University of Mongolia in the summer of 2010. By the time I spoke with the Director of TIS, I

had no doubt assimilated the understanding that I brought to consciousness when writing chapter three; that one navigates, and indeed “activates,” the hierarchy of Twentieth Century, industrial, and/or urban institutions as a foreigner much more easily speaking decent Russian than fluent English or intermediate Mongolian. My spoken Mongolian, of course, also greatly improved during my time in Erdenet, while also acquiring a regional and re-Russified cast that might be looked down upon by Ulaanbaatar elites.

My account is heavily first-person not only because of how I would produce knowledge as an ethnographer nor because I came to Erdenet seeking to engage in a comparative exercise to understand the American rural industrial contexts that I came from, but because of how I became part of relations in Erdenet, and how these relations are involved with the relations of others. For reasons I have already described and continue to explore throughout the dissertation, it is inappropriate for me to discuss, let alone to speculate, about the relations that others have with one another beyond how I myself was involved in these relations. This leads to erosion, is the practice that Mongolians associate with *khel am*, as Mongolist ethnographers have translated it into English, not only gossip but cursing. To expose the relations of others is to possibly break off relations through potentializing shame, embarrassment, blame, and suspicion, and is not unlike how a geologist might break rocks to find relations between them. Ethnographers, like geologists, however, have other methods, including friendship, available to them.

I did not design a fieldwork routine to explore a sample of a pre-determined set of sites, both because any set of this kind would have been pre-determined without much basis and for reasons described above and that are central to the dissertation relating to concerns about insiders and outsiders. Rather I accepted invitations from people to join them and strengthened these relationships as I, and my main workplace, saw fit, which overlapped for most of the term of my fieldwork, as and after I became

a member of this workplace. This workplace also defended me and my position in the dormitory when another member of the university workplace tried to increase my rent, perhaps have me kicked out to rent the room to someone else who would pay more. On the other hand a person connected to another workplace but friendly to ours and to me personally also secured my use of a refrigerator from another section of the enterprise and then had members of that workplace remove it the very day before I left Erdenet. Such relationships connected me, involved me in and as a part of, other parts of the enterprise and also happenings well beyond Erdenet, as for example with international collaborators (potential friends) who came to Erdenet to study and arrange research and business collaborations (chapters four and five). My fieldwork was thus multi-sited in the sense that George Marcus (1995) characterized as “follow the people” and “strategically single-sited.”

My general approach to field work is to do things with people (Briggs 1986) in ways that they ask me to, consistent with a long-honored approach among anthropologists that Michael Agar (1996) has characterized as a “one-down” position. This position is not merely one of submission and it is certainly not one of self-effacement; rather it was one of becoming and a critical site of analytical work. As Rena Lederman (1986) demonstrates in her discussion of her fieldwork position through the lens of stories she was told about “red” women, I took note of and engaged with how people categorized me, categorizations that persisted though I did not “lie” or misrepresent myself to fit them. These were kinds of relations accreted not only by myself, but by others in Erdenet by means of which we accreted one another. The two main categorizations were, as aligned with themes of the dissertation, in terms of nationality and profession.²¹

²¹The workplace was a site of gendered relations, and I was further drawn into gendered relations particularly in the homes of female friends. As mining professions, at least in Erdenet, as Andrew discovered, are not strongly gendered, and nationalities are not gendered (in the sense of one nationality being female in relation to another nation being male, though there are patterns of international marriage, see chapter four), I discuss gender in the dissertation tangentially throughout the chapters, though there is more to be said, and studied, in this regard (Empson (2011) and

I early on decided against staying with individual households in Erdenet, though I was invited to move in with several families over the course of my fieldwork, including in 2010. I had also stayed with a family during my undergraduate research project for a few weeks in 2007. For a short term project, this was ideal as I was able to quickly meet many of the family's contacts. However, for a long term project, especially one situated in the enterprise's workplaces and outside of the home as much as inside of it, I decided to maintain my own home to the degree that I could.

Both Buyandelger 2013 and High (2008) describe²² the difficulties of moving between several different households, or even beyond a single household in High's case, finding the problems of managing inside and outside, fears of parasitism and pollution from other households also much discussed by Empson (2012, 2011, 2007) and Swancutt (2012). As I discuss in chapter two, I also found workplaces to be much like households and herding camps in this and other ways; indeed it did turn out that I became part of one workplace, associating with other workplaces as approved by members of my workplace. However, I felt in agreement with my workplace as to whom I should and should not relate with by the time such issues arose, and was only forced towards a painful break in one case (as I discuss in chapter two).

As I describe in more detail in chapter two, I made the Mining Department and associated Hydrometallurgical Research Laboratory of the Sh. Otgonbileg Institute

Buyandelger (2013) explicitly positioned themselves to write about women, while High (2008) was positioned by at least one family she lived with and studied very firmly as female). Like many women anthropologists, I found myself often gendered male by male friends and interlocutors. During social drinking sessions (see chapter three) or while speaking Russian (see chapter four), men discussed fishing and hunting with me (though they were hesitant to actually take me with them fishing and hunting). One male coworker even began telling me about watching pornography at work before catching himself and feeling great embarrassment; while war is a highly male-gendered field, on another occasion we watched extended scenes of *Full Metal Jacket* as part of a series of conversations about Russian and English profanity (Mongolian profanity was explained to me by those who did not speak Mongolian as a first language, members of the "Turkic" nationalities or people of mixed Russian and Mongolian parentage). I believe I also entered mining and engineering workplaces as a subject actively suppressing gender difference, as described by fellow Wyomingite Jessica Rolston Smith (2014), who was raised, worked, and then conducted ethnographic research in the Powder River Basin coal mines.

²²I also had conversations about this with both High and Buyandelger.

of Technology my main fieldsite after spending about a month there during the summer of 2010, before presenting my fieldwork proposal at Princeton the following spring and returning to Erdenet to begin most of the fieldwork shortly thereafter. I spent most of every work day in the Hydrometallurgical Research Laboratory, “sitting” in the office with Serik and his colleagues.

The Sh. Otgonbileg Institute of Technology (usually referred to as *TIS*, an acronym of *Tekhnologiin Ikh Surguul*, “University of Technology”) was established with the mining and mineral enterprise and has always trained specialists to work at the enterprise. Today TIS is larger and a branch of the national University of Science and Technology (ShUTIS); many graduates must seek employment beyond Erdenet though up to a half are children of Erdenet employees (Bataa 2011c). TIS’ relation to other parts (*otdel, sekts*)²³ and workplaces of the enterprise is complex.

Organizational charts (Erdenet Mining Corporation 2007) of the Erdenet Mining Corporation place the General Director at the top, followed by the five Directors of Production, Economics, Social Issues, Commerce, and Development. The first oversaw parts of the mining and mineral processing plant: excavation in the open-pit, the mineral processing plant (OF, *obogatitel'nii fabrik*), mobile equipment (from dumptrucks to personnel transport buses and automobiles; ATP), the repair plant and foundry (RMZ, *remontno-montaj'nii fabrik*), and the power plant (*teplostants*). The geological exploration section and security (which also involves the Mongolian armed forces), as well as TIS, also were part of this department. The department of Social Issues oversaw much of the city’s infrastructure: the cultural and sports centers (known by Mongolian terms *soelin ordon* and *sportiin ordon*), a clinic, a high school (teaching in Russian as well as Mongolian), and a resort on the nearby Selenge River. A meat processing factory also fell under this department. The Commercial

²³As I explain in chapter three, Russian was almost always used for the hierarchical structure and organization of the enterprise, and speaking Russian “activated” this form of organization rather than hierarchies based on age, associated with Mongolian language and practices (*yos zanshil*).

department was in some ways the most mysterious and associated with an element of fear – it was a site of Erdenet’s relations with the outside world, through which *erdene* valuables entered and exited, where through improper relations between others value could be siphoned away by some parts of the inside as well as different kinds of outside. This section included the rail transport operations and warehouses of supplies, as well as marketing – researching and working with buyers of concentrate as well as sellers of equipment and materials. One of the heads of this section was named, like his brother, after a model of Russian military weaponry; I heard someone remark that it was an appropriate name while adding “they’re really okay...” Partly to protect the identity and relations of my friends and others of those I worked with in Erdenet, I will not discuss the positions of each of the workplaces I became familiar with in depth, but I will say that each straddled various of these five sections of the enterprise.

The Hydrometallurgical Research Laboratory (HRL) had been moved a few years before from facilities at the mine site, where there were still a few experiments underway. I occasionally visited this site with other members of the HRL, when we would take lunch at one of the two cafeterias used by specialists from throughout the enterprise. There, I received the same calorically heavy meal, including stews and Ukrainian confectionary, as the foundry workers and dumptruck drivers. I spent most of my time in the city, however, and also made friends with people working at the General Directorship (*Gendirekts*) building at the center of town, a few blocks away from TIS. I was first introduced to a workplace based at the General Directorship in the summer of 2010 through a member of the HRL, whose classmate worked there. This classmate had formerly worked at another section of the corporation, and also took me to that section at the mine site. I attended most weekly meetings held by the faculty and staff of TIS and the Mining Department, and I was also invited to celebrations at the beginning and ending of semesters with members of TIS at the

enterprise's resort and elsewhere in the countryside near Erdenet. During the summer, I was involved in logistics of taking technical exchange students from Western Europe, Poland, and India to visit the countryside, including family members of workplaces like the HRL who were full-time herders living in yurts.

Members of the HRL helped me procure a room in the dormitory of TIS in the summer of 2010, where I continued to live in 2011-2012. The floor I lived on was regularly occupied by foreign visitors, including Russian language teachers from Irkutsk employed at TIS on yearly contracts (see chapter three), summer technical exchange students from Europe and India (see chapter four), and Peace Corps and Fulbright English teachers (one of these moved in just before I left the field, and another also took my room after I left; see chapter three for more discussion about limited interaction with another Peace Corps volunteer who worked at TIS but did not live in the dormitory in 2012). Other floors were occupied by students of TIS, including participants in a program for trainees from Oyu Tolgoi to study by working at Erdenet (see chapters four and five).

Though my relations with others and the ways I shifted in terms of these relations were complex, in some ways I was more freely able to negotiate questions of "where I was from" in Erdenet than while at Princeton, and the framing of "nationality" is one that I have found useful in thinking about American society. The places I come from are not just rural while industrial, they are populated by multiple "(white) ethnics," and these categories intersect with different kinds of "profession" in ways that if payed attention to can sharpen our struggles with "race" and "class" and how to bring various kinds of inequality to consciousness in the United States. For instance, my paternal grandfather's place, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, is as other Yoopers know is divided between a Finnish south associated with forestry and a Cornish north defined by mining, with French-Canadians throughout (including my grandfather's mother, who passed when he was a boy, and the father of my

paternal grandmother, a dentist). While I was in the midst of this project, one of my elementary school teachers in Wyoming began to talk to me of her family's movements between Wyoming, Russia, and Kazakhstan as Volga Germans. Exploring this Volga Germanness, I am coming to find, is very productive in understanding the history and present of northwestern Wyoming.

When I returned from Erdenet to the United States, I joined my grandmother on a trip to central Montana to "help" her, her sisters, and brother-in-law (my favorite uncle, a snowmachine mechanic who holds several US patents and "should have gone to college") determine how to divide the rest of the "ranch" before members of their generation passed on. As in Erdenet, I did not know how to "help," but by observing and doing as directed and guided I learned much which might be applied to an ethnography of rural Norwegian and Swedish Americans, still grappling with primogeniture, or the changing relation of agriculture and oil extraction in Montana and North Dakota, as we even had several chance encounters with outfits exploring for oil shale and transporting parts of tar sands refineries north to Alberta.

Returning to Princeton was not straightforward for me as it involved reaccretion with what I had already struggled with and as having accreted with and in additional groups and the relations constituting them, I had changed since beginning my long term of fieldwork. This dissertation however also represents a becoming, an engagement between different marginal millieus, including those of academic anthropologists, including friends, colleagues, and mentors from Princeton, Cambridge, MIT, and the University of Chicago. I enact as well as argue that anthropologists and their collaborators (not always friends) not only work to demonstrate and explain the exclusions and inequalities attending networks claiming total (for instance, "global" or "national") inclusion, but also practice recognizing other others and their other ways of making relations so that they also become ours, and ours to other others.

Chapter 1

Heaps of Difference: Accessing and Accreting Value

One day Ulzii invited me to accompany his family on an after-work outing. We drove from the university dormitory building where I lived to one of the low mountains on the edge of Erdenet city. Having climbed up the slope of the mountain there, Ulzii, his wife, and I each immediately picked three stones off of the ground nearby, but not too nearby, as the ground for several meters around had been scraped clean by others. We added these stones to an *ovoo*: a “heap” of rocks, sky-blue *khadag* scarves, bottles of vodka, car parts, paper money, and other offerings (Figure 1.1).¹

Ahead of us across the valley an apparently small portion of the far horizon was occupied by the vast open space that some three decades ago had been the top of the mountain, but not yet the mine, known as Erdenetiin-Ovoo (“Treasure *Ovoo*”). The edge of the open pit mine was marked by the turquoise-blue buildings of the mineral processing factories though the pit itself was hidden among a range of forested

¹I use the transliteration *ovoo* rather than *obo* or *oboo* (Bawden 1959, Humphrey 1998, Humphrey et al. 1996, Humphrey et al. 2013, Hurelbaatar 2006, Lattimore 1941) as it more closely reflects the pronunciation local to Erdenet as well as the usual transcription in the Cyrillic alphabet widely in use in Mongolia (also discussing northern Mongolia, Empson 2011, Humphrey 2002a and Pedersen 2011 use *ovoo*).

mountains receding into the distance. It was a series of man-made mountains, heaps of low-grade copper and molybdenum ore, that dominated the view. Local mining engineers, with whom I conducted fieldwork between 2007 and 2012, also call these heaps of ore *ovoo*. Some of these *ovoo* of difficult-to-process ore were being worked on with the cooperation of researchers and corporations from nations beyond the former Eastern Bloc, adding to the Czechoslovakian and Russian partners involved in the prospecting, construction and operation of the mine at Erdenet since the 1960s. Meanwhile, other heaps of ore were being held to be processed with technologies not yet developed but potentially to be researched through these and other international partnerships.

The construction and transformation of these different kinds of *ovoo* involved the accretion and consequent transformation of separate persons and groups into new ones, action which could also transform the prior accretions, their components, and the other accretions of these component persons and groups. The *ovoo* heaps of ore that had once been *ovoo* mountain, like the *ovoo* heap of offerings on an *ovoo* mountain-top, comprise and transmit parts of an individual or group's shared substance placed to mingle with that of others who have also made offerings, whether of vodka or scientific expertise, to comprise the *ovoo* (Figure 1.2).

Like landscapes throughout Mongolia and elsewhere in Inner Asia, the terrain around Erdenet is dotted with *ovoo* heaps of stones, silk scarves (*khadag*), food, and other offerings (*takhialga*) made over time, on different occasions, by different individuals and collectivities. Anthropologists and scholars of religion have emphasized that *ovoo* are sites where members of local communities (*nutag*) make offerings to invisible entities held to have power over individual "vitality" (*khiimor*) and the source of "blessings" or "grace" (*khishig*) for the production of herd animals and the health and reproduction of humans (Bawden 1959, Chabros 1992, Empson 2011, Fijn 2011, Heissig 1980, Humphrey et al. 2013, Hurelbaatar 2006). Here I focus



Figure 1.1: An *ovoo* along a roadside in South Gobi (*Umnugov*) province. Objects placed to comprise the *ovoo* include stones, blue *khadag* scarves, a bottle of Kubulai Khan brand vodka, money, a cow skull, wild goat or ibex (*yanguur*) skulls, and the tire and wheel rim of a car or jeep.



Figure 1.2: *Ovoo* heaps, of non-ore rock and low-grade ores (right) next to the open-pit mine Erdenetiin-ovoo (left).

rather on the quality of these producers, which are all known as *erdene* (“treasures”). The name Erdenet means “place of *erdene*,” other place names in Mongolia with this construction include the mountain north of Erdenetiin-Ovoo, Sogoot, which indicates the presence of numerous cow elk. The “offerings” on *ovoo*, including money, alcohol, scarves, food, and parts of animals and vehicles, are not *erdene* valuables, rather they are valuables that carry and transmit substances, creating relations through which *erdene* valuables are accessed. I focus on this quality of alcoholic beverages and dairy foods in chapters two and three.

Erdenet is a *nutag* particularly involved in the production of the kind of *erdene* comprising valuable metals and stones (the Nine *Erdene*), as well as knowledge or skill (*ukhaan*) that Buddhists throughout the world have long symbolized as “jewels” (the Three *Erdene*). Additionally, Mongolians often describe herd animals (horses, cattle, sheep, goats, and camels) as the “five treasures” (*tavan erdene*). In Mongolia, modernist scientific traditions are also represented by the three-jewel motif (Mng. *chandmani erdene*, Pali *triratna*) that index the Buddha (enlightened teacher), the Sangha (community of practitioners), and the Dharma (teachings), Refuges which save the sentient beings coming to them (see Figures 1.3 and 1.4).

These “three jewels”² have been considered particularly effective when combined with benevolent rule, often by powers other than the Buddhist monastic (or scientific) communities themselves. Focusing on *ovoo* ceremonies held annually when groups of people associated with a local territory (*nutag*) are gathered in the summertime and hold festivals and competitive games (*naadam*) (see chapter four), many Mongolists have explored how *ovoo* emphasize the often replicative production of individuals

²Written during the socialist period, Puntsagiin Badarch’s patriotic verse “Nation of Nine Treasures” (*Eson Erdeniin Oron*) exemplifies the expansion of the meaning of the “nine jewels” (*eson erdene*) beyond nine types of precious stones to the combination of Mongolia’s environment and People (*ard tumen*) into a “motherland” (*ekh oron*), while ignoring other common and historical references to the “nine jewel-like” members of a sovereign’s court. The poem has in recent years been performed by no less than thirteen pop and operatic singers in three music videos widely distributed via YouTube.



Figure 1.3: An emblem of Erdenet city, currently used by the Facebook group Erdenet Khot (“Erdenet City”) (<http://www.facebook.com/erdenetcity>) and displayed on the Mongolian-Russian friendship monument on Undurlug mountain, shows a lion (*arslan*) with *erdene* treasure in the form of three teardrop-shaped jewels. Like the White Old Man (*Tsagaan Ovgon*) and Garuda bird (*Khangard*), the lion is often associated with particular local *ovoo* mountains as a powerful nonhuman involved in the access of *erdene* treasures – three of the four *ovoo* mountains of Ulaanbaatar and their districts (*duureg*) are represented with images of the lion, Khangard, and White Old Man. At annual *naadam* games held along with large annual *ovoo* ceremonies, human wrestlers and archers demonstrating their value and that of their accretive groups, are also called *arslan*, *Khangard*, and *mergen* (“wise and skillful”).

and social groups (visible or human as well as invisible or nonhuman) within *nutag* communities through relations enacted at *ovoo* ceremonies (Bruun 2006, Empson 2011, Heissig 1980, Humphrey et al. 2013, Humphrey et al. 1996, Pedersen 2011, Sneath 2010). These annual *ovoo* ceremonies were, and continue to be, sites where local or particular powers articulate with those of national, ecclesiastical, and imperial centers claiming privileged access to, or participation in, the bestowal of *khishig* blessings (Pedersen 2011, Sneath 2010), or what I am emphasizing to be the access of *erdene* valuables. In these discussions, *ovoo* are understood as sites where the outside can encounter and dominate a bounded local. For example, in some Mongolian regions where shamans may once have presided, Buddhist lamas



Figure 1.4: The logo of the Mongolian University of Science and Technology, whose Erdenet branch was the site of much of my fieldwork, incorporates the three *erdene* jewels between an open book (in red) and a compass, gear, and atom. Academicians, scientists and other scholars are known in Mongolian as *erdemted* and their knowledge as *erdem*.

(associated with powerful monasteries in as well as beyond Mongolia as well as Mongol rulers claiming the lineage of Chinggis Khaan³, both groups often allied with the imperial hierarchies of Beijing) came to orchestrate *ovoo* ceremonies, composing oratory and written texts incorporating *ovoo* ritual and nonhuman entities of a local *nutag* into Buddhist cosmologies and cosmopolitics as boddhisattvas, humans as well as animals and nonhuman immortal beings who had achieved enlightenment but vowed to forgo nirvana until all sentient beings were also thus saved (Bawden 1959, Heissig 1953a, 1953, 1980, Humphrey et al. 2013). Boddhisattvas, as exemplified perhaps most clearly today by the Dalai Lama, who is a reincarnating emanation of the boddhisattva Avalokiteshvara, are involved in very human politics. A monumental image of Avalokiteshvara (Mng. Janraisig) was rebuilt in Ulaanbaatar – with Erdenet copper – in the 1990s. Some say that the original statue was melted down in the early socialist period, when almost all of the Mongolian monasteries were destroyed and the monks secularized or subjected to worse violence, to make bullets.

³For English-speakers, Chinggis Khaan is most familiar as Genghis Khan.

This discussion, however, emphasizes the accumulating and multiple aspects of *ovoo* that always resist hierarchies. This is often characterized as the shamanic element of Mongolian power and also of Mongolian Buddhism. The local, inside, and mutual are processually composed with, and often of, the foreign, outside, and separate in controlled ways for particular kinds of transformations of particular accreted groups of people and things; the local is not subsumed as a segment of a higher order, but is rather created and recreated as a changing accretion through shifting associations with a variety of other accretions. As David Sneath (2010) in particular describes, contemporary Mongolians are involved in a number of different kinds of “social networks,” many of which are associated with different varieties of *ovoo*. The inside may also be outside in these ways, Humphrey and Onon (1996) discuss a late 19th/early 20th century Manchurian Daur case in which local “elders” (*akhmad*, see chapters four and five) alone presided at *ovoo* ceremonies.

During my fieldwork in Erdenet, the mining corporation and Buddhist lamas together conducted an annual *ovoo* ceremony at a local *ovoo*, avoiding the participation of national government and the symbolism associated with the Mongolian empire of Chinggis Khaan that is used in *ovoo* ceremonies in Ulaanbaatar and elsewhere conducted by the president (Sneath 2010 discusses these national *ovoo* ceremonies).

At another Erdenet *ovoo*, Buddhist monks from the capital participated with local government officials as well as the mining corporation in the construction of a Buddhist monument on the mountain *Undurlug* (Figure 1.5), where Ulzii and I made offerings and where I later observed individuals and households making offerings on the occasion of the New Year (*Tsagaan Sar*) (Figure 1.8) and picnicking near the Russian-Mongolian friendship monument maintained by the mining corporation (Figure 1.6, 1.7). Since the socialist period (*sotsialistiin yue*) Erdenet continues to be an accretion of Mongolians with Russians, including those who continue to work

locally as well as those who are involved in managing and collecting revenues of the mining corporation as part of the Russian state enterprise Rostec.⁴ At the same time, people of Erdenet accretions, from households to workgroups to *nutag* groups of various Mongolian nationalities (*undesten*, *yastan*) and provinces (*aimag*), also carefully make use of associations with Mongolian powers based in Ulaanbaatar, who have in the past made moves antagonistic to Erdenet: removing parts of it rather than accreting with it; for example through increased taxation that does not often return in the form of local infrastructure and services that the mining corporation continues to provide. Accretions may be followed by separation that leave parts of the former accretive group without something that had been crucial to them; Erdenet's accretions risk jeopardizing existing forms of production rather than increasing them through transformation. However, the overall tendency in Erdenet has been to support and pursue, rather than to avoid or prevent, these accretions for transformations, albeit carefully and unevenly across various accretive groups.

The aspect of *ovoo* as physical accretions where inside and outside are negotiated and transformed is more evident in other *ovoo*-building practices which have had less attention paid to them by Mongolists, and discussing them will help present types of social networks and accretions also less common in Mongolist literatures but important in contemporary Erdenet and beyond. Besides two *ovoo* associated with Erdenet as a single *nutag* community, I describe three additional types of (*ovoo*) involved in comprising other accretions of Erdenet humans and nonhumans in ways that are within and outside of Erdenet.

⁴Rostec, like previous Russian and Soviet accretive groups that have partially separated and partly returned since the late 1980s, holds forty-nine percent ownership of Erdenet while the Mongolian state holds fifty-one percent ownership. Various Mongolian politicians and other state actors, including the current president Elbegdorj who is from Erdenet but, significantly went largely unmentioned – with people even refusing to talk about him – during my fieldwork (but see Conclusion), have pushed for privatization of Erdenet throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s. Rossabi (2005) and Black, Kraakman, and Tarassova (2006) provide drastically different accounts of attempts to privatize Erdenet and the involvement of Mongolian as well as Russian actors.

The first other variety of *ovoo* is the “roadside” or “boundary *ovoo*” found particularly at passes between mountains and boundaries of *nutag* communities coterminous with *sum* (former *negdel-sum*, or herding and farming collectives) and *aimag* (“province”) boundaries. Travellers with no enduring association with or belonging in the *nutag* community of these territories will often stop and make offerings at these, though not always, as associations with multiple *nutag* are risky as well as potentially productive - - they may move productive products, *erdene*, away from a *nutag* and its persons as well as potentially accrete them for beneficial transformation and increased production, the access of additional *erdene*. As sites where people may make connections to communities of humans and non-humans beyond those at their place of dwelling, these roadside *ovoo* are similar to *ovoo* at “energy centers” (*energiin tuv*) including lightning-struck trees, mineral springs (*arshaan*), and ruined as well as functional monasteries.⁵

The second kind of *ovoo* I describe are known in Erdenet as *nutgiin ovoo*, where *nutgiin*⁶ refers to *nutag* other than Erdenet’s. These are constructed on the mountains surrounding Erdenet, but of stones and other material from *nutag* far from Erdenet in far-flung corners of Mongolia, particularly those that Erdenet residents first arrived from in the 1970s.

Finally, I describe *ovoo* of mineral ores, which like the Russian-Mongolian friendship monuments found on the mountains of local *nutag ovoo* in Erdenet as well as Ulaanbaatar and other Mongolian towns and cities, are at the crux of local and international accretions that, like accretions of and between different Mongolians and groups of Mongolians, remain distinguishable while also influencing one another to produce transformations while addressing the risk of unwanted change or loss.

⁵Humphrey (2002) discusses one nationally prominent *energiin tuv* in terms of the creation of new collectivities after the end of state socialism, noting the continuation of forms of association and property also found under collectivization as well as in previous eras.

⁶*Nutgiin* is a possessive or genitive form of *nutag*.

This chapter, while offering an alternative discussion of *ovoo*, a classic theme in Mongolist ethnography and religious studies due to their crucial role in the cosmopolitics of shamans, lamas, emperors, and socialists alike, uses *ovoo* to introduce persons and collectivities in and of Erdenet and illustrate the common ways they are composed and relate to one another, a first step in examining the everyday cosmopolitics of mining, professionalism and international cooperation in contemporary Mongolia. The distinctive kinds of collectivity that are introduced in this chapter – workplaces (*khamt olon*) and households (*ger bul*, *urkh*, *ail*); Mongolian as well as international nationalities (*undesten*, *yastan*) with their own *nutag* – are also associated with particular ways of relating through accretion and separation that are discussed in the following chapters.

Multiplicity and Power

While his wife and children were playing near the *ovoo* on Undurlug, Ulzii turned to me and said “Our corporation is building the Burkhan Bagsh because we have disturbed the nature.”⁷ As we stood in front of the *ovoo* looking out to the mine and Erdenetiin-Ovoo, a monumental image of the Buddha⁸ was rising on the hillside to our left (see Figure 1.8). Ahead of us and to the right stood the monument to Mongolian-Russian friendship (Mng. *nairamdal*, Rus. *drujba*), maintained by the Erdenet Mining Corporation (locally and throughout Mongolia often called *GOK*, from Russian *gorno-obogotitel'nii kombinat*, “mining and mineral processing combine”) and marked with symbols of the city of Erdenet as a whole as well as of GOK’s constituent departments. One generally passed through this monument, in the form of two hands upholding a gear over a plaza reached by a staircase ascending the hill, to reach the *ovoo* where

⁷Ulzii and I generally spoke in English.

⁸A *Burkhan Bagsh*, “Teacher Buddha;” the historical, Gautama or Shakyamuni Buddha.



Figure 1.5: *Undurlug* mountain and the Mongolian-Russian friendship monument.

I made offerings with Ulzii and his family. Some would ascend further on other occasions.

Morten Pedersen (2009) has described *ovoo* as a “center” or “pivot,” an unmovable “node” in the landscape, of the same type as the seasonal campsites mobile herders move between more or less regularly from year to year (see also Humphrey 1995). Elaborating on this in conversation with Phillipe Descola and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Pedersen (2001, 2007) has connected *ovoo* with other kinds of “totemic” and “animistic” modes of categorizing thought and action, describing the Mongolian cosmos as a number of “wholes of holes.” The plane of the landscape, Pedersen writes, is one kind of “whole” of set states or “holes,” i.e. local areas composed of campsites that entities “trampoline” between. These local areas, of which Erdenet is one, are called *nutag*, parts of *baigal* or the more Buddhist *sansar* (from Sanskrit *samsara*), communities of entities that are part of the universe but separate from other such communities. Pedersen uses the framework of Latourian actor-networks to describe these communities of human and nonhuman, landscape and inhabitant,

but like other Mongolists highlights the role of *ezed* masters that act upon the actants of a network acting at particular *ovoo*. Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, for example, describe the *ovoo* of the Mona Uul mountain range in Inner Mongolia as sites “where ‘masters’ [that] inhere in rivers, springs, crags, animal trails, waterfalls, caves, tops of mountains, and especially green and bushy trees [...] dwell or can be called into presence” (2007:255).

Relations with these “masters” determine individual “vitality” (*khiimor*) and “blessings” (*khishig*) resulting in good weather, health, abundant children, herds, game, and so forth. Particular persons and groups of persons, including but not limited to those groups which Caroline Humphrey and Urgunge Onon (1996) first and enduringly labeled “shamans and elders” in their work of that title, have claimed and been attributed various kinds of access to members of *nutag* communities unavailable to most living humans. As discussed by Charles Bawden (1959), Walther Heissig (1980), A. Hurelbaatar (2006), David Sneath (2010), and Rebecca Empson (2011), as well as Humphrey (1995, 1998) and Pedersen (2011), those claiming access to powerful nonhuman members of the *nutag* community by orchestrating annual ceremonies at *ovoo* are not limited to shamans and elders living in the area and closely associated with the *nutag* corresponding to the *ovoo*, but have included missionary lamas, who made the local cosmological by invoking local as well as global or universally important entities such as the Buddha (Bawden 1959, Pedersen 2011, Heissig 1980), local government officials (Hurelbaatar 2006, Humphrey 1998), presidents (Sneath 2010), and businessmen from the local and national or ethnic *nutag* communities as well as beyond them (Hurelbaatar 2006).

GOK’s marked presence on the mountain near the city is thus not surprising. However, that GOK was not the only accretion making contact with powerful locals (as a powerful local) by building on the *nutag* community’s *ovoo* mountains is less in line with these other discussions of the politics of *ovoo*. In addition to a long-



Figure 1.6: The Russian-Mongolian friendship monument in 2013-2014, painted for the thirty-sixth anniversary of the corporation. (<http://www.facebook.com/erdenetinfosite>)



Figure 1.7: Opposite view of the Russian-Mongolian Friendship Monument in 2014. With Russian and Mongolian national arms beside them, Russian and Mongolian women exchange national foods. The Mongolian woman transfers her and hers' substance with a *khadag* scarf and milk produced by her household's herd animals. Above are the national symbols of the Mongolian and Russian states, around are miners. (Used with permission of Nyampurev Galsanjamts.)

running theme in the Mongolist literature about the widespread violent displacement of shamans by Buddhist lamas before the two were both targeted by Communists (Heissig 1953a, Heissig 1953b, Humphrey 1995, Pedersen 2011) Hurelbaatar (2006) associates the presence of Chinese businessmen at an annual *ovoo* ceremony in Inner Mongolia with the assimilation of Mongols, Sneath (2010) contrasts belonging in a national *nutag* community with local *nutag* as Mongolian presidents preside over new kinds of *ovoo* ceremonies using symbols of Chinggis Khaan's empire on mountains near Ulaanbaatar and elsewhere in Mongolia that are also identified with particular subnational regions, and Pedersen (2011) describes the power of "not quite shamans" who abstain from and deride *ovoo* ceremonies. While these works describe the battle for preeminence as the exclusion of others, *ovoo* practices in Erdenet are marked by the accretion (accompanied, though, by careful management) of others. Citing Hildegard Diemberger's (2007) work on *ovoo*-like structures in Tibet (*la rtse*), Empson, who characterizes *ovoo* as "accumulations" of the substance of those making offerings to and on them, writes, "The ceremonies are neither a strategic use of religion for political purposes, nor a strategic use of politics for religious purposes. Instead, 'the answer lies with each of the participants, mirrored in their personal view of the occasion and in the different 'interpretive communities' they create" (2011:91). Erdenet residents (myself included), as well as accretions such as GOK and its component sections and workplaces, built *ovoo* as creative acts that included, but also went beyond, the act of calling energies and entities already existing in the *nutag* community to control it. These creative acts transform the person or other accretion making them by relating them to others, and also transform those others by relating them to the accretion making the offerings; the *ovoo* is where substance is shared to create a group of humans and nonhumans that might later also be separated and reassociated to again transform the group as well as the individual or part being accreted or separated into something new. *Ezed* "masters" are associated with particular mountains often

called *ovoo* (such as Erdenetiin-Ovoo), but the accretions that people create there are also called *ovoo*. Offerings fall off of the heap to the dirt, are carried away by – or fed directly to – animals domestic and wild, and items comprising *ovoo* even may be taken and “borrowed” (Humphrey 2002a); as the mountain and the heap of offerings are one network or accretion of parts acting upon one another, so is the “master” and the other entities acting to create and recreate these physical and social accretions.

During my fieldwork I had noted that relations between GOK and the local government were often strained. For example, in the winter of 2011 (and before the story made national news headlines), my coworkers at GOK recounted to me how the governor (*zasag darga*) had over the weekend been physically assaulted (*zodogson*) by a GOK employee close to the general director of the corporation. In the same conversation, they recalled how our workplace had lost a luxurious new building (which had included a sauna on the premises) to the local government a few years before, indirectly placing themselves with a part of GOK and not the local government.

However, the monument of the Buddha, unlike the Russian-Mongolian friendship monument, was itself not marked by GOK nor the local government. The corporation listed the statue as one of the local infrastructure projects it had contributed to in its own newspaper and the other major local newspaper (Shine Medee 2012), while also highlighting the governor’s and a former president’s participation. Both articles also described funds drawn from the provincial budget as well as public donations (*khandiv*). The ceremony to call the bodhisattva into the statue and “enliven” it (*aravnailakh*, *amilakh*) was lead by a head lama of the Gandan monastery from Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia’s largest and oldest, having been the only one operating through the socialist period), a move that avoided the national government itself while claiming national importance, and also possibly avoided the local monastery,

which members of my workplace in GOK as well as others in Erdenet were vocal about avoiding.

Additionally, these relational and transformational possibilities were not accessible only to national, corporate, or government-related kinds of accretions. As Bernard Charlier (2012) also describes in an article about offerings made for success in wolf hunting, individuals and families like Ulzii's also made offerings as discrete accretive groups. These could relate variously to and transform other accretive groups such as the Mongolian nation or GOK, as well as accretions beyond these. Just before the New Year (*Tsagaan Sar*) people at my workplace told me that many local people would go to Undurlug at sunrise on the first day of the New Year (Figure 1.8). As I began to climb the stairs of Undurlug to the Russian-Mongolian friendship monument alone, I was careful to judge how others reacted to my presence. Not only was my foreignness visible despite covering most of myself against the February cold with a large hat made of steppe fox and marmot fur and a Mongolian-made black leather coat, I appeared to be not only the only non-Mongolian,⁹ but also the only person visiting the *ovoo* alone that morning. Though I did not make an offering at the *ovoo* (partly because I had forgotten to bring an offering of dairy (*tsagaan idee*, "white food") like most of the other people had brought), no one made any action to suggest that I should not also become part of the local accretion.

Others Creating, and Risking, One Another

Conversing with me between the *ovoo* and the friendship monument, Ulzii told me how his wife was planning to soon go to another province of soon for a high school reunion. As he told me later, Ulzii was a member of one of many Mongolian nationalities (*yastan undested*, as opposed to *undested* which often refers to nationalities associated

⁹I saw none of the local Russians. For discussion of Russian participation in "Mongolian" practices such as the summer *Naadam* that is associated with annual *ovoo* ceremonies in many localities but apparently not in Erdenet, see chapter four.



Figure 1.8: The Burkhan Bagsh on Undurlug mountain during the first day of the New Year, when people throughout Mongolia travel to a local *ovoo* for the moment the sun rises. People are making offerings and circumambulations at the *ovoo* in the foreground as well as on the top of the mountain.

with states, such as Mongolian, Russian, or American). Throughout the course of my fieldwork in Erdenet, people continued to tell me of their membership in these various nationalities that are often associated with different regions of Mongolia far from Erdenet.

After I made a short presentation about my research to a group of American students visiting Erdenet, the director of my workplace in the Erdenet Mining Corporation asked that I make the presentation to our coworkers as well. Parts of the talk about Erdenet's history as a Soviet-Mongolian joint project, how techniques of mineral production at Erdenet contrasted with those at newer mines in Mongolia operated by Western multinational corporations, and the relationships that mining

specialists maintained with and as herders were met with responses of bored statements along the lines of “of course!” Yet, after the presentation my coworkers offered an explanation of something important that I had so far not encountered in Erdenet, nor elsewhere in Mongolia. In addition to the *ovoo* at the mine site on Erdenetiin-ovoo and near the Russian-Mongolian friendship monument on Undurlug that I had mentioned in the presentation, my coworkers told me about *nutgiin ovoo* built and regularly visited by people from various regions of Mongolia or *nutag* now living in Erdenet.

A Soviet-made map from the early 1970s or late 1960s shows no more than five groups of yurts (*khot ail*) in the valley where Erdenet was built in the mid-70s along the Chingel river, north of the mountain Chingeliin Khukh Chuluut (“Place of Dark Blue Stone on the Chingel River”).¹⁰ Otherwise known as Erdenetiin-Ovoo, this mountain is across the valley from Undurlug, which is unnamed but marked with a symbol for “burial” (Headquarters, Department of the Army 1958) apparently marking the centuries-old stone circles or *khereg suur*. Several Mongolians told me that *khereg* indicates “Kirghiz,” and that the pre-Chinggisiid builders were not Mongols, and in Erdenet many people were eager to tell me of their origins elsewhere, as different kinds of Mongols and as non-Mongols.

Erdenet was built as an entirely new settlement in the 1970s but its builders and residents are in relations of accretion to Erdenet and also to the places that they came from and often return to. Erdenet was populated by people from all over Mongolia, particularly minority nationalities (*yastan undested*) from the border areas including Buriads (from the north and northeast), Zakhchin (from the southern aimag of Govi-Altai; their ethnonym literally means “borderers” and they were designated by the Manchu imperial government to guard the border of Inner and Outer Mongolia, today

¹⁰This map was given to me in digital form with material beyond the map itself trimmed off. I am thus not able to precisely identify the map. The scale is 1:500,000, covering the area from 50 to 48 degrees N and from 102 to 105 degrees E.

the Mongolian and Chinese national borders), Darkhad, Uriankhai, Kazakhs, and people from various Oirad groups (from Hovd, Uvs, Zavkhan, and Khuvsgul aimags in the northwest). Many of these people, like my close Kazakh friend Serik did, could tell me how their grandparents and great-grandparents had migrated across contemporary Chinese, Mongolian, and Russian borders that came to their present form over the course of the first half of the Twentieth Century, in the end decisively to flee or live with emerging regimes of collectivization, before their descendants moved again to become involved in Mongolia’s “avant-garde project of the Twentieth Century” at Erdenet.

The *nutgiin ovoo*, my coworkers told me, were built with stones brought from those other *nutag* themselves, though they were now lying on mountains bounding the valley of Erdenet city on the north and south.¹¹ Members of the *nutag* community that Rebecca Empson (2011) worked with, Buriad who had migrated from across the contemporary Russian-Mongolian border, told her a story about a nearby group of mountains that had also fled there. Like the *nutag* community Empson worked with, Erdenet residents describe Erdenet as having origins elsewhere. However, these humans and nonhumans did not move together as an already articulated *nutag* community. Erdenet residents, in contrast and like many Ulaanbaatar residents who associate with “*nutag* councils” (*nutgiin zuvlul*) (Sneath 2010, Dalaibuyan 2012), continue active membership with other *nutag* communities associated with other provinces of Mongolia and particular nationalities associated with them, parts of which they brought with them to Erdenet (see Figure 1.9).

Only one person told me that prior to the 1970s his family had been living near the valley where Erdenet was to be built. Yet he also claimed a minority identity

¹¹I scarcely encountered “Nutag Councils” (*nutgiin zuvlul*) like those described by Dalaibuyan (2012) and Sneath (2010). The only one I was aware of was the Bayan-Ulgii province *zuvlul*, which organized a celebration of Nauruz, the Kazak New Year, at Erdenet’s cultural palace with musicians and other performers from Bayan-Ulgii. Non-Kazakhs also from Bayan-Ulgii, particularly Uriankhai, also attended in their own national costume, which is almost indistinguishable from Mongol styles though quite different from Kazakh forms. See Figure 1.9.



Figure 1.9: “Leaders and famous members” (*terguulegchid, aldartnuud*) of the Bayan-Ulgii *nutag* council. Front and center is a Kazakh national costume. (From Bataa 2011a.)

from afar as an Evenk or Khamnigan, tracing his origin from north of the Mongolian border and into Russia. On a few occasions, he and others remarked on his Turkic, rather than Mongol, traits.

As Humphrey (2007) and Pedersen (2007) note, Mongolians rarely emphasize cosmogenic events, focusing rather on the shifting relations and identities of different energies and entities over time. Humans reincarnate as other humans, animals, or become features on the landscape. By donning their costumes and manipulating their mirrors, shamans move from a plane of relational possibilities with other humans into one of relating with deceased humans or nonhuman entities (2007, 2007). The daughter-in-law must feed the ancestors and other associates of her husband’s natal household while maintaining relations with her own natal household (Delaplace et al. 2007). Children must be coaxed to remain with their new households, even though

they may be reincarnations of deceased members of the household or one of its lineages (Delaplace et al. 2007, Empson 2011).

At the same time, however, the importance that Mongolians place on maintaining and shifting relationships with multiple others that define and redefine their own selves over time has not been much emphasized, particularly in relation to discussions of attachments to multiple households or families (*ail* and *khamaatnuud*) and local *nutag* communities (and particularly *nutag* as nationalities). This aspect of life is fraught and dangerous and people do often speak of having one *nutag*, usually that where they were born (*tursun nutag*), while as Hwan-Young Park (2003) described in discussions of adoption and long-distance trading in the early 1990s, having multiple attachments to multiple communities and networks is essential – before and after, as well as during, the crises immediately after the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc and “Democratic Revolution.”

Tsetsgee, a middle-aged woman born in the central Gobi, once complained to me that the water in her apartment (and apartments were quite scarce and desired in Erdenet, there being only half as many as would be required to house the entire population), the water that she drank, came from the Selenge river some fifty kilometers away and she envied those people living in the informally built districts of wooden houses and yurts around the city (*ger khoroolol*) because their water came from the ground nearby. Drinking it, she said, was “healthier” (*bieend sain*, “good for the body”). Tsetsgee told me that her children were part of the Erdenet *nutag*, but she also travelled with them to her home region (*tursun nutag*) from Erdenet, the *nutag* she had later “settled” in (*sudlaagiin nutag*), during the summer. She and her husband, born in Ulaanbaatar but raised and educated in the same class (*angi*, also an important kind of accretion) in Erdenet as electrical power engineers, hoped that their oldest and second sons would become mining engineers, studying but not necessarily working in Erdenet – the Gobi being the apparent center of new mining

developments. My occasional presence in their household, as someone to practice English with these children, was also an example of the importance of accreting parts of multiple different *nutag*, despite the risks involved that I played out in ways I describe further in the next chapter.

People I worked with at the Erdenet Mining Corporation also took me to trees and springs elsewhere in northern Mongolia (see Figure 1.10), and explained that these sites were connected to a “Tree Mother”¹² and Zanabazar, the first Bogd Khaan or reincarnating bodhisattva ruler of Mongolia, who passed away in the eighteenth century.¹³ At the first site, a teacher of Russian I worked with at the university had me make an offering to and ask the Tree Mother for successful completion of my doctoral degree while shamans worked nearby (see Figures 1.11 and 1.12). Some of these shamans associated themselves with Olkhon Island and its associated lineages, currently a hotspot of similar activity over the Russian border (Bernstein 2008, Hangartner 2011). A few hours’ drive from Erdenet at Amarbayasgalant Monastery, one of the three monastic sites that had been largest during presocialist times and thus maintained as a museum rather than destroyed during the socialist period, I joined a long queue of people to crawl under a small stupa-like monument, fix my view in alignment with a distant tree and further mountain, and make a wish.

Not only was Erdenet created (while being continually transformed) as a *nutag* community through the amalgamation of parts of other *nutag* communities, these accretions to *ovoo* beyond Erdenet by members of the Erdenet *nutag* also continually transformed the Erdenet *nutag* by transforming the individual persons and collectivities (for example, the workgroups and households) that I travelled to these other *ovoo* with and that I focus on in the following chapter. Thus these associations were made with care, as they effected other relationships with other

¹²*Eej Mod*, near Altanbulag in Selenge province a half-day’s drive from Erdenet.

¹³A cold spring *arshaan* in the Khandui river valley, Bayan-Agt county, Bulgan province and a day’s drive from Erdenet.



Figure 1.11: *Eej Mod*, the Tree Mother.



Figure 1.12: Verse erected at the Tree Mother by an Erdenet resident, who claims both the Selenge region and the Mongolian nation as his own and as under the protection of the Tree Mother. Behind the monument are stacks of tea-bricks covered with *khadag* scarves and milky offerings that have solidified after being thrown into the air (*tsatsrakh*). These stacks formed walls around the Tree Mother and other nearby trees.

nutag, households, and workplaces. When I returned to my workplace on Monday after visiting the Tree Mother over the weekend, the director of my workplace admonished me for not asking permission from him to leave Erdenet with someone from another workplace, even though she was known to him and part of our larger workplaces, the university and the corporation. At the Tree Mother, the Russian teacher's husband, who explained to me on the way back that he hailed from far western Mongolia as a member of one of the Oirat Mongol nationalities, kept his distance from the Tree Mother while his wife, a Khalkha Mongol from central Mongolia, made her annual visit to this powerful member of the Selenge region *nutag*. On our drive back to Erdenet, I was asked about my own nationality (*undesten*). As usual, *Amerik* (one word indexing both the nationality and the nation-state) was considered to be multiple (here, of persons of different nationalities) and that multiplicity an aspect of American power, while at the same time my answer of being *erliiz* or mixed was somewhat surprising (though intriguing) to others in the conversation. After identifying one of my nationalities as French-Canadian, I was asked many questions about how Quebec related to the nation of Canada. My "Turkic" friends on more than one occasion joked about their non-Mongolness, but often to control their place in Mongol accretions as well, treading between laughter and shouting in debates about whose ancestors made the best fermented mare's milk or made the most contributions to Chinggis Khaan's empire. As I describe further in chapter four, a person is generally assumed to be of a single national *undesten*, at least at a given time in a given context, and it is by acting as part of a national accretion that in Marilyn Strathern's (1996) terms "networks" are often "cut" – other accretions one is or might be part of are not being forever denied or membership in them foreclosed, but rather one or some are being foregrounded.

Friendship and Transformation

What do people hope to gain from multiple relations with and involvements in various accretions, particularly new and foreign ones? What do they fear they might lose? I return to the comment Ulzii made to me on Undurlug: “We have disturbed the nature. That is why our company is building the Burkhan Bagsh.”

Ulzii’s concern over “disturbing the nature” was widely shared in Erdenet. As I discuss further and in more detail in chapter six, the workplace that I was most closely associated with, the Hydrometallurgical Research Laboratory, was concerned with developing methods of processing Erdenet ore concentrates that would not only extend the life of the mine and local community, but do so without the harmful sulfuric acid clouds associated with pyrometallurgical methods (more familiarly known as smelting). That mining should continue at Erdenet was unquestioned by most, though it was also to be done in a continuously changing and improving way, developed through the accretion of various outsiders and their relations, human as well as nonhuman, to transform the inside. These relations were crucial to the very access of *erdene* valuables, eternally reproducible be they human children, herd animals, knowledge, or ore, but accessible only through the work of proper relation.

Mette High and Jonathon Schlesinger write that anxieties related to mining are “local fears of incoming miners’ intrusive behavior” (2010:290), a situation also documented by Rebecca Empson (2011).¹⁴ Mining may be especially “intrusive,”

¹⁴The mining primarily discussed by High and also partly by Empson is of a much smaller scale than that undertaken at Erdenet, mostly what anthropologists and development workers call “artisanal” or “small scale” mining. In the Mongolian context it is often called “ninja” mining. Equipment used ranges from plastic tubs for “panning” gold from soil brought up through unsupported tunnels, to bulldozers and other large, heavy equipment for removing large amounts of riverbed, coal, or other mineral-bearing material at a time. While anthropologists as well as global journalists have emphasized the involvement of herders (which High shows, in contrast to journalistic accounts, are often wealthy rather than “forced” into mining by poverty), some of those involved are industrial miners trained during the socialist period (pers. comm. Andrey Mikhalev), and some of the mining is done by small companies operating out of Ulaanbaatar (see Empson 2011). Much of this mining is illegal – conducted without proper mining licenses issued by the government (see High 2012 for a discussion of the legal context circa 2012). There are also a few large Mongolian and Mongolian-foreign joint companies, some part of larger conglomerate companies

High (2008b, 2012) writes, because it effects relationships between humans and others that compose *baigal*. Following other Mongolists, I offer “what is” as a translation for *baigal*, a word which in recent years has often been used as a Mongolian translation for the English words “environment” and “nature,” though those terms often index a much different concept, that of humans as actors upon a separate everything-else. *Baigal* includes other entities and energies that interact with humans in complicated ways: bestowing “grace” or “blessings” (*khishig*) and individual “vitality” (*khiimor*), becoming angry and causing adverse weather, sickness among humans and animals, and generally inhibiting their ability to prosper, relating with humans so that humans may receive *erdene* valuables.

In contexts where mining (*uurkhain uildver*) is new and arrives suddenly with outsiders (see also Empson 2011), it may be opposed to herding (*aj akhui uildver*) and said to anger the local entities controlling “land and water” (*gazriin ezed, lusiin amtan*), while it also disrupts, and often destroys, some local waterways and pastures. However, with Schlesinger (2010), High documents numerous historical accounts of Mongolian miners working where they had lived for a long time. As she discusses elsewhere (2013, 2013), mining may be considered and undertaken as an activity with the same productive logics as herding. Some of the miners High worked with asserted that they simply had relations with local entities (“black water entities,” *khar lusiin amitan*) that herders (relating to “white water entities,” *tsagaan lusiin amitan*) did not have (High 2013a).

In Erdenet, mining is both undertaken in the terms of herding and associated with outsideness and other kinds of relation. Interaction with the outside that is also inside, however, is also necessary to herding and shamanism. If “outsiders” and

involved in a range of industrial and commercial sectors, operating placer dredges, essentially small processing factories erected in the middle of rivers. Robin Grayson has done extensive field research, writing, and development consulting across this spectrum of mining activity and highlighted the complex interaction of different kinds of mining and miners. See Grayson et. al. 2004 Grayson et al. 2004, Grayson 2007 Grayson 2007, Grayson and Baatar 2009 Grayson et al. 2009, Grayson and Tumenbayar 2005 Grayson et al. 2005, and World Bank 2006 World Bank 2006.

other kinds of “others” are dangerous, then why do the “insider” living humans of a *nutag* community construct *ovoo* and make offerings? They must, whether miners or herders, cooperate with others: the deceased who may reincarnate into children and local entities with power over the weather and growth of pasture, for example. These others are different from the living and the human, and thus they have other powers, powers to secure the productive success of the living and the human. This process however is also transformative, accreting formerly outside substance, humans, and nonhumans while also maintaining boundaries between them, so that they might later be disassociated from, or otherwise differently related to. Morten Pedersen emphasizes that the “fields” of different “masters” do not have boundaries (2009:141); I argue that there is also no fixed “center” or “pivot,” and also that these “masters” and other important others may be human as well as nonhuman, their power being contingent on their relation to others in the *nutag* community.

As Ulzii indicated, *ovoo* and other kinds of offerings on top of *ovoo* mountains may be made to entreat entities and energies, such as the Buddha, whose “blessing” or “grace” (*khishig*) is required for success in productive activities producing “treasures” (*erdene*) including the pasturing of animals, the processing of ore, and the raising of children (often given personal names including the elements “Khishig” and “Erdene”). This is in line with, but also somewhat in contrast to, what many anthropologists and scholars of religion working with Mongolians, including those opposed to mining by outsiders, describe: that *ovoo* offerings are made to entities indivisibly and eternally associated with the local land and water itself as “owners” or “masters” (sing. *ezen*, pl. *ezed*) (Charlier 2012, Humphrey 1995, Humphrey et al. 1996, Humphrey et al. 2007, Hurelbaatar 2006, Hurelbaatar 2006, Neklyubov 1992, Pedersen 2009), sometimes the ancestors of people currently producing herds and descendants with that land and water (Empson 2011, Heissig 1980, Humphrey et al. 1996, Hurelbaatar 2006, Neklyubov 1992). In this aspect, the *nutag* communities that share substance by

accreting and dispersing *erdene* valuables at *ovoo* heaps and mountains are closed, self-replicating systems in which relations between humans and nonhumans must be kept “in balance” (Humphrey et al. 1993).

In Erdenet however, these kinds of local and ancestral recipients were not mentioned¹⁵ so much as energies and entities associated with places other than Erdenet and even from beyond Mongolia. Charles Bawden’s (1959) translation of a key Mongolian Buddhist text about *ovoo* that defines them as sites where bodhisattvas from all over the Buddhist cosmological world were summoned to aid a local community, in contrast to the qualities of *nutag* communities and *ovoo* as places associated with local nonhumans emphasized by Walther Heissig, Caroline Humphrey, Rebecca Empson, Morten Pedersen, and Bernard Charlier, resonates strongly with Ulzii’s explanation for building the Buddha in Erdenet. The *ovoo* of mineral ore, like a monument to Russian-Mongolian friendship nearby the image of the Buddha, heralded as one of the world’s largest (locally at least), are also part of the accretion of foreigners and foreignness to transform the local Erdenet and national Mongolian *nutag* groups of humans and nonhumans.

When Ulzii told me about the Burkhan Bagsh, we were standing in front of a monument to Mongolian-Russian friendship, through which one may pass to access the *ovoo* beyond. *Ovoo* are also located near Russian-Mongolian friendship monuments in the capital Ulaanbaatar as well as in Tsetserleg, Mongolia’s largest provincial capital. Though not marked by a tank as is Ulaanbaatar’s Zaisan monument, the Erdenet friendship monument is also the scene of a large, public annual commemoration of World War II, when joint Mongolian-Russian operations expelled the Japanese from the eastern steppes and Mongolia sent vast amounts

¹⁵It is not unusual for people to not discuss these matters (people in Erdenet, as elsewhere in Mongolia, for example avoid naming or speaking of the deceased) (Delaplace 2009), and this silence should not be taken to mean that local land and water entities and energies or deceased humans were not also intended recipients of offerings at *ovoo* and assumed to be helping with the production of or access to herds, children or ore.

of horses, meat, and other raw materials to Russian factories and forces. Though the ideal of “international friendship” (Mng. *nairamdal*, Rus. *družba*) is sometimes associated with failed socialism by Mongolians and foreigners alike, in Erdenet it is first of all a serious, continuing project, and Mongolians elsewhere pursue it by other names and means; in 2005 English was declared the official second language of Mongolia, and in 2014 Mongolia has one of the highest number of Peace Corps volunteers of any country in the world, despite having one of the lowest populations (between two and three million people).

When I visited the Zaisan monument in Ulaanbaatar in 2012, the *ovoo* had retreated up the forested mountainside after development below had taken off since I had last visited in 2007. The importance of nonhuman others associated with the uninhabited mountain forests coexists with that of human others from long ago and far away. Ulzii was talking about asking the Buddha for aid and then transitioned to telling me about how he had hoped to visit Yosemite National Park when he had been in the United States studying English – suggesting that Americans were part of *baigal* and global accretions while also having their own “energy centers,” and were not only themselves to be properly related to, but could be involved in accessing another kind of *erdene* treasure, that of scientific skill and knowledge, in Mongolians’ work to relate properly in the ever-changing relationships and components of more local *nutag* communities. What applies to bodhisattvas and local *ezed* masters applies to others who are living humans as well. Recently Marshall Sahlins (2013) has again made this point, surveying the importance of others as sources of power throughout the Pacific and beyond.

However, while Sahlins (1963) and Nancy Munn (1986), for example, have emphasized, what I call here accretions of difference are ways to expand and extend the power and “fame” of an individual through ever wider networks without transforming that individual, processes of accretion at Erdenet and in Mongolia more

broadly are focused on bringing difference from afar and outside to transform the personal, local, familiar, and interior.

Gregory Delaplace (2012, 2012) has recently pondered why Mongolians often espouse appreciation for Russians but condemnation of Chinese, concluding that while Russians tended to not integrate and remained strangers and guests, Chinese often took Mongolian wives and goods but without reciprocating, becoming more than strangers but less than moral fellow Mongolians. I argue that at least some Mongolians also integrated Russians and Russianness, but in a way that accreted and became involved in this difference in a way that it could be disaggregated, as they are currently also conducting other international collaborations. This accretion and disaggregation, however, does have transformative effects, as with the development of the Mongolian horse-headed fiddle discussed by Peter Marsh (2009). Working with Russian violin-makers, Mongolian craftsmen and musicians created an instrument that could, and does, play compositions by European composers in large concert halls. They hold, however, that the instrument was not thus just “Europeanized,” but its Mongolness further developed. I once made a joke in Mongolian using the poetic form about “three good things” (*gurvan saikhan*), on a friends’ Facebook page to which she responded, “ah, you have almost become a Mongolian!” [Chi barag Mongol khun bolson baina shuu dee]. As I describe in chapter three, language use, as well as well-defined hierarchies of the workplace, are ways of aggregating or disaggregating for controlled transformation that also keeps otherness inside or pushes it out, making participation in a community of others, as a powerful other, possible.

As he explained to me during a visit to his former workplace at the mineral processing factories and open pit mine, in the 1990s Ulzii was involved in selecting new kinds of ore-extracting equipment from beyond the former Eastern Bloc to increase production.¹⁶ During my fieldwork, I became part of a work place specifically

¹⁶Ore is hauled out of the mining pit and dumped onto conveyors for processing by large dump trucks. Kumatsu and Caterpillar, for example, produce dump trucks of larger capacity than the

researching ways to prolong the life of the mine through new metallurgical techniques researched in Erdenet with the collaboration of metallurgists and metallurgical enterprises from beyond Mongolian borders. Unlike the “overburden” heaped around many mines around the world, distinguished from ore and considered to be worthless and relandscaped for post-mine “recovery,” the *ovoo* around Erdenet’s open pit mine were being leached with a variety of different methods even though they had lower metal content than their counterparts in Arizona and northern Canada, and even mounds of oxide ore, which is processed nowhere in the world, lie waiting for as-yet undiscovered processes. While profoundly valuing the local, this work also gained value in being an international undertaking, with international importance. As I describe in chapters three, four, and five, being valuable in the eyes of outsiders so as to gain the wealth of being part of international partnerships was of utmost importance, and required additional skills in moving between accretions with different relations for accessing valuables and being valuable.

Erdenet miners I worked with conceptualized and engaged in mining in many of the ways (and as a part of how) they and other Mongolians herded animals, produced children, and cultivated their individual and social capabilities and possibilities. It was at risk from, as well as composed of, interaction with various kinds of others. Though herding has long involved encounters with and accretions of difference, and herding has also been transformed through “international friendship” in the socialist period cum “international development” since 1990, mining has been particularly charged as both promising and dangerous, where outsiders might work with local people to enrich both, or abscond with part of *baigal* and *nutag*, having ruinous

former Soviet factories such as the Belorussian BelAZ, which produces most of the trucks used at Erdenet. A collection of research articles considering the EMC’s past, present and future on its twentieth anniversary (Erdenet Mining Corporation 1998) also describe this development strategy of increasing the volume of ore processed, rather than, for example, introducing technologies for selecting higher-grade ore that have also been discussed since (Erdenet Mining Corporation 2004b). Both collections were lent to me by long-time Erdenet mining professionals. I discuss this in the context of longer term development strategies in chapter five.

effects on the rest of these accretive groups to leave Mongolians, or at least some Mongolians, without the means of production (not separated into human, natural, and superhuman or supernatural) itself.

In this dissertation, I describe various modes of controlled accretion of these different kinds of others to different kinds of productive “networks of mutual being” (Sahlins 2013b). The next chapter discusses workplaces which like groups of herders accrete not only daughters-in-law but all kinds of coagnates as well as strangers (Bruun 2006, Park 2003), but may separate from one another after collectively producing and sharing some but not all of their produce, the *erdene* valuables they have accessed through work together. The risky work of accreting to workplaces as well as herding groups is exemplified through the practice of collective drinking, which can result in either profound feelings of mutual belonging, or extreme separation with desire to reaccrete as well as with physical violence.

Chapter three explains individuals’ overwhelming use of single categories of nationality as a more subtle way of orchestrating accretion and multiple belonging. By speaking only Russian or only Mongolian, it is possible to maintain clear boundaries along which to separate, but without precluding accretion through other means, particularly participation in both Mongolian and Russian “national” holidays by consuming of “national” foods and exchanging “national” greetings. These national modes of separation and accretion are key in negotiating workplace hierarchies; for example by activating Mongolian meanings, older workers often have authority over younger managers, while Russian managers can maintain legitimacy with Mongolian managers and workers. On the other hand, by using Russian, Mongolians who may have lower professional status index their value as educated professionals, members or potential members of international accretions.

In the forth chapter, I describe how the legitimate leadership of directors (Mon. *zakhirlal*, *darga*, Rus. *nachalnik*) and professionals (*mergejiltnuud*, *spetsialist*) is, like

other Mongolists have argued for shamans and some Buddhist lamas (*boo*, *udgan*, *bagsh*) (Hojer 2009, Humphrey et al. 1996, Pedersen 2011), constituted through the ability to act as parts of different accretive groups with different ways of relating to one another – in the case of shamans, the worlds of nonhumans and the deceased, and in the case of professionals and especially directors, the relational systems of value of other nationalities.

The final chapter describes the encounter of Erdenet mining professionals and directors with their counterparts from Western mining companies. Sahlins' (1985) framework of the "structure of the conjuncture" inspires this chapter to explore how Mongolian and Western actors have been and may be transformed through their different use of each other's technologies to different ends: technologies to process low-grade ores may help Erdenet miners to continue their locally-oriented production that enriches their wider urban and national communities short-term in a structure established through Russian-Mongolian socialist cooperation, while some of their Western partners sought to use Erdenet funds and researchers to perfect the technology before selling it to the large companies Erdenet miners are both interested in working with but also encounter as fostering "prison-like" (*shoron shig*) working conditions without the development of urban, transport, and social infrastructures; while other Western partners in Erdenet came to confront Mongolian counterparts as part of, and partners in "creating," a "common world" (Latour 2013), much like Anna Tsing's (2005) young "nature-lovers" rather than the foreign and local miners and loggers of a "resource frontier."

Chapter 2

Drinking Together: To Expand and to Risk the Workplace and the Household

The evening before I left Erdenet to return to the United States, the members of the workplace (*khamt olon*) I had become a part of surprised me with a party. A few hours after the end of the work day we met at one of Erdenet's more expensive and luxurious restaurants. As soon as I found one of my coworkers there we quickly went upstairs into a private VIP room. We had never used a VIP room before, and there was a hurriedness to our movements that I remarked upon. Someone told me that the mining corporation had just made drinking amongst employees a punishable infraction.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, some months before an assistant to the general director of the mining corporation had beaten the local governor. That time there had been drinking involved, but no changes in company rules; this time there had been changes, immediately after some employees had beaten *one another* while at the corporation's vacation resort. While bars were required to, and for the most

part did, close at midnight in Erdenet, the vacation resort hosted a large disco where visiting workplaces partied throughout the night when visiting for at least one weekend a year.

As I describe in this chapter, I often drank with my coworkers as well as people from associated but different workplaces at the corporation. Drinking was part of celebrating holidays associated with the workplace such as “Teacher’s Day” (*Bagsh Nariin Udur*) and the beginning and end of the school semesters, which we celebrated at the corporation’s and other vacation resort camps in the nearby countryside. We also drank together in countryside (Figure 2.1) as well as at local pubs, both to acquaint coworkers from various workplaces with visitors such as the foreign technical exchange students discussed in chapter four, and also to celebrate events that were more individual-focused (though as important for defining groups, individuals, and relations) such as birthdays and graduations. Drinking at work had always officially been forbidden, but sharing a bottle of foreign liquor or the more lightly alcoholic fermented mare’s milk (Mng. *airag*, Rus. and Kaz. *kumis*) was often done when people returned, respectively, from abroad or from the countryside, as well as when celebrating certain holidays like the Mongolian New Year (*Tsagaan Sar*). No one criticized corporation regulations about alcohol consumption when I was initially shocked at the new rule, saying “we just need to be careful.”

Drinking, like fighting, was explicitly marked as such only when accretion and proper accretive relations failed. The term widely used to index “beating,” *zodokh*, is close to a verb for wrestling, *zodoglokh*, as the piece of clothing worn by Mongolian wrestlers is *zodog*. Mongolian wrestling however is almost always referred to with the very different term *bukh*, and it forms, like drinking that is not marked unless it becomes violent and antisocial, a key activity of the summer *Naadam* festival, when different groups with different relations come into contact with one another (see chapter three). Drinking, when it is problematic, erosive rather than accretive,

is marked by pointing out the problem drinker's state of drunkenness (*sogtuu*) or longer-term existential state as an alcoholic (*arkhichin*, literally a “vodka person”).¹ Unlike the trope of solitary alcoholism common in the United States, in Mongolia the alcoholic or drunk person is too social, sociality that is uncontrolled and makes relations clash with rather than cooperate with other relations, others' relations.

As I discuss in this chapter, drinking is an activity that is desirable and productive, but also risky, as it brings into relief and may also shift relations among accretions and their individual members, transforming them in desirable or undesirable ways. This is often done as new people are being accreted. Drinking opens wide the possibilities and risks of not only a single relationship, but of the relations and accretions of each drinker that are usually unknown to each of the other drinkers. Drinking is a method of not just creating but also exploring and evaluating relations of trust with another person and their accretions, learning about these others even while one is already putting themselves and their own accretive groups at stake. As Paula Haas' (2014) informants in Inner Mongolia told her, drinking reveals a person's good or bad “intentions” (*setgel*), but whether these are evaluated as good or bad is often a matter of perspective.

Moving away from categorizing Mongolian society as based on patrilineal descent groups, recent Mongolist ethnography has closely examined how Mongolians value delineation and defense of persons and social groups comprised of shared and carefully contained substances, particularly the household (*ger bul*, *urkh*, *ail*) (Delaplace et al. 2007, Empson 2007a, 2007, 2011, 2012, High 2008a, 2012, 2013, 2013, Swancutt 2012) and the nation (*undesten*, *uls*) (Bille 2010, 2013; Bulag 1998, Delaplace 2012a, Delaplace 2012b, Empson 2011). Rebecca Empson (2007, 2007, 2011, 2012, 2012) in particular discusses the careful work that Mongolians undertake to “harness fortune”

¹ *Arkhi* refers to both vodka distilled in the Russian style from wheat, of which many brands are produced in Mongolia since bottling became a major light industry in the late socialist period, as well as a specifically Mongolian beverage, also distilled to clearness, from milk. I did not come across this beverage in Erdenet or while travelling with people from Erdenet, however.



Figure 2.1: A summer picnic at herding camp of a coworker’s relatives, in the countryside near Erdenet.

as individual members and other parts of a household (including its herds) disperse or separate through travel, migration, death, and the sale of animal products. These events of dispersion thus include actions of retention such as adding photographs of a departing person to albums and display boards or clipping hairs from animals leaving the family herd to store in the home. Certain objects of personal and family substance, such as umbilical cords and genealogical charts, are kept in the family chest-altar.

During my fieldwork in Erdenet, an industrial city established around a co-constructed copper and molybdenum mine by the socialist Mongolian People’s Republic and the Soviet Union in the 1970s, I was also struck by (and became intimately involved in) the importance of the workplace, the family (*ger bul*, *urkh*, *ail*, *khamaatnuud*, and nationality (*undesten*) as groups of individual persons and other “things”² sharing substance through other persons and things they produced

²Individual humans or groups of them may be referred to as *yum* as much as a stone placed on an *ovoo*.

together or accreted. However, I also found the process of moving particular kinds of human and nonhuman objects and parts of objects between these groups of humans and nonhumans sharing substance for controlled but open-ended transformation as a crucial counterpart to and component of processes of protecting individual humans and their groups from pollution, theft, attack and other kinds of loss. Like *khadag* scarves and money placed on *ovoo*, alcohol (which may also be placed on *ovoo*) transmits substance, shares it within accretions that must relate with other accretions and renew themselves through the accretion of outsiders. These transmissions and relations are necessary for the access and control of *erdene* valuables.

The workplaces of the Erdenet Mining Corporation are like herding groups (*khot ail*) described by most ethnographers working with Mongolian herders. As I discuss further in chapters three and four, elders (*akhmad*), particularly elder men but also women, lead these groups as directors and other kinds of “moral exemplars” (Humphrey 1997), and the authority of directors (and other elders, including cleaners and handymen) at my workplace was ritually recognized during the New Year (*Tsagaan Sar*) at the university in the same ways that employees ritually recognized the authority of their parents and other relatives in apartments and herding camps during that holiday. Their authority is not merely that of “patrilineal elders” reinforced through formal repetition however. While many anthropologists of Mongolia continue to emphasize patrilineal descent and patrilocal residence as a key framework of Mongolian society,³ recently much attention has been paid to other kinds of relation: the motivations and conditions of herders and groups of herders who tend the animals of other wealthier herders (Humphrey et al. 1999, Murphy 2011), the suspicions that lead people to attend shamans and that are sometimes fueled by shamanic practices (Buyandelger 2013, Buyandelgeriyn 2007, Swancutt 2012), and the bonds between younger members of particularly “patriarchal” groups

³Older analyses emphasizing this framework include Bacon 1958, Krader 1955, Vreeland 1957.

of herders who join unstable communities of small-scale gold miners espousing individualist values (High 2008a, 2008).

Chapters three and four describe the nature of elders' (and youths') authority to legitimately exert control over the productive labor of others in accessing *erdene* valuables, which is based in more than age and gender. In this chapter, I focus on the stakes of belonging in multiple accretive groups and specifically drinking as a basic and widely shared means of managing these belongings, a means further complicated in the forms of professional and international power, which as I further discuss in the following chapters, often involve drinking in particular ways. While many discussions of the groups of households that herd together emphasize the importance of shielding groups such as individual households and *nutag* pastures from outsiders, members, regardless of the degree to which they are "moral exemplars," are part of multiple accretive groups that they must have varying relations with.⁴ Here, I describe three drinking sessions I participated in to show how a few forms of drinking practiced by moral exemplars and other people in Erdenet to manage these different relations in different workplaces, herding camps, and other associations, both more drastically and more precariously than the modes that I describe in following chapters, which use forms of relation associated with nationality and professionalism to control, but also to limit, relations of friendship that may involve less trust than the more free and intense, but also volatile, relations of drinking.

I begin with drinking that allowed me to make ties with the person, a middle-aged Mongolian engineer, who introduced me to my workplace. It focused on the immediate exchange, while creating the possibility for longer term association and even accretion as a unit of producers sharing with one another. Over a year later,

⁴Caroline Humphrey and several of her students (Rebecca Empson, Lars Hojer, Katherine Swancutt, and Morten Pedersen) associate this kind of social agency and its connected authority with shamans in particular, though I discern it in varying degrees and modalities to be exercised by different "kinds of person" throughout Erdenet society. See chapter four for more discussion of the "shamans and elders" literature.

this person contacted me by email to ask if I would assist his daughter who was currently researching the American higher educational system with the intent of possibly studying in the United States. The second example I give is of drinking within an established household, the drinking and feasting of Tsagaan Sar, that re-emphasize the relations between myself, a director I never met, my friend the director's niece, and a family of herders and corporation workers. Finally, I address an episode of drinking that placed myself and others I was with between different groups, groups that for us to have been part of would have required contradictory relations with both groups and potentially negative transformations (taking something from one group into another, altering relations, with their consequent effects) and how that episode for me involved questioning the trustworthiness of others, my own trustworthiness, feelings of moral ambiguity and guilt, and a moment of physical violence.

Drinking to Establish Relations

In the summer of 2010, the summer before I presented my dissertation proposal and returned to Mongolia to do my main term of fieldwork, I was on a train between Erdenet and Ulaanbaatar for almost twenty-four hours. Like one of the major train services established between Moscow and St. Petersburg, the train between Ulaanbaatar and Erdenet is scheduled to run overnight to facilitate commuting between the two cities. On this occasion however, heavy summer rains had washed out the track in several places. The duration of the trip as well as the intensity of association between myself and other passengers on the train were considerably increased.

While I came to prefer the open passenger car (Mng. *bagon*, Rus. *platzkart*) in which around sixty people slept in bunks arranged in groups of four that they might and often freely moved between, on this occasion I was taking the trip in a

closed compartment (Rus. and Mng. *kupei*) designed for four passengers to share, which could be closed off from a corridor with a sliding door. On this trip my only companion, at first, was a German-speaking Mongolian filmmaker trying to get to Darkhan, Mongolia's other industrial city, built before Erdenet in the 1950s and lying between Erdenet and Ulaanbaatar on the rail line. We spoke some in Mongolian after she was disappointed to learn that I was not German nor a German-speaker. As the delay lengthened people began to move between the compartments, as they might in one of the *bagon* cars. We were joined by some children from a neighboring compartment who searched my large backpack in vain for an infant, and then a middle-aged man, who memorably entered our compartment with one of his new acquaintances' infants in his arms.

This man, Ganbat, struck up a conversation with me in English, starting by asking me what I was doing in Mongolia. I told him that I was interested in changes since the socialist period, especially among young people like myself, and I would be interested in working in the corporation, or perhaps in a school. Not long after we began talking, Ganbat told me he was a chemical engineer who sold American and Chinese mining equipment to Mongolian companies. He was on his way to Erdenet as well to discuss some sales of equipment with the corporation and could introduce me to the director of the technical university affiliated with the Erdenet Mining Corporation the next day. We continued to talk over the course of the rest of the trip, both together with the filmmaker and after declining her invitation to join her in securing a taxi ride to Darkhan. We spent some time talking about how higher education in the United States worked, and Ganbat asked if sometime when I was in Ulaanbaatar I would meet with his teenaged daughter whom he hoped to send to the States for college. Ganbat also reassured me that Erdenet was a good company, interested in buying high-quality equipment, i.e. the American equipment Ganbat dealt with, not like

Mongolrossvetmet, the other major Russian-Mongolian joint mining corporation in Mongolia. “It’s all corrupt, they just buy from Russians.”

Though we reached Erdenet around midnight, Ganbat suggested that we share some beers. A television in the room was playing early scenes from the Hollywood blockbuster *Iron Man 2*, introducing the main villain scheming in a snowy, gray post-Soviet Moscow. Ganbat told me about how he had lived in Moscow and Leningrad, where he and his wife had completed engineering degrees, until the mid-90s. As other Mongolians had told me and would tell me, Ganbat critiqued the socialist period as too closed, saying “we didn’t have other sources of information then.”⁵ As a child, Ganbat said, he had dreamed of fighting the American president, Reagan or Carter or whichever one it had been. Now together we had established an international friendship, based not only on the hierarchical relation of having something the other desired (and Ganbat maintaining his place as an elder by paying for beers, food, taxis and so forth), but also leveling our relations through sharing what we would not share with just anyone. While the establishment of this relation involved an explicit critique of relations that limited, prevented or disturbed other relations, it also made such relations possible. Sharing something one is and has with another opens the possibility that the other will take it, give it to another, and change it, possibly injuring one of those who had been sharing. It requires trust not only in that other person, but in those related to that other person.

The next morning, Ganbat took me along into the General Directorship building of the Erdenet Mining Corporation. I waited in an office antechamber as he met briefly with someone there, and then we travelled up to the mine, only fifteen minutes or so drive from the General Directorship building and the middle of town. By ten o’clock, Ganbat’s colleague’s driver had dropped me off at the university. I met with the

⁵The association of postsocialism with opportunities to know what was unknowable during the socialist period was also noted among Mongolian lay Buddhists by Saskia Abrahms-Kavunenko (2013).

current director, who had actually taken up the post from Ganbat's acquaintance (who I was to come into close relations with the following year; I discuss both the current and former directors in chapter five), but nonetheless spoke with me for a few minutes about my interests and intentions to study anything about legacies of communism and young people in Mongolia. He passed me over to Dorj, a research engineer working in the mining department that would become my workplace and main social group as well.

The modes of value that Ganbat highlighted, what he presented and what he hoped to exchange for himself, his daughter, and their accretive groups, were professional and international. Ganbat had already established this on the train, however; drinking together made our exchange and further exchanges in some kind of new accretion, and our associated accretions, real, accepting of both benefit and risk.

Drinking to (Re)Intensify Relations

While conversing on the train with Ganbat, a young man who appeared to be an Anglo or European tourist had walked past the open door of our compartment several times and finally stopped to ask if I were American. I said yes but that I wasn't a tourist. He said he wasn't a tourist either, and he was looking for some "long lost relatives" near a lake that he hoped I might be able to help him find. I invited him to join Ganbat and me on the train platform when we arrived in Erdenet. He accepted the invitation enthusiastically, and when we exchanged another few sentences about our background it turned out that we had a geographical connection. He said he had been living on the Crow Reservation in Montana, which is only a few hours from my own hometown in northern Wyoming. The young man left quickly however, and when we found him on the platform in Erdenet he was with some Mongolians that he had met on the train, fueling my suspicion that the man was a Mormon missionary. Ganbat

commented on the strangeness and rudeness of this, noting that the American and I shared a *nutag*, so why would he go off with some others?

The connection of sharing a *nutag* would have been one to affirm and expand upon over drinks. One's most important relations are generally reaffirmed and elaborated on by engaging in drinking, that is, at least at first, highly ritualized, during the Mongolian New Year (*Tsagaan Sar*). Though most often associated with relations of support between parents, children, and extended family, in Erdenet Tsagaan Sar was also celebrated by coworkers not only in their own homes but also at the workplace. Members of different workplaces also visited one another during Tsagaan Sar, as I did with my friend Naraa, who was from another workplace inside the mining corporation.

Both Hwan-Young Park (2003) and Morten Pedersen (2011) describe individuals' visiting during Tsagaan Sar as the formation of bonds with multiple herding workgroups. Both emphasize the seriousness and precarity involved in such visits. Park, who worked with traders moving between Ulaanbaatar and the countryside, described the act of celebrating Tsagaan Sar with a new group as the creation of ties of fictive kinship, in the same class as adoption. Traders would regularly eat and sleep in the homes of these relations in the countryside. Pedersen describes how the legitimacy of a local strongman (*ataman*) associated with excessive drinking and violence also rested on his performances of subtle oratory particularly during Tsagaan Sar. Pedersen writes that the *ataman* "subverted" the authority of the elder men through joking manipulation of sayings associated with their position; I suggest that his authority was successful rather because he did not directly challenge the place of others present, accreting himself and his substance to that of those assembled without threatening to take anything away, to disturb the relations already there.

Unlike the drinking that differentiated host and guest in a "holding pattern of strangeness" described by Humphrey (2012), Tsagaan Sar drinking reintegrated or integrated people from outside to inside, renewing or formalizing new ties between

people who are accreting themselves to the household, group of households, or workgroup and those who have long been part of these accretive groups. Tsagaan Sar visiting is wide-ranging in Erdenet, but it is not done lightly; it furthers obligations that are based on the control members of accretive groups have over one another's well-being, it is done between people who trust one another or at least would trust one another.

In Erdenet, the Tsagaan Sar celebration lasted for three days over the period of a full week's holiday. Most shops were closed for the duration. Our larger workplace, the entire university, celebrated during the week before the work holiday began. I describe these celebrations in further detail in chapter three to elaborate on the use of modes of relation indexed and activated by markers of nationality and professionalism, between and as elders (*akhmad*) and youths (*zaluuchuud*), teachers (*bagsh nar*) as intelligentsia (*erdemted*) and other less educated and certified worker-professionals (*mergejiltnuud*, *ajilchid*), Russians and Mongolians. Here I focus on the celebration of Tsagaan Sar as visiting, or not visiting, the homes of others.

Several people invited me to visit their apartments during Tsagaan Sar, while I assumed others expected my visit. I visited those who invited me, but not one particular household whom I assumed to be expecting me; I had begun to distrust the person who had brought me into relation with who was also a part of my workplace. First, however, I will describe my relations with one family I visited, who over the coming year I continued to accrete with. I discuss this accretion further here to elaborate on the stakes of being involved in trustful membership of multiple accretive groups, and the challenges members of different kinds face as well as the powers available to them in connection to their differences, their membership in various accretions.

As I discuss in the previous chapter, in and around Erdenet herders and mining specialists interact as exchange partners each giving and receiving from different

accretive groups of humans and nonhumans (households, workgroups, and often also different *nutag* regions of Mongolia). These accretions produce different kinds of *erdene*, valuables required by all parts of all accretions to access further *erdene* valuables. *Erdene* valuables have two key characteristics: they are self-reproducing, but their reproduction depends on *erdene* valuables being brought from beyond and sent outside one's accretion. More specifically, these *erdene* valuables include herd animals (*erdene*), which the reader probably recognizes as a "renewable resource," as well as precious stones and metals (*erdene chuluu*) made into both personal possessions (particularly jewelry, riding gear, and eating utensils) and money,⁶ which readers may conceptualize as "non-renewable" or "finite" and obtained by "extraction" rather than "cultivation" or "husbandry." Learnable and teachable knowledge and skill is also *erdene*; Academicians and other intellectuals are *erdemted*. Finally, Erdene is a common name element, especially in Erdenet but throughout Mongolia as well as in neighboring areas of Russia and China.

The family I visited during Tsagaan Sar was headed by Sanchir and Chimgee, herders from a distant province, though people from this province were well represented in Erdenet, from directors in the mining corporation to newly arrived herders tending their animals perhaps desperately close to the city. Sanchir and Chimgee were associated with Angarag, who was a director of the mining corporation. Both Angarag the mining specialist from Erdenet and Sanchir the herder from the countryside needed access to each other's networks for their own and others' (particularly their son, niece, grandson, and other young relatives') individual transformations into valuable persons; persons with multiple kinds of value that are also the means of creating value. Each of these multiple kinds and

⁶Banknotes themselves, however, have a curious quality, more as a transmitter of substance like *khadag* scarves, vodka, and dairy products that are produced by *erdene* herd animals. This suggests that money is something produced internally by accretions (not *erdene*) while also being something that must come from outside through relations with others (*erdene*). Lengthy consideration of the quality of money (different kinds of money) in Mongolia is definitely warranted, but beyond the scope of this dissertation however.

means of value were achievable only through becoming a part of a variety of kinds of accretion, including in the countryside associated with herding and hunting and in the city associated with scientific and other internationally valued knowledge. In Erdenet, Sanchir's son studied English and Chinese and lived in an apartment that I was brought to as an English teacher by my friend Naraa, Angarag's niece, while Angarag received sheep from Sanchir and took his grandson to the pastureland near Erdenet where Sanchir's relatives herded and Sanchir sometimes sent his own son. In addition to his own son, Sanchir had two younger boys living in his apartment. These boys' parents were herding near Erdenet, and provided animal products while their two boys stayed with Sanchir's family to facilitate their schooling in Erdenet. Sanchir and his family also returned to the province they had moved from during the summer, returning, for example, with a freshly cured cow skin that I encountered on their living room floor shortly after their return to Erdenet.

A key relation between the mining specialist and the herder was the equivalency of each partners' being involved in different accretions, not unlike how groups of herders from one territory negotiate with groups of herders associated with different territories to access emergency pastures (*otor*) in one another's habitual (and now often legally registered) herding territories, their networks of humans and nonhumans exchanging to access and control valuables. However, these relationships were also made through distinctions. Sanchir was not only a herder, but a technician employed by the mining corporation. Angarag himself had been born on a herding collective and it was known to me that his mother and father-in-law, at least, had been full-time herders. Sanchir, in the position relative to Angarag as a better herder with more of a herding network, gave of this accretive groups' herd animals and herding knowledge and skill. In the role of being "more" of a mining professional, Angarag gave of his network's international knowledge and skill: access to schools, apartments, business networks extending beyond Erdenet and Mongolia, and the knowledge and skill to

use them. But to other herding families that Sanchir accreted with, Sanchir was the mining professional with access to these international and professional valuables, while they provided herding and Mongolian national valuables. One Saturday, while Sanchir's son and I were watching reruns of a San Antonio Spurs game in Sanchir's living room, a man I didn't recognize visited the apartment. Sanchir brought the man into the living room and introduced us, and later I heard Sanchir proudly telling the visitor that I was an English teacher helping his son. I myself was introduced to Sanchir and his family by my friend Naraa, Angarag's niece, as someone with international knowledge to give while taking knowledge of being "Mongolian," as a herder and a mining specialist.

The first several weekends that I visited Sanchir's family, I was accompanied by my friend Naraa, whom I had met through Nadia, a friend and classmate of the head of my workplace. Naraa and Nadia worked together in the same workplace, across town at the General Directorship building. Naraa took me to the household several times, including during Tsagaan Sar, when Sanchir was working but his wife hosted me in the most traditional ways, presenting me with gifts of banknotes and handing me a knife to carve off pieces of a sheep's back, resting on a special plate known as a *tegsh*, representing the very foundation of the household, its center of "even" and "equal" relations. After a few weeks, I began visiting the family alone through the spring. During the summer, the family went to one of the western provinces where they had been herding ten years before, and after that I saw them less frequently. I asked Naraa, who I saw several times a week, about why I had had trouble contacting them.

Naraa told me that there had been some dispute between Sanchir's family and her uncle Angarag; Sanchir had said he would buy, sell, or lease a piece of land but then had pulled out of the deal. The parties to the deal had recently reconciled, however, over a sheep that Sanchir had brought to Angarag's apartment and butchered to share



Figure 2.2: The freezer at the household of director Angarag, with meat obtained from herders in his accretions.

with his family. Naraa showed me the remnants of the sheep in their chest freezer (Figure 2.2).

In this case, drinking, or at least feasting, had been involved in repairing a series of relations. Drinking by itself had not done this, however; I argue, based partly on a failed reconciliation, that the trustful connection drinking can create or rekindle may conflict with other relations of trust. This occurred when someone from another family I had been visiting attempted to reintegrate me into his accretions after I had not visited during Tsagaan Sar. While that family and others of those who had invited me were members of my workplace or other workplaces approved by those in my workplace, I was not sure if I wanted to intensify my relation with this family I assumed expected me, partly because of relations within my workplace. On the second day of Tsagaan Sar, when members of different households began to visit one another, I walked across the city to their apartment building. The first door I knocked on was answered by strangers, but rather than attempting another likely door (I could

not recall exactly which floor the family lived on; like apartment blocs throughout the Eastern Bloc, many blocs look the same on the outside and within their stairwells and corridors), I travelled home and told myself that the family may have travelled outside of Erdenet to the husband or wife's parents.

Drinking and Erosion

By Tsagaan Sar I had established relationships with two households after people I knew from my workplace and associated workplaces⁷ introduced me to them asking that I help their children learn English. The family that I visited during Tsagaan Sar, and afterwards, continued to intensify my relations with, was introduced to me by Naraa. Naraa was not a member of my workplace, and though members of my workplace initially questioned me about her, my friendship and accretion with her was approved not only because someone had known her aunt as a child and had gone to school with our mutual friend Nadia, who worked a few rooms away from Naraa, but generally because over time it was demonstrated that my relationship with her did not subtract from our workplace and was not associated with any negative transformations of it.

The family, Bold and Tsetsgee's, whom I had attempted to visit on Tsagaan Sar and worried about, was associated with a member of my workplace, but that person, Zaya, was felt by other members of our workplace, to be trying to leave the workplace while benefiting herself and harming others – taking something out of the accretion of the workplace with her as she moved to leave it. Like other members of the workplace, Zaya was interested in transforming herself into a more international and professional person, competing for resources the corporation offered to attend workshops, seminars, and courses elsewhere in Mongolia and also abroad; unlike

⁷Members of both of these households worked at the mining corporation, but in workplaces I did not associate with.

others however she did not appear to struggle to reconcile leaving Erdenet to work for another corporation elsewhere with continuing to belong in and develop Erdenet.⁸ When Zaya interacted with me and our workplace director Serik in his office, she always coquettishly withheld information while questioning and also seeking favors from us. Serik's restraint in complaining about Zaya (though incomplete), and also his allowing me not only to go to Zaya's office across the courtyard to do things she asked of me but also on a weekend trip to the countryside with her and Tssetsgee's family, only made my friendship with Serik grow stronger: though he risked losing what I brought to the workplace, our relations were (are) of mutual trust and he did not move in ways to restrict or substract from my other relations.

I soon came to also avoid Zaya, but there was already much shared between us. I struggled with guilt over how to interact with Zaya, her husband Bold who also worked at the university, and Tssetsgee's family, eventually resolving to do what I could do to not further accumulate with them. I exchanged a few texts with the oldest son in particular, who was a student at the university and doing on-the-job training (*praktik*) at the mine, but did not initiate further contacts myself.

One night a few months after Tsagaan Sar, I encountered Bold and Bold⁹ at a pub. I was with Brian, a British English teacher who taught a few courses at the university, had become friendly with my workplace, and sometimes asked me to join him for a few drinks. Though I had not spoken with either of the Bolds for some months, they invited us to join their table. I immediately did so with Brian in tow. It was Bold's

⁸One workplace member, for example, who had been working in South Africa for a major global mining company kept in touch, sent materials to help the laboratory's research work, and offered help to those seeking positions with his new company.

⁹Zaya and Tssetsgee's husbands had the same name, which they associated with their strong friendship. The word they used for this special friendship was *amida*. *Am* is literally mouth and breath, an essence of life. As far as I know, other Mongolists have not documented and discussed the relation *amida*, though it seems similar to the relation *anda*. Both *amida* and *anda* are examples of major modes of "mutuality of being" discussed by Marshall Sahlins in his recent *What Kinship Is – and Is Not* (2013). *Anda* is a sharing of blood, becoming brothers (Bille 2014, Bulag 1998, and Park 2003 for discussions of *anda* and of blood in Mongolian kinship and relationality more generally), while *amida* is a sharing of breath, and also names.

birthday, and we began by introducing Brian. A few drinks on I was conversing with Tsetsgee's Bold in Mongolian, losing the thread of Brian's conversation with others in English. Bold began crying, as did I, when he asked me directly why I hadn't visited his family at Tsagaan Sar.

I resolved that I would visit his family soon, which I did. I hoped that I could continue a relationship with Bold and his family without associating with Zaya and her Bold, but I stopped visiting Bold and Tsetsgee's family soon after trying to take up the relation again. Besides the fact that it became clear to me that I could not help access what Tsetsgee and Bold hoped I would be able to for them and their household, which included teaching English to their sons, an event later on in the evening of the birthday party also made me want to distance myself more from the accretions of Zaya and Bold, which did include Bold, Tsetsgee, and their family. As we moved from the pub to a karaoke bar, I was in conversation with someone when Brian got my attention, as some other members of the party had initiated a fistfight. Though we continued to the karaoke and there was no further violence that evening, I later recalled the incident to confirm my resolution to disassociate from Bold and Zaya. The fistfight demonstrated the difficulty of reconciling multiple accretions on the part of the Bolds and/or the nature of some these as dangerous and troubled, and I did not want these other accretions and their troubled relations to affect me and mine, particularly the relations with and of my workplace. Though Zaya's actions and relations with myself and other members of my workplace gave me further reason to want to avoid her, I continue to struggle with guilt and shame over how I clumsily had attempted to separate from Bold and Tsetsgee's household. Such separation, without return or the desire of return, indeed is impossible, after these people fed me, hosted me, took me to the countryside, taught me, accreted me into the Erdenet and Mongolian *nutag* communities, and cried with me.

Like other countries of the “former” Eastern Bloc, Mongolia is considered by many to have an alcohol problem, particularly after the majority of adults lost socialist-era stability.¹⁰ Many who had had apartments and salaries had to scramble to find relatives and accrete people with herd animals and other means of subsistence; an Ulaanbaatar-based mining engineer told me that in 1994 Erdenet had been under threat of losing access to coal to fire its power plants for residential as well as industrial use, which would have rendered the apartments and other buildings of Erdenet uninhabitable, possibly for the long term. A close friend living in Ulaanbaatar revealed, after a long time of acquaintance, that his mother had lost their apartment in Erdenet in connection with a voucher-privatization scheme. When he traveled to Erdenet with me for a short visit, he also revealed that it had been almost a decade since he had last been there.¹¹ Morten Pedersen (2011) notes that his host family in the northern Mongolian taiga began drinking heavily as they declined in terms of wealth and status and particularly when the father’s connections as a state employee lost power both in the countryside and the local *sum* (former *negdel* or herding collective’s) center. Pedersen’s host also lost many of his relationships in town in connection with his drinking – Pedersen begins one of his own chapters by recounting the beating of his host father by a local leader.

However, drinking also helped Pedersen’s host to forge relationships in the countryside. The local leader described by Pedersen also forged relationships through his complex drinking practices; he was known not only for excessive alcohol and

¹⁰Pesmen 2000 and Raikhel 2006 tackle postsocialist drinking and alcoholism in Russia.

¹¹The twists and turns of Erdenet’s changes in ownership and structure were not the subject of my research, and allowing people to disclose what they might over time was more suited to my object of studying relations and processes of accretion and erosion. Rossabi 2005, Sanders 2010 and Black et al. 2006 give conflicting (and differently positioned) accounts of Erdenet’s transferring ownership and changing structure in the 1990s. These accounts focus on the politics of Russian and Mongolian state actors, far away from local politics in Erdenet. One of my closest friends told me that a part of the corporation, including the foundry, had attempted to split from the rest of the company. There were vouchers of privatization around this time, which apparently became worthless when the the main corporation was secured again by Mongolian state ownership and the ownership of Zarubezhtsvetmet, privatized in Russia during the Yeltsin years but re-acquired by the Russian state in the 2000s as a part of the state corporation Rostekhnologii (now known as Rostec).

violence but also for his skillful oratory, success at school, and connections bringing wealth and power to the local community. As Mette High emphasizes, drinking in Mongolia has long been “constructive” (Douglas 1987) as well as destructive. Having worked with small-scale gold miners and herders that were often but not always separate groups suspicious and critical of one another, High argued that “visiting situations also allow people to cross social, regional and economic divides to build up dependable relationships of practical support. Living in a remote location, important networks of mutual assistance are created and sustained through visiting and drinking” (2008:190). Granting the requests of visiting supplicants was also a way for her wealthy host father to build hierarchical relations and general renown in the local area (a function of drinking that Haas (2014) also dwells on), but as High discusses this had to be carefully managed so as not to give away too much, exhausting the household and angering the members whose work was responsible for much of its wealth (High 2008a). As Lars Hojer’s (2012) recent article about contemporary Ulaanbaatar’s many and well-stocked pawn shops suggests, a major challenge of postsocialism is the proliferation of possible relations that must now be managed. Drinking is a well-established modality, but like postsocialism itself full of risk as well as possibility.

As High explains, the sociality of drinking makes it a dangerous activity. The stakes of forming and maintaining connections between members of different herding and mining groups (as well as those among herders) she worked with were high. The drinking of hosts and guests that High focuses on required the host be generous towards a guest that may overconsume, posing a danger to the hosting household and workplace. Excessive drinking also took people away from their herding groups and households, so guest-host relations also may endanger guests and their households and workplaces. The relation of “guest and host” was always in danger of becoming one of endless consumption without production for the households and workplaces of

both host and guest, the opposite of proper household, herding group, workplace or other accretive groups which grow through the shared production and consumption of members and their accretions that increase over time. High (2008) tells of her host father's gifting a saddle with large silver ornaments (an archetypal form of *erdene*) to a guest-suppliant during a drinking session, an action much bemoaned by the rest of the household, who were responsible for most of the herding and processing of animal products that formed the material basis of the household's wealth, being the value, though not *erdene*, that was the means to creating other kinds of value and accessing *erdene*.

Alcoholism is thus understandably associated with foreignness (as in the common refrain, often joking, that "the Russians taught us," though I rarely heard this as a complaint in Erdenet)¹² and even inhumanity. High's interlocutors spoke of alcoholics being *chotgor*, vengeful entities seeking redress from humans after suffering as humans themselves, and Gaelle Lacaze's (2002) interlocutors described alcoholics as those who were born as humans but without the karmic capital to be human (High 2008a:195). Drinking vodka is also key in many interactions between *chotgor* and the shamans who reconcile them with the world of living humans (Humphrey et al. 1996, Pedersen 2011). Pedersen (2011) also explicitly links the practices of shamans and *ataman* who also straddle multiple social milieux.

Like Humphrey (2012), High and Pedersen emphasize the formality of drinking, the rules which control overconsumption and that when cleverly played upon produce shamanic and "not quite" shamanic authority. High (2008, 2012) also discusses another kind of drinking, however, that conducted among ninja miners. Unlike drinking that differentiates participants through hierarchical distinctions such as host

¹²Though as I describe in the next chapter, Russians in Mongolia do not exclusively control the use of drinking any more than Mongolians. Russians told me that Mongolian vodka was *khitrii*, or "cunning." Being made entirely of wheat, it has a light and sweet taste, but Russians perceived themselves to become drunk from this vodka more quickly, possibly because of the different play of social relations in Mongolian drinking.

and guest, elder and youth through seating arrangements and linguistic markers, drinking in the ninja camps where High worked was marked by multiple people producing bottles, drinking from the same bottle (hosts generally pour and pass alcohol to guests in a cup owned by the household, an *erdene* valuable often made of elaborately worked silver and decorated with gemstones and commonly received as wedding gifts), and participants slipping in and out of the gathering. This drinking is also interspersed with fighting between some of the participants that does not disrupt the session as a whole. High notes that many of the miners are attempting to escape from the “patriarchal” relations of their herding families, and talk proudly of their workgroups in which anyone can quickly learn and perform any job and take an equal cut of the proceeds. They are also outspoken about the value of their work when ninja mining is widely disapproved of in Mongolian society. High connects this individualism and social isolation to the chaotic and violent aspects of drinking. I argue, however, that this kind of drinking, which I often heard of and also participated in while in Erdenet, is also dangerous because it involves many different relations, the relations of many different accretions, brought into relief as well as created and transformed during drinking sessions. High (2008) quotes a ninja miner: “There are people from all over Mongolia here and you never know what they might do. They might say they’ll drink beer, but someone will add poison (*hor*) to it. Many people die because of drinking, both men and women. People here are so careless and disrespectful to each other. It’s dangerous.”

Again, however, drinking also helps people to value difference and use it for desired transformations. In the next chapter, I describe how occupying different positions, as in formal drinking, allows people to make themselves valuable as they seek valuables from others, shifting between different kinds of hierarchical positions and relations.

Chapter 3

Between Ulaanbaatar and Irkutsk: Professional and International Friendship

The variety in political uses of the concept of “international friendship” (Mng. *nairamdal*, Rus. *druzba narodov*) should not be ignored, and evaluations of the “fairness” of exchanges between Russia and Mongolia vary widely from one accretive group’s perspectives to another’s. However, foreigners in Erdenet who attempted to remain separate from Mongolians and engage with them only as powerful takers, or benevolent bestowers, of valuables were discouraged from this and found life in Erdenet to be difficult.

While Mongolians sometimes said that they had learned to drink from Russians, Russians told me that Mongolian vodka is *khitrii*, or “cunning.” Possessing the sweet and light taste of an alcohol distilled entirely from wheat, Mongolian vodka lent itself to being overconsumed, some explained. I suspect, however, that Russians were also commenting on the quality of relations involved in Mongolian drinking that I detailed in the previous chapter. These relations required them to become

somewhat Mongolian, or to accrete things and relations that were Mongolian and become involved in Mongolian accretions as trusted, trustful, and responsible (though also, like Mongolian drinking partners, careful and vigilant) members.

For example, one night I was in a local pub with Brian, a British English teacher, when two younger Russians arrived with two Mongolian women. As more Mongolian women began to arrive at the table and the Russians began being more forward and publicly sexual with them, a Mongolian from another table confronted the Russian men.¹ The Mongolian man's friends were able to sit him back down and quieten his verbal attacks two or three times, until finally the Mongolian man rose again to take a few swings at the Russians. After the Mongolian man's friends dragged him from the bar, the young Russians went to a table of older Russians seeking support. These older Russians, who were some of the long-time Erdenet residents and employees (i.e. working in Erdenet since the 1970s and 1980s) that frequented the pub, wanted nothing to do with the younger Russians, who were among those who had been arriving in recent years (since the Russian ownership of the corporation was incorporated into the Russian state corporation Rostec) on temporary contracts lasting as little as two or three years.

Brian also came under pressure as his time in Erdenet drew on. After his Mongolian wife gave birth to a child soon after Tsagaan Sar some people in my workplace, who studied English with Brian, began to complain about his resistance to learning Mongolian. "His daughter is Mongolian!" one exclaimed to me at work. Brian's father-in-law was eager to have Brian visit him in the countryside near Erdenet, where he retired after a career in architecture in Ulaanbaatar, and gave

¹He also verbally attacked the Mongolian women, calling them "prostitutes" with the Russian term *bliad*. For discussion of attacks on Mongolian women romantically or sexually involved with foreigners, see Bulag 1998 and Bille 2010. In the 2000s, public attacks on Mongolian women accused of dating foreign men became widely spoken of in Ulaanbaatar. Nationalist groups using swastikas and claiming connections with Nazism publicly claimed credit for these attacks, which involved public confrontations during which women's heads were shaved. (Accounts by American and British international journalists include Taylor 2013, Branigan 2010)

Brian gifts of jewelry, self-designed and smithed, that I explained to Brian were, in part, symbols of masculine power. Though he now lives in Ulaanbaatar, Brian continues to turn to me for cultural translations though I can discern his continued and strengthening relationships with a small group of other Anglo expats, some of which have also not learned Mongolian after years of living in the country. Two of the group, who have learned Mongolian, manage a series of successful import schemes, while attempting to act as mentors to a number of others who bitterly complain (in public forums online also frequented by Mongolians) about Mongolians and Mongolia categorically, something I never knew Russian oldtimers in Erdenet to engage in.

In the previous chapter, I detailed the importance of drinking in the creation and maintenance of relations of trust, creating and maintaining accretions through which valuables circulate beyond the control of any single person or accretive group. In this chapter, I explore the use of markers of nationality to assert more definition and control over the circulation of what valuables between what parts of accretions, for the access of *erdene* valuables. This includes managing the value of the self. Though Russians have and continue to come to Mongolia in search of valuables and value, they generally do so as members of a national accretive group separate from the Mongolian national accretion. Russians and Mongolians alike generally espouse the idea that they are parts of separate “nations” (Mng. *uls*, *undesten*, Rus. *natsii*, *narodi*) with distinctive histories, biologies, and cultural or “traditional” practices (Mng. *yos zanshil*, Rus. *traditsii*) (see Figure 3.1). Developed in part by anthropologists Lev Shternberg and Vladimir Bogoraz, colleagues of Franz Boas (Shternberg 1999, Kan 2008), this framework was rearticulated and publicized by Stalin and his government just before, during, and after the Second World War to place Russians as a “vanguard” people, bringing communism to the rest of the world’s peoples (Hirsch 2005).² In the 1960s and 1970s, international “brigades” (*brigadi*) of

²World War II, or the “Great Patriotic War,” continues to be, or has recently again become, hugely important in connection with Russian-Mongolian friendship. In Erdenet, Victory Day is

youth labored on huge infrastructural projects in Siberia, particularly the Baikal-Amur Mainline Railway (*BAM*) (Ward 2009). According to period journalism, a Russian textbook produced for Mongolian students (Rassudova 1981), and online reminiscences on Russian social media sites such as *odnoklassniki.ru* (<http://ok.ru>) and *mongol.su* (<http://mongol.su/forum/>), Erdenet's construction also involved these brigades of international youth.

Alongside the relation of Russian “elder brother” (*akh*) to Mongolian “younger sibling” (*duu*) (Marsh 2009 Sneath 2003), the relationship between Russians and Mongolians in Erdenet was explicitly that of “teachers and pupils.” Though (in stark contrast to newer Anglo-run mining corporations in Mongolia discussed in chapter five) the pupils have for the most part replaced the teachers at Erdenet, Mongolians occupy all positions in the enterprise, and Russians make up less than ten percent of the workforce, the use of Russian language continues to signal and activate relations of manager (*nachalnik*) to worker (*rabotnik*), intelligentsia to workers, if not teacher to pupil (which I describe in the next chapter).

Many Russians in Erdenet operated in terms of these relations, and accordingly, though many Russians were said to and appeared to understand Mongolian, they

celebrated annually by laying flowers on the Friendship Monument and toasting veterans there (which numbered between five and ten during my fieldwork between 2010 and 2012). During his visit to Mongolia in 2012, Dmitri Medvedev visited the site of the battle of Khalkhin Gol, more familiar in the other Allied nations as Nomonkhan, where joint Soviet-Mongolian forces repelled a Japanese invasion of Mongolia's eastern bounds. Medvedev's visit also included his opening of the the refurbished monument and museum of General Zhukov (the to be world-famous Soviet general led forces at Khalkhin Gol and is said to have there perfected tactics crucial to victory in the European Theatre). During his visit in September 2014, Vladimir Putin, as well as Mongolian Facebook commentators, also made remarks about Khalkhin Gol's example of Russian-Mongolian friendship. Reuters (2014) quoted Putin as beginning talks with Mongolian President Elbegdorj by saying “Today we are indeed marking together the 75th anniversary of one of the central events in our common history - the joint victory at Khalkhin Gol river ... Historical memory, heroic events of the past, are by all means a good foundation to build Russian-Mongolian relations.” Russia's 1TV (2014) recorded Putin saying “The courage and heroism of Soviet and Mongolian soldiers who fought side by side, which established the sovereignty and territory of all Mongolia, became a symbol of our friendship. In Russia they well remember and value the help of Mongolia during the Great Patriotic War.” [Muzhestvo i geroizm srazhavshikhsia plechom k plechu sovetskikh i mongolskikh soldat, otstoyavshikh suverenitet i territorialnuyu tselostnost Mongolii, stali simvolom nashei druzhbi. V Rossii khorosho pomniat i tseniat pomoshch Mongolii vo vremia Velikoi Otechestvennoi voinii.]

almost never spoke Mongolian. Some long-time Russian residents, however, and particularly directors and others with authority, used select Mongolian words and participated in Mongolian “national traditions” such as Tsagaan Sar and the summer Naadam festival. Thus they were also able made use of relations of hierarchy between elders and youth, the value of the countryside (Mng. *khodoo*, in some ways similar but in others very different than the Rus. *derevnia*), and other specifics defining relations associated with “Mongolness” more than “Russianness,” though not as the kinds of “moral exemplars” (Humphrey 1997) I discuss in the next chapter. Mongolians also made use of Russian language and customs marked as “Russian” to shift their position in relations, make themselves more valuable and accretable; workers often knew Russian and were eager to speak Russian with me in their moves to institute relations of trust defined by difference and mutual desire for one anothers’ valuables rather than strict hierarchy, these were much like those I associate with drinking in the previous chapter. It is difficult to speak another nationality’s language without divulging information about one’s other relations, “mistakes” and accents indicate much about how and where one learned the language, for instance. In these conditions, not unlike while one is drunk or becoming drunk, full control over how one’s value is being perceived, how one is relating with another and their relations, is seriously compromised.

In this chapter, I elaborate by first further contrasting the use of “Mongolness” by long-time Russian residents with its lack of deployment by newer arrivals also described above. The following section of the chapter discusses the use of “Russianness” by Mongolians to add greater value to themselves and their accretive groups when relating with others, in order to establish the relations of trust and open-ended exchange also detailed in the previous chapter. The final section discusses the use of both Russianness and Mongolness by Russian and Mongolian directors, before the following chapter further discusses the connection between legitimate



Figure 3.1: Images of Russian and Mongolian distinctiveness, united in building socialism. Mural at the front entrance of the main administrative building at Erdenet's mineral processing factories and open-pit mine.



authority and multiple membership in different accretions with distinctive “national cultures,” or different relational systems of value and hierarchy.

Russians in Erdenet and their Mongolian Accretions

The Mekhanobr Institute that led the planning and construction of the Erdenet mining complex (*Erdenet GOK*) was established in 1920 and designed over 250 ore-dressing and other mining facilities across the Soviet Union. These include the Norilsk plants which today are the leading global producers of nickel and palladium, additions to the Magnitogorsk and neighboring iron and steel combines first built with American partners based on the design of plants in Gary, Indiana (Graham 1993 Kotkin 1997, Scott 1942), and Kazakh copper refineries that received Erdenet ore concentrates until the mid-1990s. Erdenet GOK is the last project the Mekhanobr Institute (now a private corporation, “Mekhanobr Engineering”) describes on the “history” page of its website, placing Erdenet as the exemplar of a “new generation” of mining complexes excavating and processing non-ferrous metals (ZAO Mekahnobr Engineering 2012).

However, the Erdenet GOK not only inaugurated new lines of increased-capacity ore-crushing mills (Bazar et al. 1998). The mineral processing factories as well as the co-planned and built city itself were designed in the context of attempts by both the Soviet and Mongolian party-states to transform, not only intensify and expand, the political economy of the Eastern Bloc; to escape from the *zastoi* (Rus. “stoppedness,” “stagnation”) of social and economic progress that is a popular characterization of the period of “late socialism” from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s among scholars and reformers of political economy inside and outside the former Soviet Union.

The designation of the 1970s and 1980s as *zastoi* or “stagnation” included, and continues to include, concern over divides between intellectuals (Rus. *intelligent*,

Mng. *erdemten*)³ and working (Rus. *rabochii*) or common (Mng. *arad*) people. These groups have had and have uneven patterns of access to, creation of, and distribution of valuables such as education, Party membership, and consumer goods that define the value of those possessing, using, creating and distributing them. These valuables, however, came not only from within the Soviet Union, but also other members of the Eastern Bloc and beyond. Distinctions of nationality thus crosscut distinctions of profession in complex and manipulable ways.

Some efforts were made to control this engagement with other networks in the form of international exchange relationships, to turn them towards the otherness of interpersonal relations within communities defined through shared nationality, for example, transformation through innovating through marriage and children with one's family in one's own local and national⁴ community rather than through business and trade (or marriage and children) with foreigners. One such intervention was the still popular 1977 Soviet blockbuster romantic musical comedy *Slujebnii Roman* ("Office Romance"), 1978's most watched Soviet film worldwide and the first film translated into Mongolian by an elaborate new Mongolian film and music translation agency (Olloo 2007) in the year Erdenet produced its first ore concentrates.

The film opens with antihero Novoseltsev, whose name might be translated as "he who has just settled in a new place" or "him with a new farming household;" the name also sounds like "him with a new goal." Novoseltsev is employed at a statistics institute as, like Erdenet employees, neither an intellectual nor worker but as a type of person intended to transcend these categories, a "specialist" (Rus. *spetsialist*, Mng. *mergejilten*) (see Figures 3.2 and 3.3). He is however differentiated

³Pairs of Mongolian and Russian words given this way both index the concept in the discussions following. (In other contexts these terms may take radically different meanings.)

⁴Extended discussion of the Russians of Erdenet is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but I would note here that many of them would not be Russian in Russia; on longer acquaintance, in private, they revealed to me they were from remote parts of Russia, that they were Armenian, Ukrainian, Latvian, Jewish. One Erdenet oldtimer connected this with how she "had nowhere to return to" in Russia.

from his coworkers as being a single father, nervous about asking his director for a promotion to obtain a raise needed to care for his two boys. His classmate and female coworker Rhizhova (“the redhead,” reddish-blond hair is sometimes called “Russian” colored hair) has been unsuccessfully urging him to talk to the director Kalugina, also a woman, but to no avail. After a failed pep talk by Rhizhova, a third classmate, Samokhvalov, arrives from Switzerland to become a new assistant director at the institute. This internationally-connected bigshot turns out to be both a catalyst of positive change for Novoseltsev and a sympathetic villain. As the three smoke Marlboros (an emblematic foreign luxury good, used openly by elites but often obtained illicitly), Samokhvalov convinces his old friend in trouble to approach the director Kalugina about the promotion by first flirting with her at a party. At the end of the film Novoseltsev has emerged as triumphant hero but the assistant director Samokhvalov (possible interpretations of his name include, “he who took by/for/as himself,” “he who is fed up with himself”) falls hard. Samokhvalov resigns from the Institute after an extramarital affair with the third classmate Rhizhova, ruining his relations with classmates and friends by, in this case at least, not venturing outside of them.⁵

The director Kalugina not only grants Novoseltsev the promotion, but having transformed from lonely, frumpy, and unpopular into attractive and beloved by all at the institute, marries and bears Novoseltsev another son. “Office Romance” encourages finding “new goals” through romance, procreation (Prokhorov 2003), and changing gender roles within the national community (Kalugina signifies “from Kaluga,” a city 150 kilometers from Moscow) rather than through international relationships, dangerous in that they might shift patterns of relation within the national community. The film does however encourage going “outside” of one’s

⁵I particularly thank Michael Wachtel for his feedback on my interpretations of these names and providing me with more general information on the significance of character names in Russian literature and film.

Figure 3.2: A diverse arrangement of professional rank, nationalized features, dress, and gender. Mural at the front entrance of the main administrative building at Erdenet's mineral processing factories and open-pit mine.



existing accretions, for example that of one's classmates (*odnoklassniki*, Mng. *angi*). And as evidenced by and in Erdenet, international engagement was and is a structural transformation, or something to be called "What an Event, What a Move!" (the Mongolian translation of "Office Romance," *Iim Negen Yavdal*), also offered to and devised by, Soviet and Mongolian citizens to transform out of stagnation. While continuing relationships and bringing people into relations like those they had before coming to Mongolia, Russians also became involved in ones that they had no experience of before, in order to create new kinds of valuable, as well as new kinds of relations to produce, access, and control valuables. The contextual deployment of distinctions of nationality, indexing different kinds of relational patterns, were and remain important to managing these relationships.

One day I went skiing with Mikhail and Sveta at the hill on the north side of Erdenet that the mining corporation had developed for public use a few years before (not long after the Magnitogorsk enterprise opened a ski resort in the Urals). As

we walked back to the university and the part of the city where Mikhail and many of the other Russian citizens working at the corporation lived we passed through a kindergarten playground. Sveta, who was from the major Siberian city Irkutsk and had just finished her first semester teaching Russian in Erdenet on a contract at the university, remarked that the kindergarten was well-apportioned – in contrast to how she had complained about the “lack of culture” (*nekulturnost*) in Mongolians’ behavior (not forming a line, pushing and shoving) when we were borrowing skis at the bottom of the ski hill. Mikhail, a long-time resident specialist at Erdenet, agreed but said that the facilities used to be even better. But when I used the opening to ask what being in Erdenet had been like in the 1970s and 1980s he reconditioned the comment. Mikhail explained to us that when he came to Erdenet people from the Soviet Union were eager to come; they received “three salaries” (*tri zarplati*): an apartment, a place in a queue to buy a car, and special *cheki* exchange notes to buy exclusive products in closed stores. But there was a catch: not only you had to be good in the eyes of “them,” but so did your children.

Mikhail had made even further moves to go beyond the accretions he had come from to involve himself with new accretions with other kinds of relations. Some weeks later during the short and rapidly warming spring I encountered Mikhail on the street. He told me that he was planning to go to “the countryside” soon. Mikhail told me that he was building a tourist camp there that he was also using as his own summer home. He also said that he knew the family herding nearby and they were helping him to watch for hunters threatening a population of musk deer that were living in the adjacent forest and also how last summer he had hosted a group of kayakers from Germany. We exchanged phone numbers and Mikhail invited me to visit.

Though our conversation was otherwise in Russian, Mikhail used the Mongolian term *khodoo* for “countryside,” rather than a Russian term, for example, *derevnia*. The latter term refers to a village with small household farming plots, often used

by speakers to talk about Russia's preindustrial past, contemporary backwardness, and continuous traditions imparted by grandparents to grandchildren. In Mongolia, *khodoo* may carry these meanings as well, but the term is also often associated with the productive, transformative work of adults seeking new relationships and new kinds of relation beyond their current household, workplace, and national accretions. Galaa and Battaivan, part of my workplace, were like Mikhail, developing tourist camps with Mongolian and international partners for their own as well as Mongolian and international tourists' use. The land that Galaa, himself from southern Mongolia, was building on was a forested slope in the territory that his in-laws were herding on near Erdenet, and another business partner was his sister's husband, an American. Like Galaa and Battaivan, Mikhail would have been relying on neighboring families not just to take some part in his vision of environmental conservation,⁶ but also to acknowledge and reinforce his claims to build on, to inhabit and transform, their local *nutag* community of people, pastures, animals, and invisible entities and energies (Mng. *gazriin ezed*, Rus. *khoziain*, "landlords") controlling the weather and other conditions for production of valuable herd animals, knowledge, children and exchange partners from other accretions.

One's exchanges with others with other networks and other valuables require that one shift between roles to communicate the value one possesses as well as the value one is seeking. These exchanges are often open-ended; one does not know fully what networks and valuables others might possess. Furthermore, the accretions, valuables, and exchange partners themselves are always redefined through such exchanges, since these exchanges bring different kinds of relations into interaction, and in seeking transformation one may cultivate relationships with others defined more by their unknown value than their known value. Recently, Caroline Humphrey (2012) has discussed this character of exchange among Russians in contemporary St. Petersburg

⁶Mikhail appears to have been one of the young Soviets, described by Ward (2009), who were involved in the Brezhnev-era development of Siberia while endorsing the conservation of nature.

on the one hand, and among Mongolians in late socialist Ulaanbaatar on the other to reveal distinctive “Russian” and “Mongolian” kinds of relation and value (though these differ from those I describe here). In Erdenet, this kind of transformative and defining exchange between unknown others is especially pursued through exchange relationships defined as “international friendship” (Mng. *nairamdal*, Rus. *druzhba narodov*) that involve multiple kinds of relation and value each associated with various nationalities.

The relation of “international friendship” makes use of the concept of nationality, which can be and has been used to celebrate or condemn separation and unbalanced exchanges. These concepts of nationality, encouraged by Soviet economic planning and public education systems as well as ethnologists and anthropologists from around the world, index closed communities with bounded territories and environmentally or evolutionarily determined, historically continuous “traditions.”

In the case of Mongols in Mongolia, this includes pastoralism and was part of the rationale for Mongolia’s place in the Eastern Bloc as a source of meat, hides, and other animal products. The usual term for pastoralism, *khodoo aj akhui*, differs from the terms used for other kinds of productive activity: *uul urkhain aj uildver* (“mining industry”), *khiimiin aj uildver* (“chemical industry”), *mashnii aj uildver* (“automobile industry”) and so forth. *Akhui* and *uildver* both refer to productive action, but the former emphasizes lifestyle or livelihood and the latter (like *khodoo*, “countryside”) a place of work; i.e. a factory.⁷

⁷Mining and metallurgy were well-established in Mongolia before the development of Erdenet in the 1970s or early stages in the socialist industrialization of Mongolia. By the 1950s, Mongolia was also the Eastern Bloc’s main source of fluorspar and a major source of uranium, as well as producing major amounts of coal and minerals for construction materials such as gypsum for use within Mongolia, some before the People’s Revolution (Nergui et al. 2007). Well before that, Mongolians were producing minerals such as gold and turquoise for their own use and for international trade (Grayson 2007, High et al. 2010, Batsaikhan 2012) and *darkhad* or “smiths” were and are today associated with shamans, held to hold some of the abilities of shamans to interact with powerful entities literally invisible to other kinds of person (Delaplace et al. 2007, Pedersen 2011). In the context of the main argument of this dissertation and particular chapter about the difficulty of but absolute necessity of engaging partially known others from other accretions, foreigners as much as deceased ancestors, it is logical that Darkhan is the name of the city lying between Ulaanbaatar and

However, this characteristic of total definitiveness does not preclude the use of categories of nationality in pursuing “outside,” or “foreign” and “future,” kinds of value and ways of producing familiar as well as new kinds of value, nor does it fix the value of one nationality as either above or below that of others. Daniel Rosenberg’s (1977) ethnography of a herding collective during the late socialist period also demonstrates the importance of “international cooperation” in pastoralism (*khodoo aj akhui*) as well as industry (*aj wildver*), and the value of the national in processes of industrialization. Among Rosenberg’s collection of life histories is the collective’s director’s tale of his travels to Poland to design and manufacture new machinery for the production of dried *aaruul* curds, a distinctively “Mongolian” dairy product.

In our conversations, Mikhail engaged me as part of various accretions, indexed as “Russian” (we spoke in Russian about the place of Russians in Erdenet), “Mongolian” (he used the Mongolian term *khodoo* and referenced our shared involvement in the Mongolian countryside) and “Anglo/Western-European” (i.e. someone who could bring tourists from those countries) that he was drawing upon to transform the accretions themselves, and thus himself and myself. Many of my conversations in Russian or Mongolian or English on the street in Erdenet used my belonging in national accretions indexed by the use of Russian or Mongolian or English language to simultaneously make particular kinds of both offers and requests. All of my relationships with friends were like this. So too was my relationship with Mikhail, though so far I have only skied with him the one time, spoke with him the one time about his camp in the countryside, and spoken about him with mutual friends and acquaintances. Other conversations and exchanges made the same requests of me that friends made, especially that I help the requester or their children with English,

Erdenet, established in the 1950s as a steel town to be developed with Chinese cooperation before the Sino-Soviet split. A local iron deposit and steel mill were finally opened there during the term of my fieldwork with Japanese partners.

but did not make me want to give of myself, make my own requests, or continue interacting with that person.

Elder, Educated Workers

Compelling and continuing relationships were ones that multiplied associations and potentials, rather than foreclosed all but one structural arrangement of them. Management of these associations to define and pursue potentials invited control, however, to define the valuables that the interaction was creating or accessing and where they were moving. Language and the associations of nationalities with particular kinds of valuable and structures for producing and moving them were especially useful. For example, in Erdenet “Russianess” is often associated with the distinction of workers and intellectuals, or those managed and their managers, and Russian language activates it: in my workplace and other mining corporation workplaces Russian words for “order” (*prikaz*) and “supervisor” (*nachalnik*) were used on both documents and in conversation by people with a great deal as well as no amount of training in Russian, time spent in Russia, and number of family members in or from Russia (or non-Russian parts of the former Soviet Union such as Armenia or Kazakhstan, also generally categorized as not “Mongolian” but “Russian”). These concepts thus were not used only by certain kinds of people (“Russians”) to enforce or replace certain (“Mongolian”) kinds of relation.

As I discuss in the previous chapter, the *Tsagaan Sar* or Mongolian New Year holiday creates the opportunity and challenge of visiting the households of family, coworkers, friends and others in a ranked order from not only oldest to youngest, but also more to less “close” or “dear” (*dotno*, “inside” is *dotoor*). While I questioned making visits to some households, I scarcely hesitated to further my relationship with my university workplace by participating in their *Tsagaan Sar* celebrations. These

Tsagaan Sar celebrations, I observed, were an opportunity for those who ranked lower in the hierarchy of manager and managed, more and less educated, to claim more value and valuables by being “Mongolian,” moving into a system of relations that elevates elders over youths. This happened during everyday situations at the workplace as well, but very visibly during the Tsagaan Sar celebrations.

On the day my coworkers told me the Tsagaan Sar celebration would happen a few days before, I walked from the university dormitory to the school canteen. Everything had a blue-gray cast; it was before sunrise and a few days before the beginning of the official three days of Tsagaan Sar, the last day of work before the week-long holiday. A few people were trickling in, some dressed in brightly-colored *deel* dresses, overcoats and applique-trimmed fur hats, some were wearing the gray canvas jacket and pants which were issued to all by the mining corporation, both kinds of clothing worn at different times by different people. All of the tables were pushed together in the center of the dining room. Some of the chairs were arranged against the walls on the left of the room around the new big table in a horseshoe shape, the rest were arranged in a few rows against the right wall and facing the table.

A few people were already sitting in the left-hand chairs around the table. The head of the university’s mining department that I worked as a part of, Altantsetseg *bagsh* (Mng. “Teacher”), was there, and so was Tsengel *bagsh*. I knew Altantseteg *bagsh* to be a grandmother and Tsengel *bagsh* to be a grandfather. The middle-aged director of the school, Purevbat, who as I discuss in the next chapter was often simply called *zakhirjal* (“Director”), as well as Ganaa *bagsh*, the assistant director, were also there. Myagmar *akh*, Adiya *akh* and Dorj *akh* (“older brother” in a classificatory sense; a male person older than ego) all sat near the table as well. These three were trained professionals (Mng. *mergejilten*, Rus. *spetsialist*), responsible for maintaining the school’s electricity, plumbing and ore-crushing test equipment, though not as highly educated or ranked as highly in the “Russian” system as teachers and engineers

with more education (I describe the particular qualities and practices of *bagsh* and directors, which are “Mongolian” or shamanic and Buddhist as well as “Russian” or socialist and bureaucratic, in the next chapter). On this occasion, in contrast to the seating at weekly meetings of university employees, these older workers sat at the front of the room while the younger teachers and engineers sat to the back.

These elders (Mng. *akhmad*) seated around the table slowly and deliberately removed their *erdene* snuff bottles (*khurug*) made from precious stones and metals from embroidered pouches conjured out of their coats and wide sash-belts. Exchanging the snuff bottles with their neighbors in a handshake-like gesture, they spoke slowly as well, sounding all of the vowels as they asked “Amar baina uu...” [Is all fine, easy and peaceful?]. I had joined the younger people (*zaluuchuud*) waiting on the right side of the room, and after more arrived we began to move to the left, going around the room clockwise, as one makes offerings at an *ovoo*. I leaned down and grasped each of my elders by the elbows, asking “Amar baina uu...” They squeezed back and some kissed me on both cheeks while others took a deep breath through the nose over my left and right shoulders. *One’s scent is an important kind of substance particular to oneself; wearing another’s clothes is also not lightly done, clothes bear much of one’s scent and substance.* Before old and young dispersed, we shared the food on the table: “Roshen” brand candies made in Ukraine, *ev* (“unity”) cookies shaped like the full moon and stamped with round-square designs from Mongolian factories and bakeries, fried *bortsog* bread and dried *aaruu* curds that could have been made on production lines or in people’s homes, and finally a wide, deep white bowl of fermented mare’s milk (*airag*) that can only be made by herders in the countryside. We young people mingled and chatted, the elders remained seated and conversed softly with their neighbors.

Later on during the day before the Tsagaan Sar holiday, the director Purevbat took the stage in the school’s main lecture hall. He presented awards to Tsolmon, a younger

teacher of Russian who once gave me a lecture about problems in translating scenes of entering others' homes from twentieth century Mongolian literature into Russian, and Dorj akh, who once repaired my faucet with a plastic bag and rubber bands when its gushing scalding-hot water couldn't be turned off. The awards were for a "young teacher" and the "specialist of the year." The category of "specialist" sometimes included teachers who also sometimes wore gray canvas jackets, but often, as the award ceremony demonstrates, teachers (*bagsh*) were distinguished from the other kinds of professional (*mergejiltnuud*) at the school: electricians, janitors, accountants, record-keepers, doorpeople, and so forth (See Figure 3.3).

In these ceremonies, both "Russian" and "Mongolian" systems of hierarchy and value were activated. In the morning, elders were distinguished from youth and honored above them, but the food shared, clothing worn, and gestures exchanged were "Mongolian" as well as "Russian." In the afternoon, intelligentsia and workers were distinguished, but both honored in much the same way – presented with a blue *khadag* scarf and bowl of *aaruul* curds. It was striking to see Dorj akh both in his suit at the awards ceremony and exchanging snuff bottles in the morning. Usually I glimpsed him smoking outside the school in his paint-dusted overalls (not ones issued by the mining corporation) and a dark beret. In that guise he reminded me of images of those intelligentsia who were often against intellectualism, the Mongolian writers and artists of the 1930s, who also tended to have well-trimmed mustaches and French-looking hats, or of the wolf character from *Nu pogodi!*, a Soviet cartoon from the 1980s that cast a chain-smoking counterculture youth in the role of American cartoons' Tom C. Cat or Wylie Coyote endlessly pursuing a cute, studious Young Pioneer rabbit, also currently popular with young Mongolians. As Dorj akh had through his acceptance of the award, in his everyday appearance and habits he seemed to be an exception to the distinctions such as those between intellectuals and common people. But Dorj akh was not seeking to equalize, negate, or "be above" all distinctions of value, as



Figure 3.3: Images of a Mongolian geologist and other Mongolian mining specialists. Most employees, including engineers with doctorates as well as workers with two years of higher education or less, continue to be indistinguishable by their attire, at least in the space of the mineral processing plants and open-pit mine. Mural at the front entrance of the main administrative building at Erdenet's mineral processing factories and open-pit mine. (Also note the herder, also in distinctive dress, traditional while internationally cultured in a wide-brimmed hat, also bearing three *erdene* valuables.)



Figure 3.4: Dorj akh at summer picnic, relaxing after enacting his value as a holder of “Mongolian” herding skills by leading the butchering and cooking of a sheep for the entire university workgroup.



Alexei Yurchak (2005) argues for counterculture youths in late Soviet Leningrad. To be valuable with valuables he worked with what others around him were also using, though not all of it all of the time. While dressing in a particularly “Russian” manner, he positioned himself as different from some others of the university, as an elder (*akh*). Everyone younger than him, including my friends with master’s degrees from the Ural State Technical University and PhDs from the Moscow Institute of Metals and Alloys, always greeted him as *akhaa* (“my elder”).⁸

Other workers around the university were elders, but not always recipients of the constant respect that Dorj akh seemed to receive. Some these other workers made a point of speaking to me in Russian, and others noted that they could speak well. This applied particularly in the case of Myagmar akh, who also sometimes came to

⁸Older female workers at the institute, for example the Kazak woman who cleaned our laboratory in the mornings, were also referred to with a respectable term for older women, applied to older sisters and relatives, *egshee*. Female and male teachers and directors with high levels of legitimate authority, however, were alike called *bagsh*.

work after drinking, something that was never remarked on directly but obviously not appreciated.

Dorj akh never conversed with me in Russian or Mongolian or English and never made any requests of me. Myagmar akh and I however often spoke in Russian about our different experiences in South Korea and as members of different professions; he told me about hunting boars and the specifications of the new lighting system he and other GOK electricians were installing throughout GOK's buildings. He also told me how he was a member of the Uriankhai minority, originally from Bayan-Ulgii like my close friend Serik. Occasionally, when he would come to work intoxicated, he would call me "beautiful girl" (*krasivaya devushka*) so I began to maintain a distance from him, partly by never conversing in Mongolian with him. Dorj akh, however, was skillful in using Russian when social drinking was a modality of accretion closed to him. Conversely, I only later began to speak Mongolian with Adiya akh, who had also spoken with me for a long time only seldomly and always in Russian. Around this time, Adiya akh asked me if I would go with his family on their summer trip to a region far from Erdenet. He made it clear that he wanted me to help his son with English, but it was also clear that he, and others in Erdenet like Ulzii and Sanchir who made similar invitations that I pursued, understood my interest in becoming part of their households in emergent and contingent as well as planned ways.

My movements from Erdenet however were discouraged by Dorjsuren bagsh, a director of Adiya akh and my workplace, whom as I describe in the next chapter, managed Mongolians and Russians in Russian and Mongolian but also sometimes called on me to help him manage international exchange students and visiting mining professionals from Australia and elsewhere in English. The legitimacy of his power was based on the ability to manage a great degree of networks running through various household, workplace, and national accretions as both granter of boons and requester of others' expertise and I thus came to value and be more valuable in terms of,

especially as I discovered the difficulty of managing multiple relationships, accretions, and their different systems of value, his moves to make our workplace my main network for becoming more “Mongolian” and “Russian” in order to collaboratively create value of “international” significance.

The Russian Workplace in the Mongolian Countryside

As mentioned above, many of the people in Erdenet who had migrated from the Soviet Union, and some of their children, did not speak in Mongolian.⁹ It is commonly held, and consistent with my own observations and experiences, however that most of them understand Mongolian and many of them take part in practices marked as “Mongolian.” The alternative was isolation or moving to Russia or further abroad, which was not unknown but a difficult undertaking for many people in Erdenet.

Though long-term Russian residents in Erdenet used some Mongolian terms like *khodoo* (and derived an adjective from the word, *khudonskii*¹⁰), only those who were also “Mongolian,” who for example, had Russian as well as Mongolian parentage, or like myself, who had been given and accepted Mongolian names and even once been called a reincarnated Mongolian, engaged in conversational Mongolian. As I found after unknowingly establishing myself as a Mongolian-speaker and through furthering relationships with people with mixed parentage or who otherwise identified publicly as Mongolian in addition to Russian by speaking Mongolian as well as Russian, managing

⁹In the past few years, long-term residents of Erdenet who moved to Mongolia in the 1970s have been joined by short-term contract workers from, for example, Krasnoyarsk and Irkutsk, who told me they were glad to take work and apartments in Mongolia as there were none comparable to be found where they were coming from, though Irkutsk and Krasnoyarsk are cities of nearly five hundred thousand people and major centers of population in Siberia. I suspect the younger Russians who were confronted at the pub were among these. These were also among the people who approached me on the street asking if I could help their children study English. I did not find myself making lasting relationships with any of them.

¹⁰The use of *khodoo* and *khudonskii* by Russian-speakers is all the more notable because *khui* is a common element in Russian profanity. Sanders (2010) writes that Mongolian cosmonaut Mairdarjaviin Ganzorig was compelled to change his name from Gankhuyag due to the possibility of precisely this association, even though the way that name is pronounced by speakers of Mongolian sounds little like the swearword.

both categories in this way is difficult and often involves the use of other modes, for example the drinking I described in the previous chapter. Successful cases of migration I heard of were from among those of mixed Russian-Mongolian parentage, with Russian parents staying behind in Erdenet. The management of this difference, however, is also a potent method of holding legitimate power, as I describe below and further in the next chapter.¹¹

I was unable to go out to Mikhail's place in the countryside (*khodoo*) and see how he interacted with herders and international tourists. During an earlier summer however I visited a Naadam festival just outside of Erdenet with some international exchange students who lived in the dormitory with me and worked in closely associated workplaces, and we came upon the group of people who were becoming my workplace. Members from other workplaces were there too, and coworkers' relatives visiting from Kazakhstan and Russia. Among the group was Alexsei Sergeevich, a director who managed a department at the General Directorship building in town.

¹¹Uradyn Bulag's (1998) analysis of wife-giving and wife-taking relationships between Mongols, Russians, and Manchus across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is a good starting point for further research on Russian-Mongolian intermarriage in Erdenet. However, such intermarriages were rare in Erdenet during my fieldwork; not only were young Russians and Mongolians not marrying (many, but not all, of the newer generation of contract workers came with established families), my friends and acquaintances who were the children born in the context of such marriages or mentioned them described these international marriages in the past tense – in the case I am most familiar with, the Mongolian father had passed away in the 1990s while the “Russian” wife (in another context she was identified as a member of another Soviet nationality) continues to live and work in Erdenet. I note but do not elaborate on this method of accretion here, in part because it was not a possibility being much practiced at the present time. Indeed, the difficulties of people who were of mixed parentage were severe (see also Haslund-Christensen et al. 2002) and call for a sensitive analysis; at this time I also feel I do not have the consent of those involved to write about the topic ethnographically. Bulag's analysis would also of course be a starting point for more work on marriages such as Brian's, between Western men and Mongolian women, which are currently much more commonplace, in Ulaanbaatar at least where there are more single foreign men. However, while I was in Erdenet an Asian-American Peace Corps worker who also worked at the university married a Mongolian woman from Erdenet. Like Brian, he did not accrete with Mongolians in some ways, particularly through language, though he expressed jealousy that I spoke Mongolian and labeled it inappropriate in terms that demonstrated the clash between American systems of race and Eastern Bloc ones of nationality (“Marissa is about as white as you can get, right Serik? But you and me, we're Asian.” – to which Serik replied, “I'm Turkic!”). Particularly after speaking Mongolian with me, Mongolians encouraged me to have relationships with Mongolian men.

Naadam festivals are held all over Mongolia in the summertime, particularly around the middle of July. During the socialist period this date was fixed to align with the anniversary of the People's Revolution, and that occasion is still celebrated in connection with national independence from China if not always with specifically communist ideals in mind.¹² Along with Tsagaan Sar, Naadam is the time of year most associated with Mongolian "national traditions," particularly the products and relations associated with pastoralism. Particularly "Mongolian" meat and dairy foods are produced, acquired, distributed and consumed. Judged by their elders, archers, wrestlers, and horse trainers from different households as well as from different rural district and urban *nutag* compete with one another and honor the national ancestor, Chinggis Khaan.

For both holidays, all employees are legally guaranteed a full week's vacation from work. Many take extra days of vacation around the holiday, even for most of the summer. The streets of Ulaanbaatar, notoriously traffic-jammed, as well as those in Erdenet, are emptied, though tickets to view wrestling and archery in the city's stadium are carefully acquired and distributed and many more people follow the horse races from kilometers out of town by SUV and sedan. Even these will travel to sometimes distant regions of Mongolia that they are connected to through relations of descent, marriage, shared high school and university classes, and so forth. Belonging in the Mongolian nation is reestablished, but so is belonging in any number of other accretions with other kinds of relations.

The Tsagaan Sar holiday on the other hand officially lasts three days and comprises a series of visits of households (and workplaces) to other households (and workplaces), following a trend from one's most "inside" or "dear" (*dotoor*, *dotno*) and "high"

¹²Independence from China was actually declared in 1911, well before the Communist Revolution in 1924, by the government of the Bogd Khan, a Buddhist reincarnation, and the various other Buddhist monastic and secular nobles who had been vassals of the Qing emperor and heavily indebted to Chinese merchants. This independence was also secured by White Russian (and Buryat) as well as Communist forces, however.

(*undur*) relatives towards the less old and less close to the patrilineages of husband and wife in the following days. On the first day, at sunrise, many travel to a local mountain (*undur uul*), often associated with one's ancestors, as part of the local *nutag* community that includes passed-on as well as living humans and nonhumans that exchange with one another to produce, access, and control valuables. The first day also includes visits to one's own and one's spouses' parents' households, and in the following days the homes of older relatives, coworkers and other associates, and finally one's friends and relatives closer in age to oneself. Naadam, however, is often celebrated more publicly with more people who are related in multiple ways and often in a single day.¹³

Alexsei Sergeevich, the members of his workplace, and the members of my workplace were having a picnic (*piknik*) far away from the quadrangle marked out on the grass for wrestling and just past the picket lines of the race horses. When I arrived with the two international exchange students I had been entrusted to bring by taxi (I further discuss this exchange program in the next chapter) carpets had already been spread on the grass with bowls of white dried *aaruul* curds and fried *bortsog* pastries as well as various store-bought candies and cookies. One man was preparing potatoes and carrots to add to the *khorkhog*, an important example of Mongolian national cuisine, metal milk-can full of hot rocks and mutton.

Conversing with a small group of people from my workplace, I observed Alexsei Sergeevich. He was speaking Russian with a group of others who would sometimes wander off and speak in Mongolian with one another, but I noticed that Alexsei Sergeevich would sometimes laugh at the jokes they would tell and that they would laugh with him. At one point I heard him announce in Russian, “now bring me

¹³Various local *naadam*, held at the level of *aimag* provinces and *sum* former collectives are held throughout the month of July, and people from Ulaanbaatar and Erdenet do often attend the *naadam* of these cities as well as the *naadam* of *aimag* and *sum* that also comprise *nutag* accretions they are a part of. Serik, for example, told me that his father went to the Bayan-Ulgii *naadam* yearly, and Serik hoped to attend a *naadam* marking a major anniversary of the *aimag*'s existence soon.

some vodka!” Before he had been drinking fermented mare’s milk, which he referred to as *kumis* rather than with the Mongolian term *airag*. However, he accepted the *kumis* and vodka while remaining seated and with both hands, as though he were a Mongolian elder accepting a New Year’s offering from a younger relative (a gesture important to Tsagaan Sar, and marked with the term *zolgokh*).

Alexei Sergeevich was blurring the lines between Mongolian and Russian and the boundaries of different accretions with different kinds of relations of production and exchange within and beyond the mining corporation to keep the possibilities of all of them in play, but retained his place as a giving manager in the mutually familiar “Russian” terms of the mining corporation and a receiver of “Mongolian” pastoral foreignness (to which, of course, he was not completely foreign) by only speaking in Russian. He also, however, used some “Mongolian” gestures and consumed some “Mongolian” foods in ways that positioned him as an elder, and thus also acknowledged the value of things and persons Mongolian.

These manipulations of structure were necessary for everyone in Erdenet, whether they did not conversationally speak Mongolian or not, whether they had moved to Erdenet from the Soviet Union or not (or no matter what region of Mongolia associated with what national minority group (*yastan undesten*) they had moved from). Directors such as Alexei Sergeevitch, however, were particularly adept at making multiple, nationally-associated systems of relation resonate with one another, even while primarily occupying only a single nationality in a situation. In the next chapter, I describe how this practice was crucial to the legitimacy of one director of our workplace, in contrast to another director who did not enjoy such popularity despite his role in an international association that brought hundreds of thousands of dollars of equipment to the institute.

Chapter 4

Persons of Prominence as Directors of Difference

In this chapter I describe how, in order to be successful and legitimate authorities, directors must manage membership in multiple accretive groups that are made up of vastly different systems of value and associated relations of hierarchy, particularly “national” accretions. I compare and contrast the actions of and responses to two directors, both of whom presided over programs of international cooperation at the university, but one of whom enjoyed great legitimacy and respect while other the other was met with considerably less. I contextualize these forms of legitimacy in terms of both the values of professionalism instituted in Mongolia with a great deal of influence from the Soviet Union while also discussing how the power of legitimate directors is also like that of shamans and Buddhist lamas, who exercise power not only by recognizing and acting in terms of dominance according to various systems of hierarchy, but also by playing with these, particularly by also taking on low positions in these systems of hierarchy. I also discuss the relation of these practices to the enormous prestige of working with international partners from beyond the former Eastern Bloc. Taking on high as well as low positions in various systems of value and

hierarchy allows directors to make their international partners valuable while directors maintain value themselves, without requiring their partners and subordinates to also wield understanding and skillful management of these various systems of value and hierarchy.

Ideals of International and Professional Value

One day at Moskva-Petuskhi, the Erdenet Mining Corporation's restaurant, my orders of carrot salad and borsht appeared on a variety of mismatched plates. Usually the restaurant served everything on a heavy white set bearing the enterprise's ubiquitous shiny gold "CE" insignia. My friend Anya, who worked at the General Directorship Building next to the restaurant, pointed this out and the server replied that one of the directors had taken the Petushkii plates with him to some meetings in the countryside. Anya then launched into a series of complaints about how enterprise directors sometimes used their power in inappropriate ways to provide benefits to some of their connections. Among those specifically mentioned was Otgonbileg himself, the first Mongolian general director of Erdenet.

After holding the post of general director from 1992 to 1998, Otgonbileg was killed in an accident in 2001. Later that year his name was given to the Sh. Otgonbileg School of Technology, the technical university where I conducted much of my fieldwork¹. A statue of Otgonbileg was also erected at the main entrance of the school (No Author N.d.1).

In contrast to Anya's complaints, I sometimes I heard or read of Otgonbileg being praised for his securing of benefits for the enterprise and Erdenet at large. The 1990s, when Yeltsin's government demanded Mongolia pay back all its Soviet "loans"

¹The university was established in tandem with the mining enterprise and continues to be operated by and in Erdenet at least mostly considered to be a part of the enterprise, though since 1996 it is also officially a branch of the Mongolian University of Science and Technology based in Ulaanbaatar (No Author N.d.1.)

(Montsame 2009, Rossabi 2005, Tumurchuluun 1999) and flows of resources even to Erdenet were at a low ebb, were very seldom spoken about, both because this is sometimes remembered as a difficult period and also because many of my friends and acquaintances were close to my own age and thus young children at the time.² Yet a good friend near my age who I sometimes travelled with on the roads between Erdenet and Ulaanbaatar recalled one event of the 1990s at least with joy, crediting Otgonbileg for striking a deal in the 1990s with the director of the concrete factory at Khutul to improve the road between Erdenet and Darkhan, which he said benefited Erdenet residents by improving the roads and Khutul residents by giving them work and funds through the project.³⁴

My agemates also described how Otgonbileg had travelled to the United States to organize Erdmin, a joint venture that produces pure copper and manufactures wire and cable products from Erdenet waste products. As I discuss further in the following chapter, today it is difficult to overestimate the importance of the joint Mongolian-American company Erdmin as a model of the cutting-edge of economic (“value-added” production) and technological (hydrometallurgical) methods for the rest of the mining corporation as an exemplar of successful international collaboration with Western partners as well as counterparts from the former Eastern Bloc.⁵ The

²One friend described other children in her classroom fainting because they had not eaten. She praised her own mother (who raised three alone after the death of her husband in the early 1990s) for preserving to keep her family fed while these other children’s parents succumbed to alcoholism. A general account of Erdenet and the surrounding countryside during the 1990s, from the viewpoint of a medical researcher and based on surveys and interviews is Strickland-Scott 2001. A missionary’s account is Hogan 2007. Buyandelger 2013, Humphrey et al. 1999, and Pedersen 2011 also describe conditions of rapid economic and social decline elsewhere in 1990s Mongolia, when these anthropologists conducted their fieldwork.

³Roads throughout the former Eastern Bloc are often built of slabs of concrete (Rus., Mng., etc. *beton*) rather than asphalt. In regions with permafrost such as northern Mongolia this method has certain advantages over asphalt roads.

⁴According to Sanders (2010:264), Khutul is or was at least established as a subsidiary of the Erdenet enterprise. During my fieldwork no one described Khutul as part of Erdenet either in terms of shared community or a legally-defined subsidiary of the corporation, however.

⁵“Friendship” (and “brotherhood”) are used only to characterize the relation between Mongolians and Russians. The terms in Mongolian I translate as “collaboration,” like the term I translate as “workplace,” involve the word or root *khamt*, which expresses togetherness. An expression for “international collaboration” found in Erdenet conference proceedings (Bazar et al. 1998, Erdenet



Figure 4.1: General Director Otgonbileg in front of the Sh. Otgonbileg Institute of Technology

monument of Otgonbileg makes the social proceeds evident. A statue of Otgonbileg relaxing contemplatively in his Soviet neoclassically-styled director's chair sits atop a triptych depicting three stages of local history: a man on horseback in a landscape of mountains and river valleys dotted with Buddhist monastic buildings and yurts; a party of geologists with a woman surveyor outside a tent; and the mineral processing factory surrounded by machine operators as well as doctors and nurses delivering babies into the arms of parents (See Figure 4.1).

Like principles defining the accretion of *nutag* communities described in previous chapters, Mongolian ideals of personal value as professionalism introduced in the previous chapter are strongly tied to ideals of socialist internationalism, national development, and social, political, and economic equality. These ideals share what might be recognized as a form of Durkheim's idea of organic solidarity (Durkheim 1984:133): unity and collective value through diversity. Otgonbileg's positive

Mining Corporation 2003, Erdenet Mining Corporation 2004a, Erdenet Mining Corporation 2004b, Erdenet Mining Corporation 2007) for example, is *khamtran ajilakh* or "to work together."

legacy revolves around his being an internationally active professional providing professionalism, in the forms of work, training, and services, to other professionals.

In the spring of 2012, Otgonbileg's son Sodbileg ran for and won Erdenet's open Parliament seat. Sodbileg was running for the (in Erdenet) usually popular Mongolian People's Party⁶ against a Democratic Party candidate whose predecessor had been arrested a few months before and accused of self-enrichment both publicly and privately. Sodbileg also ran a much more expensive campaign featuring vans and apartment offices rather than yurts. However, Sodbileg's victory, or at least his legitimacy, were not fully secured by these means. Some criticized him for "not really being from Erdenet," and my friend who spoke well of Otgonbileg's deal with the cement factory director even mentioned Sodbileg and his mother's leading positions in Petrovis, the often criticized monopoly importing most of Mongolia's gasoline from Russia and charging constantly rising prices for it.⁷

Sodbileg's campaign did however attend not only to his Erdenet roots, but also to international professional ability, including promises to enable others' international professional ability. Like the campaign book distributed door-to-door by students employed by the DP candidates, Sodbileg's book established that he had grown up in the countryside and Erdenet before undertaking higher education. Unlike the DP candidate however, who gave timelines and photographs of his training as a mathematician in socialist-era Czechoslovakia and later photographs of himself meeting as a party official with counterpart party officials from Japan, Russia, Oman, and other countries, Sodbileg displayed an illustration of himself shaking hands with Bill Clinton and Prince Felipe of Spain in front of their common alma mater

⁶During my fieldwork, the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party split when former President Enkhbayar left the party. Around the same time the main body of the party changed its name to Mongolian People's Party. The colloquial name of "People's Party" (*ardiin nam*) continued to be used.

⁷Mongolia lacks its own refineries and the development of these is a continuing focus of international collaboration, most lately with Japanese partners who have been working on other projects in Darkhan.

have so far, however, eluded all but Otgonbileg. Whether Sodbileg can successfully manage his obligations to Erdenet, Petrovis, and American allies remains to be seen. Does partying with Paris Hilton signify a creative connection and exemplary use of Sodbileg's professional qualities, or does it merely index that Mongolians desire international status and relationships? If the latter are not expressed and evaluated as both collective and individual development, particularly professional development, Sodbileg is open to accusations of corruption.

In her study of Mongolian ideals of “democracy” and “capitalism,” Paula Sabloff's interviewees identified greater access to education as well as increased opportunity to travel abroad as distinguishing democracy from socialism while also linking the two: “It is possible to travel to any foreign country and learn their culture, to develop and experience [things for oneself] and to promote your country. Even more, there is opportunity to adopt foreign knowledge and experience for industrial and agricultural development. Democracy created those possibilities” (2013:66). However, the distribution of opportunity to study and travel abroad actually remains, in continuity with the socialist period, limited and managed. Ideally, since everyone is to be professionalized in the way that in the generational system of *akh* and *duu* (“older and younger siblings”) everyone has a position defined by relative age, to be a fully moral or ethical person one must be a professional, and the failure of leaders and political-economic systems to realize universal professionalism through the provision of education and jobs are automatically considered corrupt: the ideal of universal professionalism or international participation themselves are not questioned so much as accusations made that leader-professionals are enriching themselves or only some or parts of their accretions with not only actual money but the very means of being a complete person, able to act morally and be evaluated as acting morally, to be a part of multiple accretive groups. As Sabloff (2013), Humphrey (2012), Reeves (2005), and Zimmerman (2012) note, in Mongolia as well as in Kyrgyzstan and Russia

the provision of quality education is a focus of “corruption talk.” The challenge of would-be professionals, professionals, directors, and politicians who are professionals has become that of reproducing and subtly transforming the ideals and institutions of the socialist period and association with the Soviet Union through creative use of new kinds of “international cooperation,” while appreciating that this involves interacting with the unknown and the other, both younger generations and international partners from the West.

I now turn to the ways that two directors within the corporation faced this challenge of using international collaborations with other corporations to both improve production as well as the professional value of members of the corporation, particularly opportunities to access education abroad.

During my fieldwork in Erdenet between the summer of 2011 and fall of 2012 I became familiar with two different international programs to supplement the Institute of Technology’s operations, managed by two different directors. The first I will describe was claimed by the current director of the Otgonbileg Institute of Technology, Purevbat. This program directly linked Erdenet and Oyu Tolgoi, since the mid-1990s one of the world’s largest and most anticipated copper projects under development by Anglo-Canadian mining giant Rio Tinto, which many of my coworkers at the Institute hoped to work for or with in order to develop themselves, their households, workplaces, and *nutag* communities including Erdenet and Mongolia. The agreement, in which Mongolian mineral processing technicians would be trained at Erdenet to work at Oyu Tolgoi, also brought four Caterpillar heavy equipment training modules to the Institute, each worth upwards of over half a million dollars and installed by an Australian specialist who was pestered by many excited onlookers, including myself and Serik, during his time at the school.

Despite involving a transnational mining corporation with “Bill Clinton” levels of international status and prestige in the world of mining, Director Purevbat’s project

however was not particularly appreciated. It did little to benefit Erdenet employees, Erdenet itself, and the Mongolian national accretion in accord with the values of international, corporate, and personal development described above.

As indicated by their presence in the school dormitory where I, contracted Russian teachers, and other foreigners lived, the Oyu Tolgoi trainees were not part of Erdenet's accretive groups prior to coming, though these do extend well beyond the city even to the southern Gobi where many of the trainees came from.⁸ The lack of enthusiasm for the program however was not due just to how members of GOK and Erdenet were not much involved, but also because they desired other kinds of training, and thus relations, than what the Oyu Tolgoi program provided access to involvement in. The most appreciated part of the program was the provision of two summers of English language training for teachers and researchers at the institute. Unlike the training of high school graduates to perform the most menial tasks in a mineral processing factory as grateful recipients of a first stage of development from a mining corporation profiting hugely through their labor,⁹ the English program provided professional development that was considered to be self-enabling, relations that could be not just involved in but accretable, and a means to securing the acknowledgement of existing professional value, which could be used to accrete further value and relations through learning and working in accretions other than Erdenet and Oyu Tolgoi or Rio Tinto.

The second director, Director Dorjsuren, had preceded Director Purevbat as head of the Institute of Technology but retained his position as full professor¹⁰ and

⁸The Investment Agreement signed by foreign mine developers and the Mongolian Government stipulates that a certain percent of the Oyu Tolgoi workforce be Mongolian, and a certain percent of that from Umnugov, the "South Gobi" province where the mine is located.

⁹This is the intention of at least some parts of Rio Tinto, though it is important to remember that the training was actually carried out by Erdenet, which had been training Mongolians to work within the system of international professional values at all levels of the corporation for some thirty-five years.

¹⁰The Mongolian system of professorial rank, like the Russian and Soviet ones, is historically connected to the German system, originally via Peter the Great's institution of a Western university and research institute system by bringing in German academics and more lately through academic and scientific relationships within the Eastern Bloc. The position of "full professor" is quite rare and difficult to obtain.

“advisory head” in the mining department while holding the position of Director of Environmental and Worker Safety for the mining corporation as a whole. His program of international collaboration at the Institute of Technology was a local branch of the International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience (IAESTE). The program is, in terms of personnel, money, and the prestige of specific institutions involved, much more modest than Director Purevbat’s Oyu Tolgoi program. It was, however, much more popular, and Professor Dorjsuren generally enjoyed a greater degree of legitimacy and respect than Director Purevbat.¹¹

In the next section, I explain how Professor Dorjsuren’s success stemmed not just from greater age and higher position in the enterprise and academia, but from the (connected) ability to reckon with the differing systems of value held by parts of the Erdenet accretive groups on the one hand and that of the numerous international partners involved in a program of trainee exchanges (IAESTE) on the other.

Directing Difference as a Professor by Becoming a Student

The IAESTE program sends Erdenet students and teachers abroad and receives foreign university students every summer for “technical training.” Thus, from Erdenet metallurgists and mineral processing specialists as well as chemists and computer scientists went to work at ceramics institutes as well as programming firms in (former East) Germany, Spain, India, and Croatia while Erdenet received mechanical engineers, chemists, and environmental engineers from (former West) Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Poland, India, and the United Kingdom. Though IAESTE lacked any explicit connection with contemporary Mongolia’s key symbol

¹¹I believe it was Director Dorjsuren whom Ganbat intended and tried to introduce me to after we discussed where I might work in Erdenet; see chapter two.

of postsocialist development, whether Oyu Tolgoi itself or any of the multinational mining corporations comparable to Sodbileg's connections to Washington, D.C., it made the kinds of relations that people desired with what Oyu Tolgoi often symbolized to them but that they had been finding actual relations with Oyu Tolgoi to often lack.

In Mongolia, many administrators across the now oftentimes ideally separated landscape of government and business have sought to simply replace the socialist rational-bureaucratic, self-reproducing system (funded by Soviet subsidies that had been a third of Mongolia's GDP and orchestrated with the direction or advising of Soviet ministries that disappeared virtually overnight in the winter of 1990 and 1991) with a functionally similar one they imagined development banks and aid organizations to be able to and interested in providing. As widely documented by anthropologists and many development experts working across the former Eastern Bloc, these development organizations however have been intent on destroying "centralized" and "elitist" Soviet systems, in education emphasizing values of "decentralization," "critical thought," and "the market" as settings for the development of relations defined only as opposite to whatever had come before.¹²¹³

As Ines Stolpe and Gita Steiner-Khamsi (2006) describe for the compulsory elementary and high school system, Mongolian universities have seen their funding

¹²See Reeves 2005 for a discussion of how during "reform as destruction" in post-Soviet Kyrgyz higher education "the market" is variously applied to index both hope for positive change and despair of systemic failure.

¹³As Sanghera and Ilyasov (2008) detail in their discussion of Kyrgyzstani professions, participation in international development organizations' programs creates rifts between professionals who are effectively employed by them and those who are not. Doctors working for the UNDP and sociologists participating in Open Society Institute programs assume professional identities linking themselves with others working with other international agencies as "ethical" and other doctors or university faculty as "corrupt." While Sanghera and Ilyasov argue that the former are actually less corrupt and attribute this to the "strength" of these professional associations in comparison to ones with a Soviet heritage, I would argue that the professional codes of conduct and ethics reproduced in international development association-supported associations themselves are those of the Soviet and post-Soviet higher education system. In that system, to be ethical is to develop oneself, one's institution, and one's society (and in these contexts, one's profession), and socialist as well as postsocialist development is international.

sapped first by the loss of Soviet subsidies and later even further by foreign development agency-backed budget, administrative, and curricular reforms on the one hand and new windfalls for particular projects and departments on the other. A case study of the Mongolian National University by rector Rensurengiin Bat-Erden, vice-rector Surengiin Davaa, and education professor John Yaeger (1999) describes these changes in detail. The 1991 Education Law consolidated responsibility for higher education into one new ministry (The Ministry of Science and Education) and charged it with new administrative responsibilities, i.e. forming, rather than just implementing as in the past, specific policy to meet the (undefined) goals of marketizing and democratizing higher education. In 1995 a policy paper was released further devolving responsibilities for devising as well as implementing reform upon universities. Reformers attempted to excise the curriculum of Marxist-Leninist content and new departments were added as the number of students at the National University more than doubled from 1988 to 1995. These included courses in engineering, which had previously been offered only at the Institute of Technology (now National University of Science and Technology, of which the Institute of Technology in Erdenet is a branch). Research, formerly conducted separately from teaching in institutes attached to the Academy of Science, particular ministries, and various enterprises, was to be integrated into universities. The language of higher education was shifted from Russian to Mongolian and English.

For faculty and administrators, these reforms demanded new foreign-oriented skills and materials that in keeping with ideals of personal and social development through international participation they were eager to learn but lacked time, resources, and institutional support to gain and disperse. As in other former Eastern Bloc countries whose university systems are still undergoing similar reforms (Deyoung 2011, Hossler et al. 1999, Reeves 2005, Sabloff 1999), a patchwork of international development projects continue to be a major feature on the landscape of Mongolian

higher education. At Erdenet's Institute of Technology itself, English teaching is supplemented by Peace Corps and Fulbright Program teachers, Russian language education is conducted by contracted professionals who told me they had also long worked teaching Russian in northern China, and the only stable ways for students of the Institute of Technology in Erdenet to complete their educations abroad are through relations, established in the socialist period, between the Erdenet mining enterprise and institutions in Irkutsk and Ekaterinberg. The latter is still, tellingly, most often referred to in Erdenet by the Soviet name Sverdlovsk, or jokingly (familiarily and lovingly) as *shavar*, Mongolian for "mud," referring to a quality of Siberian springtime.

Thus, though programs supported and administered by large development banks and agencies (some global like the United Nations, USAID, and World Bank, and others regionally-focused such as the Soros Foundation/Open Society Institute and Asian Development Bank) have received the most attention of sociologists, political scientists, and scholars of education and law, professionals in Mongolia and other postsocialist countries have made many other kinds of international ties. In contrast to portrayals of large development agencies arriving and administering "interventions," Hossler, Liferov and Kostikov (1999) describe how at the Ryazan State Pedagogical Institute Rector Liferov and Kostikov, the university's former Party head-cum-Prorector for Financial Affairs, spent up to seventy percent of their time searching for new sources of funding not only from the Russian federal government (which was unable to pay even for faculty salaries during the First Chechen War) but international sources as well. Tellingly, Kostikov was both the Prorector for Financial Affairs and International Programs. In adding a business school to the Pedagogical Institute, administrators were working with Indiana University. At the National University of Mongolia, Bat-Erden, Davaa and Yaeger (1999) described the highly directed kinds of international projects that had been completed successfully:

library books, computers, and new (and, during my fieldwork, still functioning) training centers in law and economics not only from foreign governments and the UNDP but also The German International Center for Translation and Information and even the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints-affiliated Deseret Charities International. When I last visited the Institute of Economics, it was not focused solely on Jeffrey Sachs' development economics or the Chicago school, but had a chair named for Keynes. As at Erdenet's Institute of Technology with the IAESTE program, it appears that the Institute of Economics may be engaging creatively with various non-Soviet economists and schools of economics, while also erecting a statue to its last socialist-era director in the front courtyard (also next door to an Oyu Tolgoi public relations office).

Overcoming the significant challenges of securing such resources from these kinds of sources, however, is not enough to ensure a director's success as a legitimate leader. In this environment, directors and professionals able to make the continuing "Soviet" institutional and ideal framework function through particular kinds of international collaborations are those who have flourished. The task is also made more difficult by the reality that international organizations providing these resources also make varying levels and kinds of demands on the institutions they are "aiding." Professor Dorjsuren's success lay in how he was able not only to make the values of international partners valuable for his students and those he managed at Erdenet, but also in how he was able to make Erdenet and its members valuable to international counterparts.

I will first describe my own relationship with Professor Dorjsuren. My relations with the former director of the school and current head of the mining department as well as the environmental and worker safety departments of the mining corporation caused me great anxiety as well as intensely positive feelings of respect and the desire to be taken seriously as a capable young person, rather than just a young person or just an American. Our interactions for the most part took place in highly ritualized

context reminiscent of the Tsagaan Sar celebrations that I describe in chapter three, in which distinctions and obligations between elder (*akh*) and younger (*duu*) are sharply defined, reasserted, and redefined. Our lab workplace holds a departmental meeting every Monday. In this weekly ritual, as at the Tsagaan Sar celebration held at the school, young and old professors and researchers arrange themselves around another long table with elders (professors) towards the head and youths (also professors, including the head of the research laboratory) towards the other end of the table.

The first time I met Dorjsuren bagsh (as we addressed him with a title that I will further explore in the next section), sometime in the early first summer of my fieldwork, we members of the workplace had been enjoying ourselves around the table, young engineers and teachers including the head of the hydrometallurgical research laboratory. Suddenly Dorjsuren bagsh appeared and we fell silent mid-laughter. There was a susurration of “Sain baina uu bagshaa” [Are you well, my/our teacher?] as he took a seat at the head of the table, analogous to the position in the back of the Mongolian yurt and in front of the family altar occupied by elders not only during Tsagaan Sar, but on a daily basis at least at mealtimes. Fear and anxiety gripped me as I wondered how I would present myself to this figure with a flamboyant yet classically stylish suit, gold rings and teeth, and the easy authority of a New Russian and Soviet technocrat rolled not only together but also with that of a successful Mongolian wrestler or high lama. The anxiety grew as Dorjsuren bagsh proceeded to take lengthy phone calls in Russian and Mongolian on three separate cell phones while we waited silently and stilly.

After a year or so, I had almost become comfortable with Dorjsuren bagsh, who seemed more comfortable with me as time drew on and he realized I spoke Russian, and I discussed my twinned respect and fear for him, my need to be taken seriously, with friends of my generation who turned out to have similar attachments to Dorjsuren bagsh. Then suddenly during the second summer of my fieldwork my role vis-a-vis

Dorjsuren bagsh flipped for a moment in an encounter outside the ritual spaces of meeting in the laboratory and mineral processing factory. A Belgian photographer, Francois, whom I had helped to take portraits of workers at the open pit mine and processing factory the previous summer returned to exhibit his work at Erdenet's cultural palace. When I arrived, Francois was there with his Russian friend, an Erdenet corporation employee who had also come to the mineral processing factory with us, and a number of other Russians whom I didn't know. The opening of the exhibit was delayed as the power had gone out shortly after I had arrived. Unable to engage the strange Russians with my polyglottism, I talked with Francois and Elena in English and Russian but had to let them go after a short conversation. After fifteen minutes or so however I did meet someone else I knew.

Dorjsuren bagsh approached me somewhat suddenly and caught me by surprise. He seemed uncomfortable though, such as I had not seen him before. In his limited but carefully managed and sophisticated English he asked me if I would introduce him to Francois! Dorjsuren bagsh's daughter had been photographed by Francois and Dorjsuren bagsh of course wanted a copy of the photo. I was made even more strongly aware of how my feelings of fear were now well mixed with esteem and respect when after enquiring as to how my work was going he began to become impatient with the lack of electricity. After facilitating the conversation with Francois, I reported to Dorjsuren bagsh what I had heard about the power problem; he listened politely before one of his cell phones emerged, he made a few short orders, and the power returned.

Though *bagsh* is a form of reference and address in the fashion of a fixed, attained status, the most respected *bagsh* such as Dorjsuren always recognized being a "teacher" as relational, a role to be occupied at some times and not others in achieving specific goals, in the context of particular exchanges. He engaged young people like myself as sometimes students and sometimes fellow teachers, sometimes

even flipping the usual relation of himself as teacher and young person as student. While I often interacted with Dorjsuren bagsh by listening to his presentations and lectures at the mining department's weekly meetings, he enlisted me as a teacher to practice English with our school's students and teachers. On the occasion described above, apparently untrustworthy of his English and general manners in interacting with Westerners, Dorjsuren bagsh asked me to introduce him to the visiting Belgian photographer who had taken photographs of Dorjsuren bagsh's youngest daughter the previous summer and was presenting the photographs in a reception in Erdenet's Cultural Palace. Rather than the forceful and direct way he often asked questions of me and other young teachers in the mining department, when asking for my help as an English teacher and especially as a mediator between himself and the photographer Dorjsuren bagsh looked downward and considerably softened his tone. On the other hand, Dorjsuren bagsh had ended over an hour of waiting to begin the photographer's exhibition reception with a phone call that restored power to the gallery, by switching back into a figure at the top of a set of hierarchical relations.

From my arrival at Erdenet to do preliminary fieldwork for a month in the summer of 2010, I lived in the university dormitory alongside IAESTE trainees and assumed a role within the organization as someone to help them adjust to life in Erdenet. When students arrived, they were turned over to me quickly to show them around town; I also regularly joined IAESTE students and their Mongolian counterparts on outings in town and to the countryside. I noticed a similar dynamic that had unfolded between Dorjsuren bagsh and I to unfold between IAESTE trainees and their counterparts at Erdenet, often with the action of Dorjsuren bagsh. The third summer I spent with IAESTE students at GOK, an environmental engineer from Switzerland was, I determined, brought by Dorjsuren bagsh, who was also head of the department of environmental safety at Erdenet, to help work on improving the filtration system at one of the water treatment plants. At first, Jonas expressed concern to me over

how different members of the group had seemed to be fighting over him for English practice. By the time Jonas left, however, he was preparing his final presentation to the Erdenet IAESTE assembly, a ceremonial event spearheaded by Dorjsuren bagsh. At that point Jonas had explained the problems and solutions he and his counterparts were engaged in passionately to me – he felt valued himself by his counterparts, while also valuing their professional value, if not fully grasping the differences in his systems of value and theirs.¹⁴

By relating to me and the young IAESTE students as a “student” as well as a “teacher” or authority based on position in a vertical hierarchy with things to teach foreign trainees as well as learn from them, Dorjsuren bagsh, and by extension, all professionals at Erdenet, came to be taken first as professionals by many of the IAESTE students, professionals who could also break horses and shear sheep and took them to drink their relatives’ mares’ milk, rather than essentially nomadic pastoralists, perhaps trained in fundamentally wrong ways by Soviets, who could never become the operators of their own industry except perhaps by first becoming workers or acting under the direction of multinational corporations based in the Anglo countries or Western Europe.

Dorjsuren bagsh’s success here involved his maintenance of difference, particularly the difference of himself from his counterparts. He did not attempt to act as a “post-Soviet” or “un-Soviet” director, or as a youthful person when he interacted with youths. Involvement in IAESTE further connected those already related to Dorjsuren bagsh as “students” not only to him and the international expertise that he himself had gained as a professional trained in the Soviet Union, possibly to be viewed as tainted by association with the past socialist period and its limited international

¹⁴IAESTE trainees also enforced respect for their Mongolian counterparts amongst themselves. During a evening I spent with one summer’s two IAESTE trainees, one trainee complained that workers at his department were playing World of Warcraft on computers designated for controlling the ore crushers. The other trainee countered by expressing admiration for the engineering skill his counterparts demonstrated at optimizing the crushing line, a combination of the original Soviet installation and new German-made machines.

scope, but also with new, “postsocialist” expertise that exceeded Dorjsuren bagsh’s. Dorjsuren bagsh also was not accused of corruption despite his involvement in the selection of the trainees brought to work at labs throughout the corporation. While the members of these workplaces, especially the counterparts they were paired with, benefitted personally through the chance to, for example, practice their English with the exchangees, the training of workers and improvement of techniques in these departments, as with the sending of teachers and students from the school abroad, were widely considered to be of particular weight in the development of Erdenet as a community and impressed the trainees as significant problems that both engaged them as professionals and demonstrated the expertise of their Mongolian counterparts. Members of these workplaces received exchangees and went on exchange themselves not simply because they were under the management of Professor Dorjsuren, but because they were part of his and their own missions to improve, for example, the mining enterprise’s environmental impacts, as well as the professional expertise of its specialists in general, missions Dorjsuren bagsh conducted through his multiple positions in Erdenet as head of environmental and worker safety and former head of the school and its mining department.¹⁵

“Mongolian” Persons of Prominence: Inner Asian Shamans, Buddhist Lamas, and Charismatic Engineer-Bricoleurs

Dorjsuren bagsh’s ability to “direct difference” and be a powerful and legitimate director was to translate and transfer between accretions, which meant that he also

¹⁵I also had friends and spent time at workplaces that were not part of Dorjsuren bagsh’s environmental, work safety, and university mining department workplaces. I might have expected to hear accusations of corruption directed towards Dorjsuren bagsh’s in these workplaces but never did.

had the respect of international partners. This kind of legitimacy is not unassociated with directors elsewhere in the former Eastern Bloc (see for example, Rogers (2006)), but in Erdenet it is associated also with shamans and lamas, who may also be called *bagsh*.

Professor Dorjsuren (as well as Professor Altantsetseg, an older woman who was the current head of the mining department) were always addressed and referred to by members of our mining department and school workgroups with the title *bagsh*. Glossed as “teacher,” this is a title associated with a variety of often separated ideologies and institutions emphasizing a hierarchical relation of care, powered by the ability to mediate between multiple accretive groups for their mutual benefits.

The title *bagsh* may be applied to the Buddha (*Burkhan Bagsh*), and it has also been applied to Lenin (*Lenin bagsh*). One does not need to be part of a particular institution, or an elder, to be a *bagsh*; again it emphasizes a relational position. Younger students and adults in Erdenet whom I helped with English and applications to foreign universities and companies, as well as those I did not know through such specific personal interactions, often addressed me and other members of our workplace as *bagsh*. I addressed Dorjsuren as *bagsh*, as well as certain other full professors such as Oyuntsetseg, and also my Mongolian language teachers in both Moscow and Ulaanbaatar. As well as the teacher and student relation in schools and universities, the term also refers to Buddhist lineage holders and their students in the lineage tradition as well as lay followers. In the Qing period *shav* (“pupils”) were also those laymen in the territories of Buddhist reincarnations who managed monastery herds but owed no military or tax obligations to the Emperor, unlike the *khamjilgaa* who worked the herds of the Emperor’s noble vassals (Pedersen 2011, Vreeland 1957. The position of *shav* also appears occasionally in the context of the university: on formal occasions such as Teacher’s Day (*Bagsh nar udur*) and Intellectual Day (*Erdemtnii*

udur), students and younger teachers invoked their relationship with full professors and some administrators as *bagsh-shav*.

From the late 1960s, around the same time that the planning of Erdenet as a joint project of the Soviet Union and the Mongolian People's Republic began, the category of university-educated professional or "specialist" (Mng. *mergejilten*, Rus. *spetsialist*) joined those of elder (*akhmad*), shaman (*boo*, *udgan*), Buddhist lama (*lam*), and the descendants of Chinggis Khaan's lineage enfeoffed to Living Buddhas and the Manchu Emperor in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (*taij*, *van*). These leaders in government, business, trade, religion, higher education, and family life articulate various accretive groups at local, regional, national, and international levels, both reproducing and transforming them.

As noted in the previous chapter, legitimate leaders, whether they are high lamas, directors, or grandparents, express their exceptional quality through their own level of education, indexed by degrees held, as well as through the provision of education or knowledge to others. This authority, as shown particularly by shamans and lamas operating outside of the Gelugpa Buddhist hierarchy and institutions, is not grounded just in one's place in an institution; the charismatic ability to be a successful bricoleur evidenced by Dorjsuren bagsh is just as important, and it is even the source of one's stability in a position in an institutional hierarchy, as emphasized by Weber (1946) and Levi-Strauss (1966).¹⁶ As it evolved in Mongolia primarily as a joint project with the Soviet Union, professionalism is closely bound up with the ideals of international socialism shared by Soviet and Mongolian planners. However, qualities and categories of leadership associated with Qing systems of imperial bureaucratic administration, Buddhism, shamanism, and pastoralism also remain important for professionals and directors.

¹⁶See also Katherine Swancutt's 2007 discussion of the role of "perspectival shifts" in "virtuosity" among players of a board game in a Mongolian region of northeast China.

In a turning point for Mongolist anthropology, Caroline Humphrey described Mongolian political authority as the negotiation of competing ideologies and institutions in her ethnography of a late Soviet Buryad¹⁷ collective farm (1998). In this work she named Buryad shamans “bricoleurs of the Soviet world,” exploring how, in contrast to not only the Soviet system but also the vertical hierarchy of pre-Revolution Buddhist monastic estates and the ubiquitous “patrilineal” order arranging all persons in relations of elder (*akh*) and younger (*duu*), shamanism is “fluid, undogmatic, secret and transient” (Humphrey 1998:416).

In contrast to other “prominent persons” enacting and reproducing Soviet, Buddhist and generationally organized pastoralist systems’ commitment to “positive values [...] of labor and productivity,” Humphrey argued that shamans and shamanism addressed suffering, for instance the possibility of failing to meet economic plan targets. In conversation with James Scott and Anna Tsing, Morten Pedersen (2011) has also lately furthered Humphrey’s analysis of shamans and shamanism (among the Darkhad, who live to the northwest of, as well as in, Erdenet) as troubling the authority of lamas, elders, national politicians, and international financial institutions into exploring how shamans and other marginal, joking, and trickster-type subjects who associate themselves with shamanism confound the authority of elder men leading households and groups of herders as well as the Mongolian state and its national and internationally-ranked orders of centers and peripheries. Manduhai Buyandelger (2007, 2013) also positions the Buriad shamans she worked with as marginal and even outside global capitalist systems, leading people who come to them seeking help in business into genealogical quests searching for the identities of ancestors who suffered under socialist, colonial, and Buddhist

¹⁷The Buryad and Buriad people are a Mongolian group that migrated across the Mongolian/Russian border at various points up to the early 20th Century. I use “Buryad” to refer to those on the Russian side and “Buriad” for those on the Mongolian side, following common transliterations of their own naming conventions.

repression and whose suffering is linked to the suffering of their descendants alive today.

Thus, though Humphrey first formulated the distinction of “shamans and elders” or “shamans and chiefs” in the context of a late Soviet collective farm (1998) this framework has barely been applied to institutions and ideologies associated with the Mongolian socialist period and their postsocialist transformations since, as ethnographers have focused on shamanic subversions and alternatives to state and other political-economic institutions and practices. Turning in another direction, my concern here is how nationally and internationally recognized state and corporate actors, as well as “hillbillies” (Pedersen 2011, Tsing 2005), also navigate, connect and merge various hierarchized social positions and the various differently systematized accretive groups associated with them, reproducing as well as transforming the distinctive institutions and ideologies of these various groups. Thus, directors at Erdenet can be both “hillbilly” and official in highly bureaucratized international administrative systems; their power, like that of shamans, is in being particularly proficient being both outside and inside, in accord with and beyond, the systems of relation composing particular accretive groups.

Rather than holding Soviet structures, Buddhist institutions, or pastoral political-economic organization as steady “state” systems that shamans and their clients react to as separate agents, I trace what Humphrey termed “chiefly” and “shamanist” forms of authority across different kinds of accretion with different systems of relation that sometimes coalesce as structures fixed in place to be reacted to by individuals and groups as actors but that at other times are open to unexpected uses and even radical transformation: creating cooperation and trust where there may have been violent opposition, hope where there was despair. As Weberian-style ideal types, “chief” and “shaman” may refer to types of individuals, or practices and relations that the same individual takes up in different contexts, two kinds of authority that may oppose or

bolster one another. As Humphrey writes about these positions in terms of gender, “the two kinds of ‘person’ are ideally male members of replicating hierarchical lineages on the one hand [everyone as someone else’s elder, chiefs of a household if not a larger accretive group], and mediating, birth-giving, persons-in-transit on the other (perhaps ideologically “females”) [shamans]. But actual people, whether men or women, can take one or both of these stances” (with Onon 1996:159).

In her study of the Karl Marx Collective, Humphrey noted the participation of the farm’s Party Secretary and Russian workers, or those usually associated with the “chiefly” authority of the Soviet rational-bureaucratic system, in “shamanic” ritual offerings to help fulfill economic plans. Thus Humphrey was concerned with how individuals and groups aligned and merged as well as opposed Soviet socialism, shamanism, Buddhism, and patrilineal organization in practice. However, that study and many drawing on it have focused on oppositions and complementarity between shamans and these others, as separate persons – “shamans” and “elders” (Humphrey et al. 1996), “not-quite-shamans” and “businesspeople” (Pedersen 2011), “seers” and “presidents” (Humphrey 2006), “shaman” and “Emperor” (Humphrey 1994). In these comparisons, shamans are individual persons who ally with or oppose elders or chiefs as individual persons.

More recently however, Humphrey and others have emphasized how Mongolian “kinds of persons,” have shamanic-type abilities without being shamans that define them in ways additional to their position in generational orders. They conclude that Mongolian personhood is always marked by the challenges of managing one’s obligations to many different and often conflicting groups (which I call “accretions” or “accretive groups”) in various ways particular to different kinds of persons. In conversation, while Humphrey (2007) notes that shamans manage relations between the living and the dead, humans and nonhumans, determining when and how relations of mutual benefit are to be established with these others and when they should be

fought off, Delaplace and Empson (2007) discuss how daughters-in-law must become part of their husband's household while not completely severing ties with their natal family, having to make use of the new unknown to mediate with the old known for the good of both groups. High (2013) describes how some engaging in "ninja" (small-scale and often part-time) gold mining claim the ability to mediate with powerful but dangerous "black" as well as the usual benevolent "white" water spirits (*lus*) that bestow fortune upon herding households but have fled from the mining sites.¹⁸

These analyses, however, have not treated the workings of high Buddhist lamas, khans, *and* communists, with the communists as exceptional from all the others and virtually unanalyzed as "Mongolian" at all. While the violent conflict of shamans and lamas that preceded the suppression of both shamans and lamas by communists has been widely analyzed and described (Bawden 1959, Heissig 1953a, 1953), by framing it in terms of destructive and creative "shamans" and rationally self-reproducing "elders" or "chiefs," Humphrey and Onon (1996), have shown how such violence was not inevitable but only a structural possibility, with the complementary cooperation of lamas and shamans, sometimes with individuals acting as both lama and shaman, often realized in other cases. I seek to do this with "communism" or "socialism" (and its "postsocialist" transformations) which have so far only been analyzed as oppositional against and violent (even in nostalgia) towards all others (Buyandelger 2013, Kaplonski 1999, Pedersen 2011).

In keeping with my interest in following the combination of "shamanic" and "chiefly" authority in single persons, I note Lars Hojer's (2009) discussion of the combination of chiefly Buddhist authority and shamanic bricolage in the person of the "red lama" while comparing this efficacy to that of the communists as well. As my friend Bold (see chapter two) also explained to me when I asked about the

¹⁸For discussion of how while "ninja" mining works in tension with generational orders and pastoralist household-based production while at Erdenet mining is undertaken in terms of these and their cosmologies of benevolent hierarchies of Buddhist bodhisattvas as well as land and water spirits, see chapter two.

difference between Gelugpa Buddhism (*shar shashin* or “yellow religion”) and other forms of Mongolian and Tibetan Buddhism (*ulaan shashin* or “red religion”), these “red lamas” create written charms executed in Tibetan script, often found inside apartments above the entrance door of apartments, including some of those that I have visited and rented, that are “magic” (*idtei*) and exceed the protective properties of the spoken prayers of “yellow lamas” associated with the Dalai Lama’s internationally hierarchical and scholar-governed Gelugpa lineage. Hojer argues that this efficacy is created by same “labor of negation” (citing Taussig) and manipulation of “present absence” that socialist leaders wielded against shamans, lamas, and others recreated as “enemies” (citing Zizek as well as Kaplonski 1999).

Rather than the “labor of the negative” and “creation of enemies” that furthers existing oppositions and categories, however, I emphasize the reordering of categories and their values in creating new kinds of mutually productive relations rather than new ways of extending old conflicts. I turn attention to how elders and chiefs, including the very “yellow lamas,” Party Secretaries, state ministers, and specifically the Parliament members and directors of socialist and postsocialist institutions that are held to have introduced and reproduce rationalization, bureaucracy, certification and “audit culture” (Strathern 2000) associated with the creation of all others as enemies and “the labor of the negative,” also gain legitimacy by wielding shamanic abilities of mediation and creation to organize the economic and political (often also military) groups that they lead. This authority is ideally but not only based on “self-reproducing” patrilineal relations or vertical hierarchies of command described in textual law¹⁹ However, I argue that shamans, clients, lamas, and directors do not just use sometimes separate regimes of value or power to legitimize themselves in

¹⁹Hangartner (2011) describes shamanic associations in the capital that offer courses and certificates, and in 2011 I noted that legislation was introduced in Parliament to combat “fake shamans” who would charge pupils exorbitant fees, extorting them with the fear of falling ill or dying if they did not heed “the call of their ancestral spirits.” Buyandelger (2013) has described the self-reproducibility of shamanic practice in a region of northern Mongolia she frames as particularly economically depressed, defining shamanism as feeding off of and reproducing suffering.

alliance with or opposition to the different, momentarily higher power of the other. The “charisma” gifted to shamans by ancestral (and other) spirits, the ability to engage unknown others in creative ways, is also Durkheim’s (1973) “moral authority” of government administrators and educators as exemplary adult community members, the already internalized precursor and product of “secular” and “modern” as well as “religious” and “primitive” law and education.

Just as elders and chiefs must be bricoleurs carefully discerning how to apply apparently general rules and customs to highly specific situations as well as automatic holders of status (if not automatic legitimacy), shamans are also associated with defined systems of authority and morality that they must navigate and engage skillfully to negotiate problems of legitimacy and social agency that are sometimes the same and at other times distinct from those of other Mongolian persons.

What kind of persons then, are professionals (*mergejilten*) and the directors (*zakhiral*) of corporations, schools and other institutions associated with Mongolian socialism and postsocialism but not other periods of Mongolian history? What are the different groups they must mediate and to what ends? How must they act as “chiefs” or “elders” and how must they act as “shamans?” When are they for the most part goal-oriented “engineers” reproducing old solutions to familiar problems, and when are they engineer-bricoleurs (Levi-Strauss 1966) also meeting the unknown with what is to hand? I argue professionals like engineers have always been expected to combine these, but that postsocialism, as both the disappearance of former institutional structures and resources and the pervasive collective sense that everything has changed but must also remain the same (Oushakine 2000, 2009, Yurchak 2005), constitutes a specific such challenge to Mongolian professionals and directors in meeting their goals, ideals which are evolving but based in those established well before the “Democratic Revolution” in 1990. As Humphrey puts it, shamans rise when the state falls (with Onon 1996).

Dorjsuren, the former head of the Sh. Otgonbileg Institute of Technology (TIS), head of Erdenet Mining Corporation’s Environmental and Worker Safety Department, and advising emeritus head of the Department of Mining, exemplifies successful combination of chiefly and shamanic aspects in legitimate and creative leadership. While exemplifying and espousing the internationalist and professional ideals of the postwar generation of Mongolian socialist leaders, Dorjsuren was able to maneuver within this ideal system and meet its demands to create openings for transformation and creative relations not only with fellow “postsocialist” subjects who expected development both in continuity with and as a break from socialism (for example, continued “social infrastructure” but increased access to international relations and consumer goods), but also with newly accessible international professional others from beyond the former Eastern Bloc.

These others often approach Mongolian professionals as not professionals at all. On the one hand, they may be approached as corrupted “Soviet” versions of true Western professionals with “autonomous” associations, prevented from moral action by force through their lack of autonomy from the inherently immoral state.²⁰ On the other hand, Mongolians are often also conceptualized and encountered as part of a “resource frontier” (Tsing 2005) populated by subsistence-oriented nomads “without history,” outside of the world-system and to be brought into it as workers or other kinds of submissive subjects.²¹ Though Dorjsuren bagsh carried the same ideals of internationalism and professionalism as other Mongolians of his generation, unlike many others he was able to create conditions under which those ideals reproduced as Soviet-style socialism were both “forever” and “no more” (Yurchak 2005) for enterprise employees and students, as well as a framework within which these new international others could recognize and appreciate Mongolians as part of an

²⁰See Graham 1993 and Sanghera et al. 2008.

²¹This perspective is reproduced not only by professionals working for multinational mining corporations approaching diverse locales in a “modular” fashion (Appel 2012) and international journalists but also many ecologists, geographers, and anthropologists.

international community of engineering professionals, as opposed to assuming that Australians or Swiss would automatically recognize professional quality in the same way as Russians or Armenians.

Unlike Dorjsuren bagsh, the school director Purevbat, often referred to simply as *zakhiral* or “The Director,” relied on rules, regulations and his office to command authority. This difference is also exemplified by the international program he took ownership of versus the one that Dorjsuren bagsh helped administer and received credit for. At first glance, Purevbat’s program might seem more impressive and desirable in terms of Mongolian values of professional internationalism.

This program directly linked Erdenet and Oyu Tolgoi, since the mid-1990s one of the world’s largest and most anticipated copper projects under development by Anglo-Canadian mining giant Rio Tinto. But while the Oyu Tolgoi program was celebrated by Purevbat, for example at the school’s New Year celebration, it was not embraced by the university workplace.

Though many desired to work for Oyu Tolgoi, they wished for this as accretion with the international community for the betterment of themselves, families, various local communities, and Mongolia. For those who were already professionals and students at Erdenet it was other kinds of training, especially training abroad, that would make them become more part of the international community of mining professionals that were much sought after and felt to be better provided for by the IAESTE program. The Oyu Tolgoi program, in contrast to IAESTE, framed Mongolians as human components of a “resource frontier,” “without history” (Wolf 1982) to be developed from scratch by multinational mining corporations and others their members recognized as professionals rather than partners in a cooperative process of mutual learning in which foreign professionals might learn from as well as teach Mongolian professionals. Oyu Tolgoi and Rio Tinto themselves never mention their training programs at the Otgonbileg Technical Institute in Erdenet nor the

Technical Institute in Darkhan, describing only the training programs for Mongolians they “have established,” not stating that these are programs contracted out to existing Mongolian institutions created in the socialist period (Batbileg 2013). This lack of acknowledgement is an ultimate form of the predation that accretion risks and that shamans are called upon as specialists to manage or turn into productive exchange.

Director Purevbat was never addressed or referred to as bagsh. Unlike Dorjsuren bagsh, Altantsetseg bagsh and Ganaa bagsh, who directed the non-degree technikum programs such as driving and welding, Purevbat held a PhD, but not a Doctor of Science degree. Ganaa bagsh only received his Doctor of Science in 2012 while I was at the school, followed by a party for faculty and staff at the Selenge Hotel.²² The more bureaucratic bent of his degree-holding compared to the vocational or charismatic legitimacy attributed to Dorjsuren and Altantsetseg was suggested by the use of his short familiar name (Ganaa) rather than full name (as in Purevbat or Altantsetseg).

In Weberian terms, “bureaucracy” is less legitimate than “charisma” when the former is recognized as “routinized charisma.” However, the use of this short form also reflected Ganaa bagsh’s legitimacy as an authority. People both enjoyed themselves around and while talking about Ganaa bagsh and recognized him as someone of wider power in the community. His elder female relative (*egch*) ran a foreign language training program based at the Selenge Hotel that I was engaged to help with, conducting afternoon English practice sessions on the grounds of the Institute of Technology. While Purevbat, on the other hand, was engaged officially and seriously in meetings, I heard members of the school question how he was making and using connections to possibly climb higher in hierarchies of the company and city. He was especially criticized for citing official rules and regulations, and

²²The Selenge has been fully privatized. It is no longer part of the mining corporation officially and around half of the building now houses smaller hotels, restaurants, and the offices of a variety of businesses including the local office of shipping company DHL, a cable TV distributor, and a language school and foreign exchange program directed by Ganaa bagsh’s elder female relative (*egsh*).

especially referring to budget constraints, when teachers requested leave or funds to study English at the Institute of Technology or to train abroad. One day, someone who was having meeting after meeting trying to gain permission from Purevbat to complete a six-week training program abroad that he had been accepted into from among a national pool of applicants told me “don’t tell anyone else, but Purevbat is himself going to Australia next year for graduate school.”

Like shamans, whose unrivaled potential for power makes them suspicious, feared and often considered “weird” as much as respected, directors operate in the context of accusations of corruption, as capable of moving their “clients”’ valuables away to themselves and the outside with which they engage as they are capable of interacting with the outside unknown, whether the unseen dead or foreigners, to generate productive exchange for all.²³

To conclude this chapter, while anthropologists working on critical discourses about governance have often shown how these reveal the imagined and ideal character of “the state,” they also tend to reproduce an opposition between “state” and “society” and index rather than deeply explore the social groupings that produce and reproduce what Durkheim called “moral authority” and Weber identified as “calling” or “vocation.”

Considerations of Soviet and post-Soviet education and professions have especially evoked Weber’s negative ideal types, arguing that Soviet professionalism made professionals “extensions of the state,” rendering them immoral as well as technically inferior in comparison to Western counterparts with “autonomous” professional associations (Graham 1993, Sanghera et al. 2008). However, in his discussion of “Politics as a Vocation” Weber demonstrates the impossibility of “autonomous”

²³I thank Manduhai Buyandelger, who pressed me on my comparison of directors and shamans, for a discussion that made me reconsider how shamans are often considered to be “weird” or “funny” as much as they are feared, and making me recall that this also applies to directors. At one workplace party, for instance, Directors Purevbat and Ganaa bagsh took a series of pictures of me while I was sleeping and showed them to me with giggling delight, while the rest of us did not laugh much about it, at least at the time.

associations by noting how similar problems arise in both systems of dilettantes directing professionals (the ideal Machiavellian diplomat-prince as well as early American gentlemen-democrats) and those with intellectuals directing each other (the Chinese literati and the cabinet of the Weimar Republic). He concludes that both “the ethics of responsibility” for all effects of leadership as well as “the ethics of ultimate ends” are necessary not only for moral leadership, but also for all effective and enduring forms of leadership. As in Durkheim’s definition of morality, Weber’s balance between ultimate and immediate ends is the ability to apply general rules to specific situations.

Chapter 5

International Collaboration: Erdenet in a World of Accretions and Refusals to Accrete

Since the 1970s, transnational mining and oil companies based in the English-speaking world and Western Europe have enacted a business strategy that entails controlling a portfolio of mining projects throughout the so-called decolonized world, particularly in South America (Finn 1998, Nash 1993, Sawyer 2004, Shever 2012, Taussig 1980), Africa (Appel 2012, 2014, Ferguson 1999), Indonesia (Welker 2014), and Papua New Guinea (Biersack 1999, Filer 1999, Golub 2014, Kirsch 2006, 2014). Anna Tsing (Tsing 2005) points out the great attractiveness of this approach among many parties, as it frames these post-colonies as previously untouched “resource frontiers” to be heroically conquered and developed, economically and often morally as well. The model is also a classic example of what David Harvey (1989) has termed a regime of flexible accumulation – as a page from the 2009 annual report of major transnational Rio Tinto demonstrates, single companies are insulated from changes in commodity prices by owning mines producing different minerals, and also avoid involvement in

local social and political contexts by controlling assets throughout the world (Tinto 2009).

After revolution swept through most of the Eastern Bloc in the early 1990s, countries like Mongolia have become major sites of interest for transnational mining companies and associated investors. However, in Mongolia at least, while these companies have bought up exploration and extraction licenses and also begun constructing mining and mineral processing facilities, they have so far encountered great difficulties, including drawn-out battles with the Mongolian government over the responsibilities of mining companies to build infrastructure and the rights of the Mongolian state to control property and draw taxes and royalties. Over the course of my fieldwork, I also encountered discontent with international relationships between Mongolians and “Americans and Canadians” associated with mining. For instance, I was once sleeping on in an open car (Mng. *bagon*; Rus., Mng., etc. *platzkart*) on the train between Erdenet and Ulaanbaatar when I woke up to some of my sixty or so neighbors in the car talking about how cooperation with these countries had been harmful to Mongolia, and Mongolians should turn again to the Germans (see Figure 5.2).¹

For example, the Oyu Tolgoi mine, developed by transnational giant Rio Tinto and smaller Canada-based Turquoise Hill, to exploit what has been touted as the world’s largest known copper deposit, began production in 2013 but reported full production only in 2014. The planned extension of the mine into an underground phase has been halted, despite funding from the World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the Australian government. Rio Tinto, the major transnational mining house developing the Oyu Tolgoi mine, lost this funding

¹For reasons I describe in chapter four, my speaking Russian and Mongolian, let alone my riding in the open car (*bagonaar*), put me outside of the usual “American” category and I did not have much to fear from these gentlemen.



Figure 5.1: A campaign banner of a minor party for the 2012 Parliamentary elections hung in Erdenet. The banner states “Save our country and people” and lists, as well as graphically illustrates, the number of mining licenses held by foreign mining companies.

last October, over 4.2 billion dollars, when it decided to not proceed without settling disputes with the Mongolian government.

In this chapter I explore some of the different kinds of relations and systems of value underlying this conflict, while focusing on the successful collaborations of Mongolians with new Western counterparts. With the rich ores of unmined deposits available to industry-leading corporations, research into the processing of low-grade ores, like those now beginning to predominate in Erdenet’s excavations, has been sidelined by many Anglo miners. Erdenet miners and metallurgists however have become participants in this kind of research, collaborating with miners and metallurgists from around the world also interested in developing processing techniques for low-grade

ores, as well as the recycling of electronic waste (e-waste), often with both economic and environmental concerns in mind.

The interests and associated systems of value here vary but also both in many ways intrinsically value and ultimately rely on this difference. Involved Erdenet miners also hope it will benefit their local mine, which may then continue to be a focus for the city of Erdenet, while Western miners associated with small companies as well as global majors, look to perfect technology funded by the Erdenet enterprise as “pilot plants” and envision selling the methods to major global companies. Also crucial, however, is the place of Erdenet and Erdenet miners vis-a-vis Mongolia and the world. Research on new metallurgical techniques is a major site by which to collaboratively create, access, or control value, both gaining value from others and making Erdenet and Erdenet miner’s value valuable to others. New forms of value are also created in this process, though only when both parties agree to involve themselves in the other’s distinct forms of relation and kinds of value.

This chapter also discusses how some professional counterparts from beyond Mongolia, at their peril and the peril of their valuables, have been unable to positively evaluate, and even acknowledge the existence, of their colleagues at Erdenet. I attend to the distinctive systems of value that these Western counterparts involve in their internationalism and as scientists and technologists, the “implicit meanings” (Douglas 1999) that are in many ways particular to their professional groups and that they have difficulty expressing to Mongolian counterparts, and that also make it difficult for them to evaluate Mongolians’ systems of value and implicit meanings. I then further examine how this relates to strained relationships between Western miners and Mongolian counterparts in Mongolia, which have halted processes of value creation and threaten to reverse them, turning these relationships into predatory and violent ones.

Collapse and Transition as Development and Expansion

In the early spring of 2012, a group of Finnish professors and a representative from a major metallurgical company visited TIS. The visit was highly anticipated and there had been talk of it for several weeks. When we entered the lab space I noticed immediately that everything had been cleaned.

I was on my guard as well. When the Finns opened up a new, American-made ore crusher, one of them immediately said with surprise, “it’s clean?” Not wanting them to assume that it was never used, I interjected, “Hah, it was dirty last week, I saw it!” One member of the lab particularly eager to make an impression on the Finns² added, “It needs to be cleaned after each use, like it says in the manual.” We were anxious that the visitors approach Erdenet counterparts in a spirit of professional collegiality.

Like other visitors to Erdenet, the Finnish visitors were surprised by my presence even though they assumed that I was also a metallurgical engineer. Matti asked me more questions than most, including but beyond such questions as “Do you speak Mongolian?” “Do you like it here?” His other questions and comments continued to make me feel defensive. Matti said that they had been in Darkhan which “seemed mostly shut down.” He was convinced that Oyu Tolgoi would begin production that summer, and seemed, unlike myself and Serik, to think it feasible that its copper concentrates could be shipped out by truck rather than by rail.³ When we visited the electronics classroom, which had been carefully remodeled the previous summer by an electrical engineer and teacher I had conversed with during his work on the classroom, Matti laughed about the portraits of Joule and other scientists of the

²Apparently she had known before their arrival that the Finns’ visit was also associated with an agreement between the Finnish and Mongolian governments to train Mongolians in Finland; the President of Finland had made an official visit to Mongolia the previous September following the Mongolian president’s visit to Finland in 2010.

³As of January 2015, Oyu Tolgoi has reported, for the first year, production figures similar to Erdenet’s, while actual sales figures are unclear. Oyu Tolgoi is still not connected to rail.

Industrial Revolution and Enlightenment on the wall. When we got to the Caterpillar simulators that had recently been donated by Oyu Tolgoi, however, Matti effusively praised them. Meanwhile, I felt that I had to reassure the other members of the lab that Matti had also complimented the other equipment in the lab, saying in Russian to the coworker nearest to me that Matti had said our stuff was better than what they had in Darkhan. Before the group left the school, Matti asked me about the relationship of the school and mine, replying “yes, we too have cooperation between industry and universities!”

Matti, like other Western mining professionals coming to Mongolia, was clearly frustrated and perplexed by the country, and openly admitted it. He told me he had lived and worked in China for years, and found Mongolia to be completely different, before asking me directly, apparently as an anthropologist, what I thought about Mongolians and environmentalism. I answered that people had told me they were genuinely concerned about angering the Buddha himself; that was why they told me the corporation was building the monumental new Buddha taking shape on the edge of town. Though I was quick to note that this did not stop people from mining (and now at least I would say it is also often productive in and of mining activity), Matti countered my answer with a comment of “Well, some of us have to make money!” Matti was confused and asking me for insight, though he was also unwilling to listen, and more particularly, to acknowledge, let alone involve himself in, the value of Mongolians and their particular values and relations as much as the supposedly socially unmoored, free market-determined value of natural resources such as copper. He was also consistently distinguishing himself from me while not acknowledging my membership in the workplace and *nutag* he was visiting.

I find it understandable that Matti was confused and I will proceed by explaining Mongolia’s unique mining industry as I might to Matti. In this process I also elaborate Matti and other Western miners’ understandings about international mining and

metallurgy. Mongolians' engagement in mining and metallurgy does not easily fit into the "developing" or "East Asian/Pacific" categories that Western miners as well as development agents often place it in. Mongolians have both a history of direct involvement in all aspects of mineral production, and a wealth of international connections, though many Western counterparts view Mongolians' involvement in the mineral industry before the Revolution of 1990 as either non-existent or as marginal to the role of Russians, who are, also wrongly, believed to have abandoned the country after the Revolution.

Mongolians have a history of involvement in international mineral production that is both more recent than that of many Europeans but not as short as that of the Papua New Guineans and Africans with whom Western miners often compare them (and in some cases Africans and Papua New Guineans have been involved in mining as long or longer than Mongolians, as I discuss below). Already in a 1909 travelogue of Buryatia, the region of Siberia just north of the border between Qing-controlled Outer Mongolia and the Russian Empire,⁴ In this account Jeremiah Curtin (1909) observed that "though the country west of the mountains was great in extent, the country to the east was enormously greater. It was also richer in furs of a high quality, and had besides the master metals." The mountains Curtin referred to were the Urals, and the metals to the east were not extracted industrially until the 1970s, while many deposits remain known but unexcavated (an apparent successor to Erdenet, Udokan, lies to the northeast of Mongolia). The industrial development of Russia, and Mongolia, in general, east of the Urals also did not begin in earnest until the 1970s. By this time the large deposits of European Russia and the Urals had been in production for some time, and many of them were beginning to be depleted.⁵ The

⁴The territory of modern-day Mongolia was brought under Manchu "suzerainty" in the Eighteenth Century. While "Inner Mongolia," today an Autonomous Province of the People's Republic of China, was open to Chinese settlement, access to "Outer Mongolia" was tightly controlled and mostly limited to certain trading companies.

⁵Many of these regions retain a great deal of importance in the minerals industry, though in some cases their role is no longer as major producers of ore but rather as metallurgical complexes

drive East was also fueled by developments in Soviet economic policy in the Brezhnev and Gorbachev eras, however.

In Siberia and Mongolia, expanded mineral production occurred in the context of longer processes of industrialization aimed at transforming national and class structures. In the context of this drive to expand mining and metallurgy, Mongolia's population made the great shift from rural to urban, its economy from pastoral to industrial – the Tsedenbal years, which coincided with Brezhnev's term of power in the Soviet Union, and the building up of industry and infrastructure, such as the Baikal-Amur Mainline project, in Siberia and the Far East (see Ward 2009). Before the 1960s, the only major extractive operation in Mongolia was the coal deposit Nalaikh, developed earlier to fuel Ulaanbaatar. The 1950s saw the development of crop agriculture (coinciding with the Virgin Lands initiative in the Soviet Union), and completion of the railway between Ulaanbaatar and Ulan-Ude. Darkhan was built in 1961, and conceived in part as a center for the production of construction materials from local minerals deposits. The project was to include a steel mill when Chinese aid was still a component of the plan before the Sino-Soviet Split (2004:157). Darkhan also became a center of light industry, including a coat factory still producing today. The strip mining operations at Sharin Gol were initiated in 1964 to help power Darkhan. The 1966 treaty between Mongolia and the Soviet Union promised aid that would amount to forty percent of the MPR's investment capital (Atwood 2004:516) and from (1976-1980), the amount of aid from the Soviet Union was double that of the previous joint Five Year Plan (Heaton 1979:60). In 1976, work began on both Erdenet and the Baga Nuur coal deposits (near Ulaanbaatar). "During Tsedenbal's October 1976 visit to the USSR, Brezhnev said construction of the Erdenet combine absorbs as much money in one year as the whole of Darhan [sic] city used to in five" (Sanders 1977:32). With Baga Nuur, Mongolian coal production increased from

producing steel and other metals. Like Erdenet, they also still host centers of higher education for training miners and metallurgists.

around 2 million to 7 million metric tons annually, which fueled not only Erdenet but the growing demand of Ulaanbaatar. In 1978, half of the Mongolian population lived in towns and urban areas versus only a quarter in 1956 (Rossabi 2005:32).⁶

The USSR's Five Year Plan of 1976-1980 foreshadowed trends that gained momentum under Gorbachev, and "indicate[d] the need for implementing measures directed toward greater participation by the USSR in the international division of labor and to increasing the role of external economic ties for resolving problems confronting the national economy and for speeding up scientific and technological progress" (Slavinsky 1977:311). As outlined by Ziegler (1991), Gorbachev extended policy of this type further (during the Brezhnev era increases in efficiency and an increase of international ties were sought, although domestic firms were to be protected). The landmark Vladivostok speech of July 1986 outlined new objectives for Siberia and the Far East: increase exploitation of raw materials, and sustainable power (coal as well as some hydroelectric) yet expand the economy to manufacturing and increase the population and standard of living. The idea was to expand the export base, to increase ties with the Asian Tigers (by the late 1980s, Japan's absolute gross national product had passed the Soviet Union's). Great emphasis was placed on developing international joint ventures; many were developed with Japan (in Mongolia, the still important Gobi Cashmere company was established as a joint Mongolian-Japanese enterprise). Ties with China, also were rapidly increasing.

Thus, though beginning at around the same time, large-scale mineral extraction in Mongolia was quite different from that in Papua New Guinea (Filer 1999, Golub 2014) and Indonesia (Welker 2014). It bears some resemblance to earlier large-scale extraction in British controlled colonies in sub-Saharan Africa, where large mines

⁶The population of Ulaanbaatar itself has expanded from around five hundred thousand at the end of the socialist period to over one million today. Much of this migration has been from regional towns, where jobs disappeared and infrastructure collapsed. See Pedersen 2011 and Buyandelger 2013 for ethnographic accounts of such rural centers and internal migration associated with them in the late 1990s.

were foundational structures for the control of space and the populace, while fueling “expectations of modernity” (Ferguson 1999). As Robert Rupen (1979) pointed out in his discussion of Erdenet as it was still under construction, Erdenet was a strategic project, further securing north-central Mongolia, where agricultural, railroads, and other urban development had been concentrated since after the Second World War, the “Baikal corridor” through which the Chinese would invade Siberia if they were to invade. As much as it was a project of controlling space, however, Erdenet also furthered social ties, relationships of and for value, between Mongolians and Soviets, training and employing not only Mongolian industrial workers and mining engineers, but also teachers, artists, doctors, nurses, and accountants, centralizing them in urban spaces where they could “take part in cultural life” at Houses of Culture and Sport (Mng. *soeliin ordon* and *sportiin ordon*, Rus. *dom kultura* and *sport zal*). This includes deep senses of national value, and how international partners should be involved in that value, that differ markedly from approaches taken by some Western partners.

Some of these Western partners view the Mongolian situation as one of desperation, and I have known disappointed expats to decry Mongolians as “arrogant” and “ungrateful.” It is true that ties with Russia began unraveling in the late 1980s. In 1990, all Soviet aid to Mongolia stopped as the country began an attempted transition to democracy and capitalism. Soviet politicians claimed the Soviet Union’s program of foreign aid had become too expensive, and policy turned to concentrate on wide-sweeping domestic reforms. In July 1990 Gorbachev said that “without a new foreign policy we would not have been in any condition to change our own country” (Light 1991:266). A figure of debt owed to the USSR was finally stated in that year: 85 trillion rubles. By this accounting Mongolia was second only to Cuba in degree of indebtedness to the Soviet Union, and arguably, its successor the Russian Federation (Light 1991:273).

However, until about 1997 (the year of famously foreign investment-friendly minerals law amendments that have since been overturned) all of Mongolia's mining had been done predominantly by Russian-Mongolian joint enterprises. The large projects of the 1960s and 70s were planned as part of the economy of the Committee for Mutual Economic Aid (CMEA or COMECON) countries – Eastern Europe, the USSR and Mongolia. With the collapse of this organization and drastic decreases in demand from the former member countries, the creations of this period, Erdenet and Mongolrostsvet (which still controls fluor spar production Mongolia, the world's third country in terms of production volume), have also had to seek markets elsewhere, but continued as Russian-Mongolian joint corporations. As Erdenet miners framed it, however, this was a positive development – further international relationships, continuing relationships forged within the Eastern Bloc but also moving beyond them. These enterprises have continued to have a very large share of the Mongolian mining industry up to today.

Russian-Mongolian relations have gone closer and developed in some new directions in recent years as well. Until 2004, Russian-Mongolian relations remained tense, but in that year, Vladimir Putin, who had been moving towards more extensive relations between the two countries, made the first visit to Mongolia by a Russian or Soviet leader since Brezhnev in 1974 and “forgave” ninety-eight percent of the debt that Russia spent most of the the 1990s and first years of the Twenty-First Century demanding.

According the the United States Geological Survey, in 1994 Russia imported only 612 tons of molybdenum concentrate from Erdenet, of a total of 2,800 tons produced, compared to the over 1,000 tons that were received annually during the 1980s (Levine 1995:733). In 1996 Erdenet was one of the partners in a project with the Karabash smelting complex to smelt Erdenet's copper, but the agreement reportedly fell through when local *oblast* (provincial) authorities, who had supported the project, issued a

special decree giving Karabash five years to deal with its environmental problems, which were considerable (Levine 1997:5). Perhaps the most negative of Erdenet's experiences with CIS countries in the nineties were the results of its 1996 sale of copper concentrate to the Balkash smelter in Kazakhstan. According to the United States Geological Survey, the company declared bankruptcy soon after, resulting in nonpayment of 10,800 tons of refined copper worth between twelve and twenty-seven million dollars (Levine 1997:2).⁷ The USGS Minerals Yearbook for 1998 reported that this caused "substantial financial difficulties," and a twenty million dollar credit from Credit Lyonnais of France was secured (Wu 1999) Wu 1999.

However, these conditions were addressed by expanding international ties beyond the realm of finance, and the Erdenet Mining Corporation has also undertaken major administrative and technological overhauls and established new relations as a seller of concentrates. Foreign ties, both through sales of concentrate and cathode and in the purchase of new equipment and the establishment of joint ventures has been broad and long-term, involving not only Russia but Japan, China, the US, Finland, Israel, Switzerland, and Germany. I focus here on technological upgrades and research into new technologies. At the same time, the Russian mining and mineral processing industry (since 2010, several new Russian copper mines and processing plants producing both concentrates and refined copper, have been opened and more are reportedly planned (Safirova 2012, 2013, 2015)) and wider ties between Russia and Mongolia, are resurgent. Putin visited again in September 2014 amidst international controversy over Russian action towards Ukraine, following Medvedev's visit in 2009. In February 2015 the Speaker of the Duma, Naryshin, visited Mongolia.

⁷According to Alexander Diener (2009) Diener 2009 an agreement was later made between the Kazakh and Mongolian governments to repay the debt in zinc.

Localizing Transnational Mining

Matti understood and approved of Mongolian counterparts, and myself, where their ways and priorities matched those like his own. He was also insistent about the value of Finnish copper refining technology. I will further describe here how Matti's Mongolian counterparts in Erdenet were particularly interested in the refining technologies that his company offered, but these very interests, and their particular notions of "sustainability," for instance, also made the actual purchase of these technologies from the company unlikely.

Erdenet is what is called a porphyry copper deposit, meaning that it is a large deposit of copper in a large crystallized magma formation or "intrusion," which also contains less extensive deposits of another metal. The copper and other metals are deposited as sulfide compounds in the intrusion by hydrothermal solution, from which the minerals precipitate out in veins and dissipations.

In Erdenet's case the second metal is molybdenum, though other porphyry copper deposits are associated with gold and silver (Oyu Tolgoi, for example, currently the most well-known mineral prospect in Mongolia, is a copper-gold deposit with some silver as well). Erdenet's ore contains over twenty other elements and has an especially high content of silver, selenium and rhenium (Erdenet Mining Corporation 1998:18). Erdenet is among the largest deposits in the world, though the largest examples are found in Chile and North America. Porphyry deposits of molybdenum (as the main metal with copper as the secondary metal) and tin also occur in other parts of the world. Because these deposits are so large in size, open pit mining is by far the preferred method for extraction (although Oyu Tolgoi is so extensive that underground mining had also been planned and funded as "Phase II").

Copper is processed from two main kinds of ore compounds, sulfides and oxides (see Figure 5.2). Most of the ore removed in the world today is sulfide, as is Erdenet's. There are also two methods of processing copper. The first and most familiar way



Figure 5.2: Oxide and sulfide ores.

is pyrometallurgy, more widely known as smelting. In the second, hydrometallurgy, an electrolytic process that produces mostly “cathode,” pure copper is collected from solution on metal plates, resulting in sheets that may be easily made into wires, cables, and other components conducting electricity.

Smelting is mostly associated with concentrate made from sulfide ores. After the ore (composed of copper sulfide and a variety of other compounds) is crushed and ground in mills (this increases surface area for more effective chemical reactions) and then put through the froth flotation process, or more rarely, bacterial oxidization (which researchers at Erdenet were working on). The powdered ore is mixed with “collector chemicals” and put in a water bath (aeration) tank containing surfactant. Air is forced through and the copper sulfides rise via air bubbles to the top of the tank, where the “froth” it forms is skimmed off. The process is continued at least once again, until the product (concentrate) is twenty to forty percent copper. The remaining material is processed to reclaim other minerals or discarded (or in Erdenet’s case, stored) as tailings. Lime is added sometimes (as at Erdenet) to raise the pH so the collector chemical will ionize more to bond to chalcopyrite (a copper-iron-sulfide compound that supplies the source material of most of the world’s refined

copper) rather than pyrite (iron sulfide). Molybdenum sulfide (found alongside copper sulfide at Erdenet) is processed into concentrate using a similar method of milling and flotation. Sometimes the resulting concentrate is afterwards leached to remove impurities such as lead and copper. The next step is then “roasting,” which removes sulfur and creates an oxide.

Strong growth of electrowinning technology, a hydrometallurgical technique replacing pyrometallurgy or smelting, occurred worldwide throughout the 1990s and early 21st century. In the United States, smelters processed 1,313,000 short tons of primary (from concentrate) copper in 1985, increasing until 1998 to around 2000, and then quickly declined. In 2012 only 535,000 short tons of copper were produced by smelters (Copper Development Association Inc. 2013:6). Since 2001 no scrap has been processed by smelter. Electrowinning provided only 100,000 short tons to mills and other manufacturers in 1985, but this number reached around 500,000 in 1991, steadily increasing through the 1990s to reach over 650,000. In 2005 the figure was 612,000 short tons (Copper Development Association Inc. 2013:6, 8). The use of pyrometallurgical techniques has resisted further encroachment of hydrometallurgical techniques since the mid-2000s however.

Hydrometallurgical methods are in many ways preferable in economic terms and as having a lower environmental impact. With a SX-EW (“solvent extraction and electrowinning”) plant, a finished marketable product can be produced at the mine site. In the case of many older and centrally-planned mines, it is also an ideal response to decreasing qualities of ore and a way to profit from piles of so-called “waste rock” – as I describe in chapter two, in Erdenet these piles are *ovoo* heaps created in the process of accessing *erdene* valuables. Smelters are often far from the mine site, and the problems of finding a market for concentrate and funding transport have plagued many Soviet-built mines. In the case of Erdenet, concentrate is or has been sold to Russia (where much of it is processed in the Urals), China, Japan, the United States,

Germany, Switzerland, South Korea, and Kazakhstan. Environmentally speaking, most smelters, those in the Urals and throughout China, for example, are powered by coal and are major sources of sulfide emissions.

Building a smelter in Mongolia has been controversial, not only because of where to build the smelter vis-a-vis the location of Erdenet and future copper mines (for example, whether or not to wait and see how Gobi copper deposits such as Oyu Tolgoi will be developed and then to build a smelter an optimal distance from both these and Erdenet) but also because of the air pollution involved with smelting. Erdenet employees repeatedly pointed out to me that a smelter in or near Erdenet would also be too near Lake Khuvsgul, which many in and beyond Mongolia regard as the worlds' most pristine large mountain lake. They told me that in the 1980s, Lake Khuvsgul was the center of an environmental movement protesting the extraction of phosphates near the lake in socialist Mongolia at the same time Lake Baikal to the northeast became the focus of similar protests against the creation of a series of pulp mills on its shores (see Weiner 1999).

However, at least since the Democratic Revolution of 1990, when most ties with the Soviet Union and Russia were almost completely severed for over a decade, Mongolians have sought to build an industrial complex that would produce pure copper, which might then even further be made into electronics within the country, capturing "added-value" that was currently considered lost (or stolen). The majority of copper leaves Mongolia as more of a "raw material," in form of concentrates, a grey powder containing up to forty percent copper, and a range of other valuable metals, whose "added-value" as pure metals and electronic components are also considered "lost," kinds of *erdene* that have not been accessed.

Most of Erdenet's product is in the form of concentrate as well. However, a small processing plant and factories producing small electronics like outlet extensions has indeed been in operation at Erdenet since the early 1990s, a joint Mongolian-American



Figure 5.3: The Erdmin SX-EW plant, producing pure copper from what has long been conventionally understood by some miners and metallurgists as “waste rock” (Erdmin n.d.) Erdmin Co., Ltd. N.d.

company, Erdmin (the founding of which is discussed in chapter four) (see Figure 5.3, 5.4, 5.5). This company, crucially, is firmly attached to Erdenet; other proposals for refineries have been backed by the Mongolian state and proposed they be built far away from Erdenet, one of few potential sources of funding, not to mention raw material to process, for such a large project. The benefit however would be for the Mongolian state and Mongolian nation – new mines such as Oyu Tolgoi, developed in the Gobi Desert a thousand kilometers away from Erdenet, could also theoretically send their ore concentrates to a central location on the Trans-Mongolian Railroad (Erdenet is connected to the Trans-Mongolian, and many intend for Oyu Tolgoi to be connected by rail, though the way this will be accomplished has been a major bottleneck in negotiations between Russian as well as Mongolian and international mining company stakeholders).

Thus, though interested in the technologies offered by Matti’s company, which have the local benefit of producing little air pollution⁸ Erdenet metallurgists were

⁸In these so-called “hydrometallurgical” processes, sulfuric acid remains in a liquid form, which could be contained or removed from the area, if not chemically neutralized, a process that Erdenet metallurgists have also been researching. “Pyrometallurgy,” more commonly known as smelting, is the more widely known method that results in gaseous sulfuric acid and is highly polluting. It is mainly China (where many ore concentrates, including those from the United States as well as Erdenet are further processed) that continues to use this process at a large scale.

ажиллагаандаа нэвтрүүлсэн.

КАТОДЫН ЗЭС

Манай компанийн үйлдвэрлэж буй катодын цэвэр зэс нь Лондонгийн металлын биржийн "А" зэрэглэлийн шаардлага хангадаг бөгөөд 99,999%-ийн сорьцтой байдаг.
Standard: MNS 4501:1997 and BS EN 1978:1998

COPPER CATHODE

Quality copper cathode 99.999% copper, as shown in the London Metal Exchange specification "A".



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ERDENET CITY
MONGOLIA

CERTIFICATE OF ANALYSIS

DATE	01 st NOVEMBER 2002
OUR REF	A45656 W42465
CLIENT REF	LOT 06/2002
MATERIAL	ERDMIN COPPER CATHODES
SAMPLING DATE	03/10/2002
SHIPMENT WEIGHT	200.986 MT

We have analysed the above sample and would report as below:

COPPER	(Cu)% By Difference	99.9996
SILVER	(Ag)%	Trace
ARSENIC	(As)%	Trace
BISMUTH	(Bi)%	Trace
CADMIUM	(Cd)%	Trace
COBALT	(Co)%	Trace
CHROMIUM	(Cr)%	Trace
IRON	(Fe)%	0.0002
MANGANESE	(Mn)%	Trace
NICKEL	(Ni)%	Trace
PHOSPHORUS	(P)%	Trace
LEAD	(Pb)%	0.0001
SULPHUR	(S)%	0.0001
ANTIMONY	(Sb)%	Trace
SELENIUM	(Se)%	Trace

ЗЭС ТАТАНГИ

Өөрийн үйлдвэрлэсэн катодын цэвэр зэсээ хайлуулж, цувин 8мм-ийн голчтой зэс татанги үйлдвэрлэдэг бөгөөд жилд 2000 тн зэс хайлуулж цувих хүчин чадалтай.

COPPER ROD

Capacity of 8mm copper rod production 2000 tons per year.

Standard: MNS 4738:2005;
IEC 60228



Figure 5.4: Copper cathode and cable manufactured at Erdmin in Erdenet (Erdmin n.d.) Erdmin Co., Ltd. N.d.



Figure 5.5: Outlet extension manufactured by Erdmin in Erdenet, “Made in Mongolia of Mongolian Copper” (Erdmin n.d.) Erdmin Co., Ltd. N.d.

actively pursuing other kinds of technology that would be cheaper, and importantly, simpler and even easier to control from home. The international relation involved is that of “calling” others to Erdenet for the benefit of Erdenet, to put it in the terms of old Buddhist texts to be read at *ovoo* ceremonies (see chapter two).

The main technology that Mongolian researchers I worked with were pursuing is called “heap leaching” and it is this technique that turns the heaps of so-called “waste rock” into value-producing *ovoo*. In this process, piles of ore-bearing rock are watered with solutions containing acid, and in a variation of particular interest at Erdenet, bacteria. Significantly, when I first visited the research laboratory, I was told that the bacteria being researched were “Mongolian,” taken from Mongolian hot springs and grown in repurposed Hungarian-made medical equipment sterilizers. Heap-leaching techniques at Erdenet, however, were also the product of joint research with metallurgists from other countries, as the corporation proudly announces whenever possible, on its website, prospectuses, and in regular corporation conferences with published proceedings, at which papers are also presented by foreign metallurgists, for example from the southwestern United States and Chile, centers of copper production via heap leaching.

When I first spent a few weeks in Erdenet in 2007 to conduct an “independent study project” for the School of International Training’s undergraduate study abroad program, Erdenet employees in part began our relationship by lending me copies of such conference (Mng. *baga khural*, Rus. *soveshchanie*) proceedings. Members of my workgroup at TIS also immediately lent me such proceedings to read, and doing so helped me to understand interactions with international partners that I witnessed and became involved in later during my time in Erdenet.

These conference proceedings (here I discuss Erdenet Mining Corporation 1998, and Erdenet Mining Corporation 2004b) reveal the selective ways that Erdenet miners, metallurgists, and managers have used technologies from without, adapting

and developing them in terms of their own values. As I explain, these often differ significantly from the technologies and methods highly valued by most Western miners seeking to do business with Mongolians.

In 1994 the Erdenet Mining Corporation embarked on the ten-year plan “*Kontseptsia Razvitia Sovmestnoi Predpriatii Erdeneta*” (Conception of Development of the Joint-Venture Erdenet). The major, final stated goal was to protect profits. The challenges were twofold: address the declining quality of ore (see Figure 5.6) and improve the “physically and morally deteriorating equipment” (Sataev and Bazar 1998, 12) Bazar et al. 1998. The first problem is one still being faced by the large porphyry deposits worldwide, though many began upgrading their technology earlier than Erdenet. Specifically, at the time these technological upgrades were to address this problem by increasing the amount of ore extracted and processed (with fewer, more efficient transport vehicles – for example larger dumptrucks from companies such as Komatsu rather than the Belarussian BelAz – and processing machinery) and to automate and computerize operations.

These were a temporary measure, but still carefully considered to maximize values particular to Erdenet. Ulzii, who had worked as a mechanical engineer for the Auto-Transport Section, once took me on a visit there. One of the mechanics there showed me around the garage, proudly pointing out a Kamatsu dumptruck, the largest model of its kind. In the taxi on the way back to the city, however, Ulzii described to me the decisions he and his colleagues had made about what company’s models of heavy mobile equipment to purchase in the 1990s. Liebherr was a good compromise between expense on the one hand and workers’ safety and comfort on the other in the case of drilling rigs. Caterpillars and Komatsus turned out to be too hard to maintain and most of the dumptrucks were again BelAz, still manufactured in Belarus, with smaller capacities (also aligning with the planned timing-out of the strategy to simply increase volumes of material processed in dealing with declining ore grades). Also from the

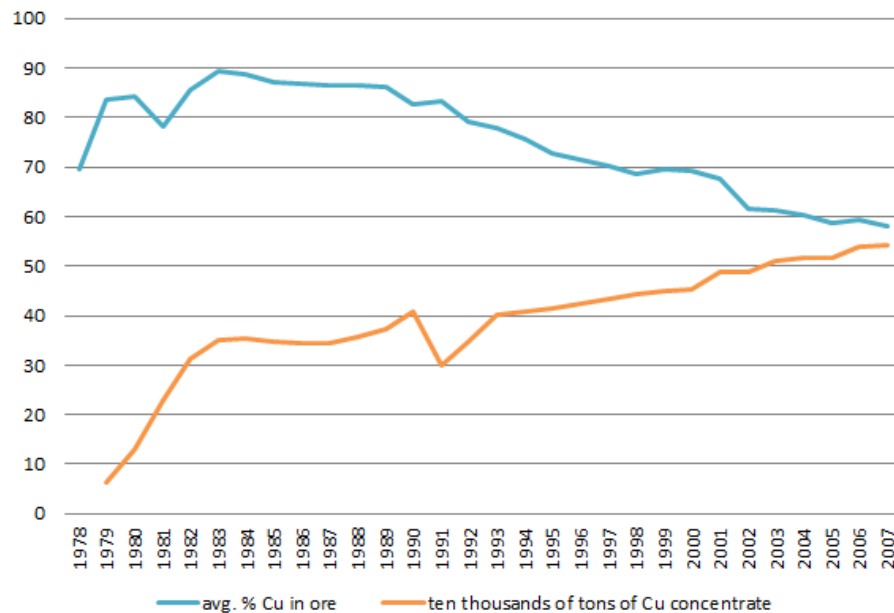


Figure 5.6: Between 1990 and 2007, Erdenet increased production to deal with declining copper content in ore. (Data from Erdenet 2007 Erdenet Mining Corporation 2007)

former Soviet Union, in 2009 a new line of Russian flotation machines were installed (Bataa 2011b).

Erdenet has also continued to work with partners from beyond the Eastern Bloc in other realms to add entire new processing technologies and factories to the mining enterprise. At the “First Conference of Financial, Economic and Bookkeeping Employees of the Joint-Venture Erdenet” [Pervoe Covershenoiu Finansoviih, Ekonomicheskikh i Bukhgalterskikh Rabotnikov Predpriatia “Erdenet”] (Erdenet Mining Corporation 2004a) L. Munkhtogtokh (head of the Department of Development) mentioned a plan for the period 2005-2025, which had been decided on by Erdenet’s governing Board (*Soviet*) and General Director. The main goals included construction of an Outokumpu HydroCopper plant and facilities to reclaim acids, construction of a plant to further process molybdenum concentrate, the remodeling of the coal-burning *teplostants*, and an assessment of the open-pit mine with according changes

in methods. He pointed out that although the copper prices were currently high, they would level out – an average of 1,973 dollars for the coming twenty years. The strategy offered was to now process the ore with the least amount of copper, using hydrometallurgical techniques, which “cost less, have a lower impact on the environment, and resulted in a higher-quality product.”

At least as early as 1998 new ways of producing refined copper and molybdenum products were being investigated and seen as the next step in the company’s development, though the plan was to continue producing mostly concentrate until 2004. Thus, improving technology was the focus of Erdenet throughout the 1990s, and it involved buying from and working with Japanese, American, Finnish, and Chinese firms.

The move towards hydrometallurgical processing began in 1994 with the establishment of Erdmin, a joint Mongolian-American enterprise to build a SX-EW (solvent extraction and electrowinning) plant to process waste rock piles, which in 1998 were estimated to be sufficient to provide for the first plant and a second for eighty years. According to the United States Geological Survey, the first plant, financed by the Marubeni Corporation of Japan, was modest with a capacity of 3,000 tons per year and faced several set backs (production saw a thirty-four percent decrease in 1999 from the previous year, and cost of production had increased) (Wu 1999:15.2). A proposed Outokumpu plant would have a significantly larger capacity of 35,000 tons (Tse 2003:71.1). In 2004 the joint enterprise Shim Technology was created with Metal-tech of Israel.

An agreement was signed between Samsung and Erdenet to build a new plant to use Outokumpu’s new HydroCopper technology in 2003. The HydroCopper technology was called truly cutting edge, perhaps too cutting-edge. Although the authors of a more recent *Mining Magazine* article regarded HydroCopper as one of the more promising new hydrometallurgical processes (Mining Magazine 2006)

they also pointed out the mixed success of hydrometallurgy in general (other than the well-established SX-EW, which by 2006 accounted for a quarter of the world's finished copper (52)), and that the new Outotec technology was only one of many contenders in the race to viably process sulfide concentrates hydrometallurgically, and that HydroCopper is probably the most innovative.

The advantages compared to the Erdmin SX-EW plant at that time mentioned were that the process produces powder that can be cast into wire, rods, or billets rather than the sheets of cathode, making it possible to sell directly to cable factories, for instance. Since, however, Erdmin has also begun producing not only copper cables but small finished consumer electronics such as outlet extensions. Erdmin, however, processes "waste rock" while the HydroCopper plant would also be a way of processing concentrate on site. Compared to other concentrate-leaching methods, the power used is thirty percent less (Peacey et al. 2004:13,16). If the factory were built, Erdenet would have been the site of the world's first full-scale HydroCopper plant. According to the United States Geological Survey, the proposed plant was small (35,000 t/y, the low end of the technology's capacity range of 30,000 to 200,000 t/y), and when the Erdenet ore was tested at Outokumpu's pilot plant in Finland, copper content in the powder was higher than the London Metal Exchange's grade A purity (Tse 2003:18.2).

However, a plant built by Outotec would require Erdenet to enter into a relationship of dependency vis-a-vis Finnish partners, rather than bringing Finnish value to better Erdenet and improve its self-reliance and capability to maintain and form other international relationships. This kind of international relationship is exemplified by another international interaction that I took part in while in Erdenet. A few months after the visit by the Finnish delegation, our laboratory hosted Andrew, an Australian professor of metallurgy who edited an esteemed journal in the field of hydrometallurgy but also did consulting work for major transnational

mining corporations, including those involved with the Oyu Tolgoi mine. Andrew's visit however contrasted sharply with that of Matti.

Like the Finnish professors, Andrew gave a scientific talk in the university lecture hall that was well attended by professors and students in mining and other departments. His talk was on a subject of somewhat peripheral interest, gold processing, but he was engaging and fielded questions that revealed both the interest of Erdenet miners in forging global relationships that were Erdenet-centered and Andrew's willingness to participate in such relationships. While the Finnish professors' presentations had been about the results of laboratory tests and proprietary equipment that were far beyond the capabilities of labs that could feasibly be set up at Erdenet, Andrew's talk was built around fundamental science yet was also attentive to how the different properties of any orebody, and questions of "feasibility" and legality, affected metallurgical research and practice as well as problems of environmental impacts and worker safety ("There is no alternative to cyanide, until cyanide is banned. Which is improbable.")

In his presentation, Andrew had mentioned the use of coconut husks and shells as sources of carbon in aiding cementation reactions. When I asked him, "do they use coconuts everywhere?" Andrew grasped my intent immediately, and answered, "yes, pretty much, though people have tried all kinds of things, grape vines in Australia. When I gave this talk in Ulaanbaatar, a woman came up to me and asked, because she had been buying carbon from China, but it's false economy." When I asked if dried horse droppings, like Mongolians use as a major fuel source, might work, Andrew didn't wonder at all at the logic behind my question. When my friend, the head of the research laboratory asked what a Canadian-owned and -operated gold mine near Erdenet used, Andrew knew and answered, right away, "coconuts."

The next day, I joined the group giving Andrew a tour of the mineral processing plant of Erdenet, where ore from the open-pit is crushed and put through a chemical

process known as flotation that requires few materials other than lime mined nearby by an enterprise built by the Soviet Union to provide the material for Erdenet (Khutul, also described in chapter four). After the tour, Andrew told me he was surprised to find so many older women working at the plant, “grannies” as he called them, and also a general lack of the “unsafe macho culture” often associated with mines in Australia. When we met with the director in charge of worker safety at the plant, he asked for Andrew’s thoughts and recommendations, to which Andrew gave a balanced answer. He said he was impressed with the cleanliness of the facility, but also thought workers should wear more brightly colored uniforms and safety glasses. The director reciprocated in a way that I had not seen before. He took note of the recommendations, and then presented Andrew with an offering of a gemstone-quality blue-green copper mineral, such as turquoise, from the Erdenet ore deposit.

From the director, who was also an elder always addressed as “teacher” (*bagsh*) and receiving offerings from younger coworkers on the occasion of Tsagaan Sar, the Mongolian New Year, the gift to Andrew was highly significant. My friend, the head of the research laboratory, later remarked that he had not seen a gift like that given to a foreign visitor before. The gift was however like the copper drinking bowls I and the IAESTE exchange students who worked at Erdenet for periods ranging from three months to several years were given. These gifts of material from the ore body were given to us as part of the accretion of Erdenet, made us continue to be part of a group of persons sharing benefits and risks, accessing such *erdene* valuables together. These were inscribed with our names, the names of our workplaces, “Erdenet,” and the date we left Erdenet. In the past few years, Andrew has coauthored papers about the processing of electronic waste with members of the research lab at Erdenet, and one of the IAESTE students met with me last year in Princeton, giving me a gift of Chinggis Khaan vodka she had turned up in Switzerland.

Such accretions are created over time, through deliberate acts of inclusion, just like *ovoo* are. An *ovoo* I observed along a roadside in South Gobi (*Umnugov*) province includes stones, blue *khadag* scarves, a bottle of Kubulai Khan brand vodka, money, a cow skull, wild goat or ibex skulls, and the tire and wheel rim of a car or jeep. Why a rusted wheel rim? This is a move to share substance with others who have made offerings at the *ovoo* of their own substance, to engage in relations which have the potential to be, but is not necessarily hierarchical. Like the skulls of herd animals, the parts of a car are possessed as part of the person or accretive groups who worked with them to access value, even if only for a while (as, for example, Caroline Humphrey (2002) has discussed the fate of personal possessions through funerary practices in Mongolia). Money and *khadag* scarves are objects that can carry personal or shared substance and transfer possession, under the auspices of a master such as the sovereign issuing them or the sky, but not necessarily between a master and one less powerful.

Parity and Parasitism

In conclusion, I discuss a third kind of international relation I encountered in Erdenet, which I have also addressed in chapter four. This international collaboration in the field of mining and metallurgy during my fieldwork was with the new Oyu Tolgoi mine in the Gobi, operated, built, and partly owned by transnational giants based in the United Kingdom and Canada. In this collaboration, Erdenet's Institute of Technology, which was my daily scene of operation during fieldwork and where I became most part of a workplace, received cutting-edge training equipment, including four Caterpillar heavy equipment simulators worth over five hundred thousand dollars each, while high school graduates completed their training at Erdenet, living in the school dormitory (where I also lived), taking courses at the school, and working at the mine site.

This relationship ultimately met with disapproval from the professors and researchers I worked with at the university. The benefits for Erdenet were unclear, and even some donated equipment created a burden for those of us fluent in English and Mongolian when we were called upon to spend several weeks translating the instruction manuals from English. Most of the students being trained through the program, ultimately to work at Oyu Tolgoi and not Erdenet, were from the southern Gobi region, a thousand kilometers away. This was not complained about, however.

Complaints suggested that the problem was the fact that the skills being promoted by the program were menial jobs, not training in English or new metallurgical techniques that Mongolians could use to further their own mining industry. This collaboration, crucially, involved contradictory values and relations of work and international collaboration, training Mongolians to be workers rather than both workers and intelligentsia, and thus ignoring or devaluing Mongolian mining, and professional institutions in general, while making use of them. The training of new cohorts of workers for and by Western miners and mines will no doubt change Mongolian mining and Mongolia, though it is striking that this process also centrally involves Soviet and Mongolian-established institutions. More importantly though, this relationship was a parasitic relation, in stark contrast to the relationship of mutual benefit and involvement in others' kinds of relations established with Andrew and visiting summer IAESTE students, who were counterparts of Mongolian students studying in Germany and India (also discussed in chapter five).

The parasitism is also characterized by the way that Oyu Tolgoi has hardly acknowledged Erdenet. I have repeatedly found references made by Oyu Tolgoi to training centers it claims to have established in Mongolia, while only a single article on its website, authored by a Mongolian, describes the program at Erdenet, identifying it as one of the training centers supposedly established by Oyu Tolgoi (Batbileg 2013). The university at Erdenet received some equipment and funds from

Oyu Tolgoi, of course, but the university is primarily funded and officially a part of the Erdenet Mining Corporation, with which it was established in the 1970s, and since 1996 the university has been a local branch of the national University of Science and Technology. This extraction of value associated with a lack of acknowledgment of the other from whom value is being extracted recalls relational forms associated with shamanic practices in Mongolia, whereby clients seek shamans to identify unknown entities causing misfortune, so that that proper relations of reciprocity, shared substance, risk, and benefit, may be restored.

Thus, rather than being determined by large transnational mining corporations, many of which are indeed currently struggling to remain in Mongolia at all, mining technologies in Erdenet are locally particular, and also have the potential to transform the industry globally, in spite of the efforts of many Western miners to, as Hannah Appel has written about transnational petroleum corporations, “disentangle” themselves from all local involvements and in that sense always operate “offshore” (Appel 2014). Many Western miners turned to a transnational model in the 1970s, away from a locality-focused orientation like that still important in Erdenet. Erdenet miners are most concerned with the future of not only their enterprise, but their city of over one hundred thousand people. The ore at Erdenet is declining in metal content, and the corporation is funding research into new methods to extract this ore. While transnational miners are largely still confident in their method of opening and closing individual mines around the world as their profitability vis-a-vis changes in world market (and more local) conditions, they are interested enough in processes that will extract more ore from lower grade sources (including electronic waste) to also undertake work at Erdenet, which has the potential to create new processes that may be used the world over, but could only have been developed at Erdenet.

Conclusion

In this dissertation I have analyzed Mongolian engagements in herding and mining, shamanism and engineering, socialism and postsocialism, and multiple intra- and international relations by using the concept of accretion. Using this concept, I characterize and describe processes of creating and managing relations with and belonging in a variety of different local and national communities (*nutag*), workgroups, and households.

In the first chapter, I describe the role of *ovoo*, “heaps” of rock and offerings of the very value-laden substance of those making them, in creating a range of kinds of accretive groups. These span from national groups associated with particular territories in other parts of Mongolia to groups within a city such as Erdenet that may contest each other’s power through their links beyond Erdenet. *Ovoo* are also generally like other accretive groups that include households and workplaces. One cannot know all the others one is connected to in this way, and though the structures weaken and fall apart, they return to the ground that they are a part of and that is also already shared by those making offerings – mountains on which *ovoo* are built are themselves also called *ovoo*.

As I discuss in the second chapter of the dissertation, drinking practices in Mongolia reveal that though full knowledge of the other is not sought or necessarily understood to even be obtainable, these practices create interactions in which people do seek to learn more about one another and their connections before moving into

further relations of accretion. This process also often risks violence, however, for instance when revelations of drinking partners' other accretions reveal conflicts in other relations or potential such conflicts. In these cases drinking may turn towards very physical, and very public, fights. What may result is what I call erosion, like the erosion to which mountains and other kinds of *ovoo* are subject. Erosion is a kind of breakage through which relations are revealed though these are also relations that will continue and are likely to involve reaccretion.

Chapters three and four discuss other ways of accretion and its management. As during socialism, in Erdenet categories of professionalism are often as important as categories of nationalism, remaining available to people as ways in which to make themselves valuable to others and assess others' value, the valuables they might access together if they move into accretion.

The next chapter of the dissertation explores the relationship between the legitimate authority of corporate directors and their ability to not just keep boundaries between their own national accretions' systems of relation and those of others', but to also understand and move between the different systems of relation and value associated with these various nationalities. Like the abilities and power of shamans, this ability and power of directors involves not just boundary keeping, but reworking these boundaries in facing and working with the complexities that come through involvement with others and their other forms of relations, managed in part by taking on submissive as well as dominant roles, particularly those of students and teachers.

In the final chapter, I discuss how accretion is and is not participated in on the part of some Western miners and metallurgists coming to work in Mongolia and Erdene, and illustrate how with Mongolian counterparts they are involved in developing new and unique technologies that may transform the industry globally.

Of my own involvement in Erdenet, I conclude by saying that it is also defined by multiplicity, and exceeds that of a researcher. In this dissertation, I have explored the form and process of workplaces, households, and nationalities that I was a part of or otherwise in relation with by taking seriously, taking on, and paying close attention to the ways I was related to in the context of what accretive groups. I also thus became genuinely involved in mutual practices of accessing and controlling value that take concern over practices that insulate against or oppose difference seriously and counter them with practices that respect differing systems of relation and their kinds of value. I hold that these differences can not only coexist, but relations between them rather are integral to all kinds of value and their continual reproduction.

Appendix A

Glossary of Mongolian and Russian Terms

aimag

province

airag

mare's milk fermented until lightly alcoholic, Rus. and Kaz. *kumis*; *shar airag*
– yellow airag, beer

ajilchin

worker, as opposed to intelligentsia, sometimes a relational counterpart of
director (*zakhirlal*) or head of a section (Rus. *nachalnik*); *khar bor ajil* –
“black-brown work,” menial work

akh male relation older than ego, used to address familiar people as well as strangers
respectfully with possessive suffix (*akhaa*), relational counterpart of *duu*; see
akhmad, *egsh*

akhmad

elders, relational counterpart of *zaluu*; see *akh*

ard

People, in socialist and democratic senses; People’s Revolution – *ardin khuvsgal*;
Democratic Party – *ardchilalin nam*

bagsh

teacher, relational counterpart of *shav*; see chapter four

boo

shaman, female shamans are often called *udgan*, some shamans are *zairan*

Burkhan

benevolent, enlightened nonhuman person, *Burkhan Bagsh* – the Buddha,
burkhan bolokh – to pass away, “to become a Burkhan”

dotoor

dotno naiz – “close friend,” *dotoor min* – term of endearment, “my inside [one];”
see also *gadaad*

duu

younger relation, used to address familiar people as well as strangers respectfully
with possessive suffix (*duu min*), relational counterpart of *akh* and *egsh*; see
zaluu

drujba narodov

(Rus.) socialist internationalism, Mng. *nairamdal*

erdene

treasure, see pg. 18-19, 47-51

erdemten

Academician, member of the intelligentsia, Rus. *intelligent*; see *erdene*

ezen

head of a household, leader or most powerful person of an accretive group such as a *nutag*; a title of Chinggis Khaan

gadaad

gadaad khumuus – foreigners not in relation of accretion, “outside people”

ger bul

household, “all of a yurt,” often used interchangeably with *ail*, *urkh*, refers as much to families living in apartments as in yurts

GOK

mining and mineral processing enterprise, general term used for the Erdenet GOK throughout Mongolia, from Rus. *gorno-obogatitelnii kombinat*, “mining and mineral processing combine”

khadag

scarf of silk or synthetic fibers with a similar luster, usually blue but of various other colors as well (for example, yellow in Buddhist and educational contexts in which people relate as students and teachers, see *bagsh*), usually printed or woven with verses in Tibetan and images of the Eight Auspicious Symbols of Tibetan Buddhism, an important transmitter of personal substance or the substance of an accretive group, often placed on *ovoo*

khamt olon

workplace, “many together”

khamaatnuud

relatives from beyond the household

khodoo

countryside, relational counterpart of *khot*

khot

city, relational counterpart of *khodoo*

khot ail

multiple household herding group

lam

lama, member of Buddhist clergy

malchin

herder, a professional category like miner (*uurchaichin*)

mergejil

profession, Rus. *profesia*

mergejilten

professional, specialist (including workers and intelligentsia), Rus. *spetsialist*

Naadam

summer festival during which a *nutag* gathers together, see chapter three

nairamdal

international friendship, international socialism, Rus. *drujba narodov*

naiz

friend, Rus. *drug*, *podruga*

nutag

community of humans and nonhumans, people and their pasture or territory,
see page 17-18, chapter one

ovoo

heap of stones and other offerings of personal and group substance, found across
the Mongolian landscape, see chapter one

setgel

intention, heart-mind; see also *ukhaan*

Tsagaan Sar

Mongolian New Year, “White Moon;” the Russian or European New Year is also celebrated (*Shine Jil* – “New Year”)

ukhaan

mind, intellect; *davkhar ukhaan* – clever, duplicitous, “layered mind,” *shinjelek* ukhaan – science, “renewing intellect;” see also *setgel*

uls

members of a nationality, nation-state

undesten

nationality, as in Mongolian, Russian, American, Rus. *narod*, *natsionalnost*

uurkhaichin

miner, a professional

yastan undesten

Mongolian nationality, may include Kazakhs, Buriad, Oirad, etc.

yos zanshil

national traditions, ways of life, Rus. *traditsii*, though Russians spoke more often of *mentalitet* – mentality, as distinguishing nationalities

zakhirlal

director, Rus. *nachalnik*

zaluu

youth, relational counterpart of *akhmad*

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